



Lesson Plan: Understanding the Declaration of Independence

Lesson Activity Steps:

1. Hook: Provide each student with a few sticky notes. Write the question, “What are some things that kids your age complain about?” on the board. Have students write down one complaint on each sticky note. Give more if needed. As they write on their notes, have students come place them under the question on the board. Discuss.
2. Pass out a “break-up” letter to students written in the form of the Declaration of Independence. After the students read the letter independently, discuss with students what each section of the letter is trying to convey to the reader.
3. Explain to students that the components of this letter can also be seen in the Declaration of Independence. Just as they broke down the ideas in the break-up letter, they will interpret the language used in the Declaration of Independence in small groups and then create a storyboard of a skit to share their interpretations with the class.
4. Break students into small groups, and give each group one of the five sections of the Declaration of Independence to translate into common language.
5. Monitor students as they work together to translate their assigned section.
6. When students have successfully translated their section, provide each student with a blank storyboard to create the outline of the skit they will perform for the class.
7. Once students have successfully created the storyboard including captions and thought/voice bubbles, provide an opportunity to create props and costumes to enhance the class’ understanding of their section of the Declaration of Independence.
8. Students perform skits.
9. Students conduct a debriefing with the class for their portion of the Declaration to ensure understanding.



10. Students revisit the “break-up” letter presented at the beginning of the lesson and are asked to connect the part of the letter to the corresponding part of the Declaration.
11. Students answer the following question about the Declaration of Independence:
What ideas did the framers of the Declaration of Independence express in the document?
Why did some colonists want to remain under British rule?
If you were a colonist, would you be a loyalist or a patriot? Give reasons to support your answer.
What are some of the ideas about government that are implied in the Declaration of Independence?

Special Needs of students are considered in this lesson:

The five parts of the Declaration of Independence allow for differentiation throughout the lesson. This lesson was designed to meet the needs of GATE identified, Special Education students, and students with different learning styles. *GATE*—Students were given the second part of the Dec. of Independence to translate, as it is the most verbose and requires a depth of understanding. These students were monitored, but guided to answer questions on their own.

Special Education—These students were given a section that requires literal translation instead of a deeper interpretation. They were also assisted by the Resource Specialist throughout the entire lesson.

Learning Styles—Students whose strengths are more kinesthetic and or artistic are given the opportunity to show what they know through drama and art.

Extension Ideas:

- Students could create a “claymation” activity instead of a skit.
- Each student could do research on one of the important framers of the Declaration of Independence and present their findings to the class or write an essay on the figure.
- Students could compile their storyboards into a children’s book to share with younger students.