

Jefferson's Masterpiece TEACHER'S GUIDE

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I hope this Guide will help enrich your students experience of learning the wonderful Declaration of Independence story.

*Thank You,
Dennis*

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Teaching Activities

This provides a variety of resources, exercises and methods that will assist you in teaching about the Declaration of Independence. You can pick-and-choose and adapt the activities you think would best suit your students.

Introduction to the Declaration of Independence

■ **WORKSHEET 1: INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE** will introduce your students to the Declaration of Independence. It is designed to see how much they already know about the Declaration.

Explain to them that the Declaration of Independence is America's most important document. First, let them answer the questions on the worksheet as best they can. Then, instruct them to give the answers orally as you read through each question. The objective is to encourage them to want to learn more about the Declaration of Independence and the story of its creation.

Tell them that *Jefferson's Masterpiece* will take them on an exciting adventure to learn why and how our founding fathers were able to overcome numerous obstacles to create a free and independent new country - the United States of America. They will see Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Sam Adams and others as real people debating and working together, under difficult circumstances, to create a new nation based upon freedom and opportunity for everyone.

Prelude to Independence Exercises

■ Instruct the students to read the Prelude to Independence on pages 120-127 in *Jefferson's Masterpiece*. Review the material with the students to make certain they understand that this is a list of the major events – over a period of 12 years – that led to the outbreak of war between the American colonies and the royal government of King George III and the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Assign the students to complete **WORKSHEET 2: PRELUDE TO INDEPENDENCE**.

■ Tell the students to choose the 6 events they think were the most important in leading to the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Next, instruct them to pick 3 events out of the 6 that they think changed the minds of many colonists that a separation from Great Britain was necessary. Ask them to explain why they chose those 3 events.

Declaration of Independence Exercises

■ Give each student a copy of RESOURCE A: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE TIMELINE. Explain that these are the events that led to the Declaration of Independence being written, edited, approved and signed by the Second Continental Congress between June 7 and August 2, 1776.

The Second Continental Congress was a convention of delegates from the 13 colonies that met beginning on May 10, 1775, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It succeeded the First Continental Congress, which met briefly during 1774. The Second Congress managed the colonial war effort, raised and supplied the Continental Army, directed strategy, appointed diplomats, and made formal treaties with foreign nations. The Congress acted as the de facto national government of the 13 independent colonies.

Assign the students to study Resource A and answer these questions:

1. Why was passage of the Virginia Resolution necessary before the Second Continental Congress could consider a written Declaration of Independence? ANSWER: *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, pages 3-4.
2. What did John Adams say to convince Thomas Jefferson that he should write the Declaration of Independence? ANSWER: *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, pages 1-3.
3. On what type of desk did Thomas Jefferson write the Declaration of Independence? ANSWER: *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, page 14.
4. What were the arguments presented by John Dickinson of Pennsylvania against passage of the Virginia Resolution? ANSWER: *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, page 66.
5. What change to the Declaration upset Thomas Jefferson more than any other? ANSWER: *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, page 79-80 and 83-85.
6. By signing the Declaration of Independence, what did the delegates to the Second Continental Congress pledge to each other? ANSWER: *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, pages 112-113.

■ Tell the students to conduct an interview with John Adams. First step is for the students to prepare 5 questions they would like to ask John Adams. Then after doing research, they should answer the questions the way they think John Adams would answer them.

■ Divide the class into teams to conduct a debate between patriots and loyalists on whether or not the colonies should declare independence from Great Britain. Students should spend time developing arguments for their side. The teacher should act as moderator. When the debate is over, let the students discuss their experiences and what they learned from the exercise. As if they now have a better understanding of the viewpoint of both sides?

■ Let the students make a list of questions they would like to ask Thomas Jefferson about the Declaration of Independence, his experience writing it and watching it being edited by members of the Congress. Now, let them suggest the answers they think he might offer.

■ Provide each student with a copy of RESOURCE D: 27 GRIEVANCES AGAINST KING GEORGE III. Explain that Thomas Jefferson included a list of grievances against King George III to prove that the King had lost his right to rule the citizens of the American colonies. Tell them to study the list carefully, and then list what they think are the 3 most important grievances against King George. Instruct them to explain why they chose those specific grievances. Ask them to share with the class the grievances and the reasons they were selected.

