

# Celebrate Freedom Week Lessons

## Lesson 1

### The Declaration of Independence:

### In Search of Economic and Political Freedom

#### Background

The Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia in June 1776, and remains one of the most important documents ever written. It provided a summary of the thoughts and ideals prevalent during the early days of the United States. Jefferson was one of the committee of five men appointed by the Continental Congress to outline the colonies case for independence from Great Britain. The other members included John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and Robert R. Livingston of New York.

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Posted: November 2007

Reaching consensus about the wording of the Declaration of Independence and getting it passed through the Continental Congress was not easy. It required long days of negotiating and compromising to approve the final document. The quest for economic and political freedom prevailed, and after working all night to make final revisions, the Declaration was adopted late in the morning on July 4, 1776.

Following is one of the most common excerpts from this document:

*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--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

## Suggested Classroom Activities

1. Write out the above excerpt from the Declaration of Independence on a piece of poster board. Cut the words apart and pass out single words to students so they can re-assemble the statement in the correct order. You may want to put students in groups and have them compete to see which group can correctly re-assemble it first. Have students describe the challenges they faced in completing this assignment. Ask how the challenges of re-assembling the statement would compare with the challenges of writing the initial document. Talk about the role of leadership, decision-making and teamwork in both situations.
2. Discuss the intent and purpose of the excerpt. Students may need to use a dictionary or online searches to find the meanings of some of the words used in the original document. Ask students to rewrite it in their own words. Encourage them to analyze each other's writing to ensure that the statement's original wording remains. Give students a copy of an article found in today's newspaper to compare the writing styles of our nation's founders and current writers.
3. Discuss the historical events leading up to the drafting of the Declaration of Independence and the colonists' desire for political and economic freedom. Have students find an article in the newspaper about a current struggle for political or economic freedom. Ask them to write an essay comparing and contrasting the situation today with the challenges faced by the colonists.
4. Have students research the delegates to the Continental Congress and report their findings to the class. Make note of similarities and differences.

*For more information on the Declaration of Independence, visit the National Archives online at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).*