



# ACTIVITY OVERVIEW



## Q1 • Declaration of Independence • Middle School

### Contextualizing the Declaration of Independence

**Theme:** Histories of Independence

**Time Required:** 3–5 class sessions

#### Materials Needed:

- Copy of the Declaration of Independence (excerpted for classroom reading)
- Vocabulary lists or flashcards
- Access to video or media equipment (for optional montage or debate presentations)
- Journals or notebooks
- Internet access for reference activities

#### Activity Overview

This activity helps students explore the meaning, language, and relevance of the Declaration of Independence through historical investigation, vocabulary building, discussion, and creative expression. Students analyze the grievances listed in the document, consider the social and political context of the time, and reflect on what liberty and happiness mean today.

Using reading, writing, and performance-based approaches, students will contextualize the Declaration and, optionally, collaborate on a Declaration montage video or mini debate to share during a school assembly or Constitution Day celebration.

This lesson aligns with New Mexico's statewide recognition of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. As part of The American Revolution: 250 Years since the Declaration of Independence initiative, schools are encouraged to link classroom projects with Constitution Day (September 17) events that celebrate civic pride and the enduring pursuit of independence and equality.



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## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Describe the historical context and significance of the Declaration of Independence.
- Identify key grievances and analyze their meaning and impact.
- Define and interpret challenging vocabulary and 18th-century language.
- Connect the ideas of liberty, justice, and cooperation to modern experiences.
- Communicate historical ideas through writing, discussion, and creative presentation.

## Essential Questions

- What does liberty mean, and what responsibilities come with it?
- How did the colonists express grievances and seek justice?
- Why is the Declaration still important today?
- How can we express independence and fairness in our own communities?

## Classroom Implementation Ideas:

### Context Lessons:

- Review the French and Indian War as background to colonial tensions.
- Discuss how the war's outcomes influenced later grievances.

### Grievance Lessons:

- Define 'grievance.'
- Read and discuss selected grievances—why were they issues for the colonists?
- Ask students to write their own 'mini-grievance' statements about fairness in school life.

### Vocabulary Lessons:

- Explore how 1700s language differs from today's.
- Introduce or create virtual vocabulary cards and a word-find.
- Paraphrase lines from the Declaration to ensure comprehension.



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### Discussion & Reflection:

- Which parts of the Declaration are most quoted today? Why?
- What ideas might be controversial if written now?
- How does 'the pursuit of happiness' relate to modern values?

### Essay Options:

- What is liberty? What are its responsibilities and limits?
- What does 'the pursuit of happiness' mean to you?
- Write your own Declaration of Independence. How is it similar to or different from the U.S. Declaration?

### Extension or Enrichment Activities:

- Create a Declaration montage video with classmates for Constitution Day.
- Hold a mini debate about a historical or modern grievance.
- Invite a local official to speak about civic participation.

### Connection to Statewide Theme

This activity supports the American Revolution: 250 Years since the Declaration of Independence initiative, encouraging New Mexico schools to bring history to life through research, creativity, and collaboration.