“Creating the Declaration of Independence”

**Objective:** The students will investigate events and people that were crucial to the development of the Declaration of Independence.

**PA Standards: 8.3.5.B:** Illustrate concepts and knowledge of historical documents, artifacts, and places critical to United States history.

**Guiding Question:** Why did the colonists decide to declare independence and how did they do it? (Description)

**Materials:**

- Infocus Projector
- YouTube video: “The Declaration Schoolhouse Rock Copy” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrSeCYSnj5Y
- Scott Forseman Textbook
- Scott Forseman Reading Guide (pg. 66-67)
- Highlighters
- Computers with Internet Access
- Link to the Library of Congress website
- IPads
- Primary Sources:
  - Final Copy of Declaration of Independence http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffdec.html
  - Print of “Congress Voting on Declaration of Independence” Image http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008678323/
  - Print of “The First Public Reading of the Declaration of Independence” Image http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/200668176/

**Procedures**

**Introduction:** Begin by showing the students the “The Declaration” Schoolhouse Rock video. Ask the students to recall what they know about the Declaration of Independence (Connect). Some prompting questions used to facilitate a discussion may include the following:

- Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
- Why did the colonists want to declare independence?
- What were some of the events that led to the colonists’ wanting to declare independence?
Ask the students to make predictions before reading *(Wonder)*.

Ask questions like:

- How do you think the colonists felt when congress declared independence?
- Why did they feel that way?
- Do you think Thomas Jefferson was excited to write the Declaration of Independence?
- Do you think it was difficult for him to write it?

**Development:** Put the students into their “learning pairs.” Instruct them to re-read section 9-1 in their Social Studies textbook. They may partner read this section. Instruct them to complete workbook pages 66-67 with their partners *(Investigate)*. Remind them to highlight important information. Allow 15 minutes for students to complete this.
Lesson 1: Declaring Independence

Vocabulary

- **Second Continental Congress**: a meeting in which colonial leaders made decisions about problems with Britain
- **Continental Army**: an army with soldiers from all 13 colonies
- **Olive Branch Petition**: a letter from the colonists to King George III of Britain
- **Declaration of Independence**: a document explaining why the colonies wanted independence
- **traitor**: a person who works against his or her country

The Second Continental Congress

The Second Continental Congress began meeting in Philadelphia in May 1775. The Congress formed the **Continental Army** with soldiers from all 13 colonies. George Washington was elected to lead the Continental Army. The Congress sent King George III a letter called the **Olive Branch Petition**. The letter said that the colonists were still loyal to Great Britain. They did not want to fight a war. The Congress asked the king to give the colonists more self-government. The king said that he would use force to end the rebellion.

“Time to Part”

Thomas Paine was a colonist. In 1776 he wrote a pamphlet called **Common Sense**. The pamphlet convinced many Americans to support the colonies’ independence from Britain. The Continental Congress wanted to make sure every colony supported independence. It set up a group to put together the **Declaration of Independence**. The **Declaration of Independence** explained why the colonies wanted independence. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson decided what would be in the Declaration of Independence. Then Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that people are born with rights that cannot be taken away. These are the right to live, to be free, and to seek happiness. He also wrote that if a government tries to take away these rights, the people have the right to form a new government. The Declaration listed the ways Britain tried to take away colonists’ rights. For example, it said that Britain taxed the colonists without their consent. This list showed that the king had abused the colonists’ rights. Therefore, the colonists had the right to declare independence and form a new government. Those who signed the Declaration promised to defend the new nation.

A Dangerous Decision

The Declaration of Independence was approved by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. In August members of the Congress signed the Declaration. They knew it would be dangerous to sign it. The British government would think they were **traitors**. Traitors are people who work against their country.
When the students are done reading and completing the reading guide, review it as a class.

Inform the students that they will be completing learning centers. Explain each center. Instruct the students to get into their centers group. Inform them that they will have fifteen minutes to complete each center. Allow the students to work through the centers.