■ Provide each student with a copy of RESOURCE E: THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE and RESOURCE B: 6 PARTS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. Divide the class into 6 groups and assign one part of the Declaration to each group. Tell them to answer the questions that go with their assigned part on WORKSHEET 3: SIX PARTS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. Bring the class back together and let one person from each group answer the questions.

■ Provide each student with a copy of RESOURCE E: THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. Tell them to read the Statement of Beliefs paragraph of the Declaration (“We hold these Truths to be self-evident ...”) Instruct them to choose one of the unalienable rights – “Life, Liberty or the Pursuit of Happiness” – and to write an essay explaining what that word means to them.

■ Instruct the students to use WORKSHEET 4: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE EXCERPT COMPARISONS to analyze and compare the wording of Jefferson’s original draft of the Declaration of Independence with the version approved on July 4, 1776. Instruct them to identify the most significant differences between the two documents (capitalization, word substitutions, etc.). Does the new wording help them to better understand the Declaration?

■ WORKSHEET 5: STUDENTS CONSIDER THE STATEMENT OF BELIEFS is an exercise to help the students better understand and appreciate the Statement of Beliefs paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. It encourages them to evaluate and decide if they agree or disagree with the four beliefs outlined in that section. Start by reading the “We hold these Truths to be self-evident ...” paragraph at the top of the page. Concentrate on the first two sentences that end with “Safety and Happiness.” Remind them not to sign the pledge yet. This activity is based on the great American tradition of open debate, so signatures should come later. Let the students discuss each statement as thoroughly as they can. They should mark whether they “agree” or “disagree” as they go along. After all four statements have been discussed, invite the students to sign the statements they agree with.

■ Instruct the students to rank in order (1-10) what they believe to be the most significant contributions of the Declaration of Independence. *Jefferson’s Masterpiece*, page 153.

■ Assign the students to complete WORKSHEET 6: COMPLETE THE SENTENCES.

■ Assign the students to complete WORKSHEET 7: FILL-IN THE MISSING WORDS.

■ Assign the students to complete WORKSHEET 8: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE QUIZ.

Vocabulary Exercises

■ Give each student a copy of RESOURCE E: THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. Tell them to find the quotation: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Tell them to define the words: “self-evident,” “endowed” and “unalienable.” What do these words mean to them and what are their present-day relevance? Instruct them to list others rights they have as American citizens because of the Declaration of Independence.

■ Ask the students to identify unfamiliar words in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence (“When in the Course of human events, ...”), to find the meaning of those words, and to identify

substitute words they would use instead. Use RESOURCE E: THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE and RESOURCE F: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE GLOSSARY.

■ Assign the students to complete WORKSHEET 9: WORD-DEFINITION MATCH. RESOURCE F: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE GLOSSARY will be helpful.

■ Assign the students to complete WORKSHEET 10: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE CROSSWORD. RESOURCE F: DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE GLOSSARY will be helpful.

Discussion Questions

■ How did the Declaration of Independence change America?

■ Would you have been a patriot or a loyalist? Explain your answer.

■ Do you think the 13 colonies were justified in breaking ties with Great Britain? Provide at least two reasons for your decision.

■ What does the term “created equal” mean?

■ How are Americans today affected by what happened on July 4, 1776? What do you think the Declaration of Independence means to present-day Americans?

■ Why do you think so many changes were made to Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence? What do you think was the most significant change made to the Declaration?

■ One of the most significant changes to the Declaration of Independence was the removal of the slavery clause.

1. Why did Congress remove this section?

2. Do you agree or disagree with the reasons?

3. If the clause had not been removed, do they think the Declaration would have passed?

4. If the slavery clause had not been removed, what impact do the students think it might have had on American history?

ANSWERS: *Jefferson’s Masterpiece*, page 79-80 and 83-85.

■ Why do you think it was important to title the Declaration of Independence with these words: “The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America”?

■ According to the Declaration of Independence, what “unalienable rights” did the Creator give to mankind? Can government take these rights away from the people?

■ Ask the students to identify at least 3 new facts they learned about the Declaration of Independence after reading *Jefferson’s Masterpiece*, and at least 3 new facts about how it was adopted.

■ Tell the students to imagine that they are members of the Second Continental Congress in 1776.

