

THEME: The Declaration of Independence

TOPIC: The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

PREPARATION / PROPS: Poster including a typed version of Preamble to Declaration of Independence, a typed version of the Preamble using more common and simpler words, definitions of words

LESSON: The abuses of the British crown were great during the times leading up to the American Revolutionary War including: unfair taxes, quartering of soldiers, and no representation of the colonies in British Parliament (government). Imagine that while you and your family are playing a game after dinner, or watching TV, you get a knock at the door. It's a group of soldiers who insist on coming in.



They eat your food, make themselves comfortable, and tell you they will be staying with you indefinitely. Oh yes, and they will be sleeping in your bed and using your things. And, by order of the King, you have nothing to say about it. That doesn't seem very fair, does it?

Eventually, the colonists believed they had no choice but to break ties with England and establish their own free country.

On June 11, 1776, the Second Continental Congress appointed a five-man committee to write a Declaration of Independence from British rule. This was more than a list of grievances, or complaints. This was a document written to King George to inform him that the colonies would be severing ties with the British crown and creating their own country. This was huge!

At the time of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War had already broken out at the Battles of Lexington and Concord.

The Committee of Five included: Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman. The committee chose Thomas Jefferson to draft the document in Philadelphia, PA. The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence contains some of the most famous words in our nation's history - "and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

A preamble is an introductory statement or explanation of what is to follow. The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence is:

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,
WHEN in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

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, that whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security. Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.

The Preamble, in simpler terms:

We hold these Truths to be certain w/o having to be proven, that all Men are created equal, that they are given by God certain Rights that can not be sold, transferred to another person or taken away by anyone, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these Rights, Governments are formed among Men, getting their fair Powers from the agreement of the people, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive and does not secure these rights, it is the Right of the People to change or get rid of it, and to form new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to insure the Safety and Happiness of the people. Carefulness will require, that Governments long established, should not be changed for unimportant or temporary causes. But when a long list of Abuses to the people by the government occurs, it is the Right of the people, it is the Duty of the people, to get rid of such Government, and to provide new government and protections for their future Security.

It is important to note that our Founders believed that our rights come from God. This means that rights can not be taken away by or created by government.

The committee declared Jefferson's Declaration of Independence to be almost perfect. The committee presented it to Congress July 2, 1776 and with few changes it was adopted on July 4, 1776. With this, church bells rang out, and our nation was officially born!

When the Declaration of Independence was declared, John Adams wrote this historic letter to his wife: "I am apt to believe that this day will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore."

Independence Day, also known as 4th of July, is the birthday of the United States of America. It is celebrated on July 4th each year in the United States. It is the anniversary of the day on which the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress - July 4, 1776 - the day they announced to the world that the 13 colonies no longer belonged to Great Britain. Independence Day was first observed in Philadelphia on July 8, 1776.

The following year, on July 4, 1777, the night sky of Philadelphia lit up with the blaze of bonfires. Candles illuminated the windows of houses and public buildings. Church bells rang out loud, and cannons were shot from ships breaking the silence. The city was celebrating the first anniversary of the founding of the United States.

The Fourth of July soon became the main patriotic holiday of the entire country. Veterans of the Revolutionary War made a tradition of gathering on the Fourth to remember their victory. In towns and cities, the American flags flew; shops displayed red, white, and blue decorations; and people marched in parades that were followed by public readings of the Declaration of Independence. In 1941, Congress declared July 4 a federal legal holiday.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why do you think they chose five people to write the Declaration of Independence instead of just one?
- Do you think John Adams was excited about the Declaration of Independence? He wrote to his wife Abigail, that the day should be remembered “as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.” Would he be pleased with our celebrations today? Why or why not?
- The founders thought it was important to let everyone know exactly why the colonies were breaking away from Great Britain. What might have happened if the founders didn't explain their situation when they decided to break away?

ACTIVITY: Special Traditions, Parades, and Fireworks (Outdoor Activity)

Materials: Pots, pans, recorders, maracas, wooden spoons, cake pans, pretzel tins for drums, flags, tricorner hats, pop-its, rocket balloons and pumpers (large, long balloons that you pump up and release into the sky making a cool screeching sound)

Method: Ask the kids what special traditions their families have to celebrate the Fourth of July. Give them an example such as: “My family has a picnic, and then we gather with friends at a large field to watch fireworks. We arrive a few hours early, and we and other families set up chairs, bring snacks, and play frisbee and football in the field before the fireworks display. We also bring pop-its, sparklers, and rocket balloons to share and enjoy.”

For younger kids: Have an old-fashioned pots and pans parade. Let them choose an “instrument” and have them follow you around your area. Carry flags and wear tricorne hats. Teach them and sing “You’re a Grand Old Flag” while you march.

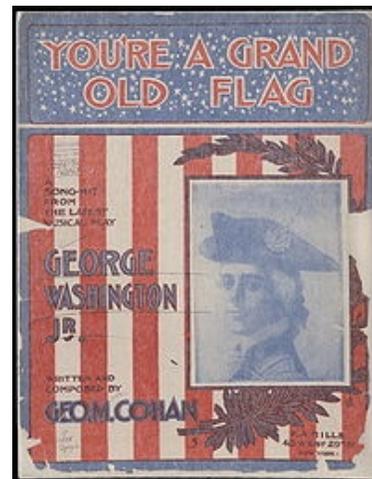
For older kids: Explain safety precautions for the pop-its, which are small pouches of gun powder that you throw to the ground to make a loud popping sound. Have adult helpers work with groups of 3 or 4 kids at a time. Use pop-its and set off some rocket balloons.

Lyrics to You're a Grand Old Flag by George M. Cohan

Chorus

You're a grand old flag,
You're a high flying flag
And forever in peace may you wave.
You're the emblem of
The land I love.
The home of the free and the brave.

Ev'ry heart beats true
'neath the Red, White and Blue,
Where there's never a boast or brag.
But should auld acquaintance be forgot,
Keep your eye on the grand old flag.



REFERENCES: “A Guide for Learning and Teaching The Declaration of Independence and The US Constitution, Learning from the Original Texts Using Classical Learning Methods of the Founders.” by Joseph Andrews, The Center for Teaching the Constitution, www.just4kidsmagazine.com, www.congressforkids.net, wikipedia