The four learning stations will be set up as follows:

Station 1: This is an Ipad station. At this station, the students will access the interactive tool called “The Declaration of Independence: Rewriting the Rough Draft” from the Library’s website on the Ipad. With their partners, students have the opportunity to analyze the rough draft of the Declaration of Independence. They are given several lines of the Declaration that were edited. They then have to
choose to keep the original line or choose a new (predetermined) way to word it. At the end of the activity, they compare their draft to the final document.

**Station 2:** This is a computer station. The students will be provided with prints of “Congress voting the Declaration of Independence.” They will then use the Library’s online “Source Analysis Tool” to analyze the print. At the beginning of every rotation, go over to this station and demonstrate how to use the analysis tool using another primary source image. When they are finished, instruct the students to print their analysis.

![Congress voting the Declaration of Independence](image1)

**Station 3:** This is a writing station. The students will be provided with prints of “The First Public Reading of the Declaration of Independence.” They will be asked to analyze the photo and write a journal entry as if they were one of the colonists standing the crowd, hearing the Declaration for the first time (Construct). Collect the journal entry.

![The First Public Reading of the Declaration of Independence](image2)

**Station 4:** This is a writing station. At this station, the students will receive a printed copy of the final Declaration of Independence, with the first paragraph highlighted. They will be required to read the paragraph and list the reasons given for declaring independence. (DOK, Level 1).

**Conclusion:** Ask the students to return to their seats. Ask if the students have any questions about the material that was covered. Facilitate a discussion using the following prompting questions:

- Why did the colonists decide to declare independence?
- How did the colonists declare independence?
- Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
• How would you feel if you were a colonist hearing about the declaration for the first time?

Assign students to write (as homework) either a newspaper article, story, or song about the Declaration of Independence (Express). Inform them that they will be reading or performing their project in class. They must follow these guidelines:

• Write your project from the perspective of a colonist, Thomas Jefferson, or a signer of the Declaration if writing a story.
• Include interview quotes from a colonist, Thomas Jefferson, or a Declaration signer if writing an article.
• Date your song, story, or article correctly.
• Include factual details about who wrote the declaration and why it was written.
• Include how the colonist, writer, composer, or signer felt about the declaration.

Assessment:

• Primary source analysis from station #2
• Diary entry from station #3
• Final project (song, newspaper article, or story)

Reflection:

To be used as a warm-up for the next class period (Reflect):

The students should write in their daily writing journals choosing one of the following prompts:

• What did you hope to communicate to your peers through your song, article, or story?
• What surprised you most during our study of the Declaration, and why was this surprising to you?
Stripling’s Model of Inquiry

**Connect:** Students connect the new content to previous knowledge in the introduction section. They are asked to recall what they know about the Declaration of Independence.

**Wonder:** Students have the opportunity to develop questions and make predictions before reading the textbook and engaging in the primary sources activities. They are asked to share hypotheses about the lives of colonists during the time that the Declaration of Independence was written. One specific probing question designed to make students wonder is “Why do you think the colonists wanted to declare independence?”

**Investigate:** Students get to “evaluate and synthesize information” in pairs, as they research and answer the questions on the reading guide.

**Construct:** Students build new knowledge by determining how the colonists felt hearing the Declaration read for the first time. This is done by using a primary source print.

**Express:** In this lesson, the students have a wonderful opportunity to express their understanding of the content by writing a newspaper article, song lyrics, or a story from the perspective of a colonist. They are required to incorporate facts that they learned from the lesson.

**Reflect:** There is an opportunity for reflection listed under the “Activity Extensions” section. The students have to write a reflection about their learning process. Possible questions are also listed. The student can choose from the following prompts: “What did you hope to communicate about this topic to peers through your writing?” and “What surprised you the most during our study of the Declaration of Independence?” I feel that these prompts would allow students to take ownership of learning and demonstrate an understanding of the content.