



**NEW MEXICO
SPIRIT**
1776 + 2026

ACTIVITY CHECKLIST



Q1 • Declaration of Independence • Middle School

Contextualizing the Declaration of Independence

Before the Activity

- Review the Activity Overview for this activity.
- Prepare the Context Lesson materials (background on colonial tensions, King George III, and major events leading to the Declaration).
- Gather the Grievances Worksheet, Vocabulary List, student notebooks, and copies/excerpts of the Declaration of Independence.
- Prepare a short clip or image set if using visuals (e.g., [National Archives Declaration of Independence](#))
- Set up space for group discussion and independent writing.

During the Activity

1. Context Lesson

- Introduce the historical background leading to 1776 (taxation, protests, colonial unity).
- Clarify key terms students will encounter: grievance, tyranny, liberty, consent, rights, independence.
- Ask: *“What conditions might push people to separate from a government?”*

2. Grievances Lesson

- Review the list of grievances written in the Declaration.
- Assign students to read simplified or grouped grievances in pairs.
- Discuss:
 - What is the colonists' complaint?
 - Why did this issue matter?
 - How does this grievance connect to the larger call for independence?



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3. Vocabulary Work

- Provide the vocabulary sheet (definitions, examples, and usage).
- Have students identify where these terms appear in the Declaration.
- Ask: *“Which vocabulary words help you understand the colonists’ argument?”*
- Practice pronunciation of long or multisyllable words (e.g., “unalienable,” “usurpations”).

4. Reading the Declaration

- Read selected sections aloud as a class or in small groups.
- Pause to explain meaning, structure, and rhetorical techniques (parallelism, appeals).
- Ask comprehension questions: *What claim is being made? What evidence supports it?*
- Encourage students to annotate for grievances, values, and arguments.

5. Discussion Questions

- Guide a class discussion using questions from the Activity Overview:
 - What reasons did the colonists give for declaring independence?
 - How does the document define rights and responsibilities?
 - How might different groups in 1776 have viewed the Declaration?
 - Which parts of the document still feel relevant today?

6. Primary Source Analysis

- Have students examine a high-quality image of the [National Archives digital Declaration](#)
- Assign students to identify:
 - Key phrases, Signatures
 - Evidence of historical context (writing style, layout, materials)
- Students complete a brief analysis paragraph using evidence from the document.



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7. Essay Assignment

- Introduce the core writing task:
“Write a 3–5 paragraph essay explaining whether the colonists were justified in declaring independence. Use evidence from the Declaration, grievances, and class discussions.”
- Review expectations: clear claim, evidence, explanation, conclusion.
- Provide time for drafting, peer review, and revision.

After the Activity

- Facilitate final reflections:
 - Which grievance felt most significant?
 - How does this document reflect ideas of freedom and fairness?
- Collect student essays or schedule presentations.
- (Optional) Display student vocabulary posters or Declaration annotations in the classroom.