1. Would they have voted on July 2 for the Virginia Resolution? Explain why.

2. Would they have voted on July 4 to adopt the Declaration of Independence? Explain why.

3. Would they have signed the Declaration of Independence on August 2? Explain why.

Be sure the students are aware of some of the consequences some of the signers suffered because they signed the Declaration of Independence (*Jefferson's Masterpiece*, pages 148-152).

■ What do students think might have happened if the 13 colonies had not declared independence from Great Britain or had lost the American Revolution? What might America be like today? How might their lives be different?

■ Name the 2 signers who became President of the United States, the 3 signers who became Vice-President, the 2 who became Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, the 6 who became Senators, and the 7 who became Congressmen. *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, pages 131-147.

Writing Exercises

■ Tell the students to imagine they are living in 1776 and to write a letter to King George III expressing their concerns about the way he mistreats the colonists.

■ Tell the students to pretend they are a loyalist supporter of King George III. Assign them to write a letter to the editor of a 1776 colonial newspaper expressing their opposition to the Declaration of Independence.

■ Write newspaper headlines, one for a patriot newspaper and one for a loyalist newspaper, describing the first reading of the Declaration of Independence to the people of Philadelphia on Monday, July 8, 1776,

■ Instruct the students to write an essay describing what they learned from reading *Jefferson's Masterpiece*.

■ Tell the class to pretend to be 18th century newspaper reporters who have been assigned to write a story about the recently adopted Declaration of Independence. Their assignment is to interview 3 students (citizens) to get their opinion of the Declaration of Independence. Instruct them to prepare 5 questions they will ask during their interviews. Let the students switch roles until all have participated as a reporter and a citizen. After all the interviews have taken place, the students should write a 200-word newspaper story.

■ Instruct the students to write a letter to a friend explaining why they think their friend should support the Declaration of Independence.

■ Tell the students to write an essay explaining how signing the Declaration of Independence impacted the lives of three signers. *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, pages 148-152.

■ Assign the students to read about one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and to write a report on him

Creative Exercises

■ Create a poster to announce the first reading of the Declaration of Independence to the people of Philadelphia at noon on Monday, July 8, 1776, as described in *Jefferson's Masterpiece*, page 99-100.

■ Assign the students to use excerpts from *Jefferson's Masterpiece* to create a skit. Encourage them to use their imaginations to add additional characters and dialogue, as well as their own interpretations of what they believe might have taken place.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. The scene where Jefferson was asked to write the Declaration of Independence, pages 1-3;
2. The scene where Franklin asked Jefferson about his progress on writing the Declaration, pages 11-13;
3. The conversation between Jefferson and Thomas Paine, pages 33-36;
4. The scene where John Adams reviewed the Declaration of Independence, pages 39-40;
5. The scene where Jefferson met John and Sam Adams at City Tavern, pages 57-60;
6. The scene where the Virginia Resolution was debated, pages 63-67;
7. The July 4th scene where the Declaration was debated and approved, pages 83-90;
8. The August 2 scene when the Declaration was signed, pages 111-115.

■ Instruct the students to pretend that they attended the first reading of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia on July 8, 1776. Tell them to describe what they saw, what they heard, what they thought and how they felt when they heard the Declaration of Independence being read.

■ Students could recreate the debate on the Virginia Resolution that took place in the Pennsylvania State House on July 2, 1776. Each student would be assigned a delegate to impersonate. They would conduct research on their delegate in order to be able to imagine what he might have said during the actual debate. The question under consideration is: Should they vote to break ties with the British Crown and become free and independent states? Information about the signers can be found in *Jefferson's Masterpiece* on pages 131-147 or <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/index.htm>.

RESOURCE G: VIRGINIA RESOLUTION

■ Students could stage a dramatic reading of the Declaration of Independence for other students.

■ Direct the students to make trading cards for their 5 favorite signers. List the types of information that should be included on each card. Information about the signers can be found in *Jefferson's Masterpiece* on pages 131-147.

Jefferson's Masterpiece Quiz

■ Tell the students to complete WORKSHEET 11: *JEFFERSON'S MASTERPIECE QUIZ*.

RESOURCES

Resource A – Declaration of Independence Timeline

Resource B – 6 Parts of the Declaration of Independence

Resource C – Evolution of the Declaration of Independence

Resource D – 27 Grievances Against King George III

Resource E – The Declaration of Independence

Resource F – Declaration of Independence Glossary

Resource G – Virginia Resolution

