

STUDENTS INVESTIGATING PRIMARY SOURCES
Forward to the Future: The Declaration of Independence in Our Lives
Celebrate Freedom Week Series: Part IV

How are the ideas from the Declaration of Independence connected to our government today?
A Short Activity for High School and Middle School

Benchmark Correlations

[Celebrate Freedom Week Information](#)

[Constitution Day Information](#)

SS.912.C.1.2-Explain how the Declaration of Independence reflected the political principles of popular sovereignty, social contract, natural rights, and individual rights.

LAFS.910.RH.1.2- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

LAFS.1112.RH.1.2-Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

SS.8.A.3.7- Examine the structure, content, and consequences of the Declaration of Independence.

SS.7.C.1.4- Analyze the ideas (natural rights, role of the government) and complaints set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

Benchmark Clarification: Students will analyze the relationship between natural rights and the role of government.

LAFS.68.RH.1.2 – Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Activity Documents and Handouts

- ✓ Projected image of the Dunlap Broadside of the Declaration of Independence
- ✓ Gallery Wall/Carousel Station Handouts
- ✓ Forward to the Future Graphic Organizer

Full Document Citations

[Bill of Rights](#), 9/25/1789; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives at Washington, DC. National Archives Identifier: 1408042.

[<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1408042>]

[<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/bill-of-rights>]

[Constitution of the United States](#), 9/17/1787; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives at Washington, DC. National Archives Identifier: 1667751.

[<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1667751>]

[<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/constitution>]

[Dunlap Broadside \[Declaration of Independence\]](#), July 4, 1776; Rough Journals, 9/5/1774 - 3/2/1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1765 - 1821, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington DC. National Archives Identifier: 301682.

[<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/301682>]

[<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/dunlap-broadside>]

Activity Vocabulary

abolish – to end or destroy

abridge – to shorten or make less

alter – to change

amendment – a change to a constitution

deriving– taking from

legislative power – the power of the government to make laws

judicial power – the power of the government to interpret laws

petition the government – the right to ask the government to solve a problem or to express an opinion about how the government is being run

secure – protect



tenure – time period or length of holding a position

vested – to place or give into the possession or control of some person or authority

Teacher Note: This activity uses a Gallery Walk or Carousel strategy. Post the Activity Vocabulary on the board during the activity to assist with reading comprehension.

1. Project the Dunlap Broadside of the Declaration of Independence.
2. Ask students if they can identify the document based on the image and text they have viewed. Lead students to the understanding that they are looking at the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.
3. Share with students that they will analyze text from the Declaration of Independence and text from the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights in order to answer the question: How are the ideas from the Declaration of Independence connected to our government today?
4. Explain to students that they will rotate through different stations around the room. Each station has text from the Declaration of Independence, text from the Bill of Rights or U.S. Constitution and three questions. Instruct students to work as a group to read the text and answer the questions. One member of each group will serve as the leader and be responsible for recording the group's response at each station.
5. Place each student group at a station around the classroom. Provide students with 3-4 minutes at each station and provide time for each student group to visit each of the five stations. **Teacher Note:** To shorten this activity, have students visit less than all five stations.
6. Have students return to their seats.
7. Review the examples students came up with from the third question on the graphic organizer.
8. Pose the following questions for discussion and closure: What are some of the big ideas from the excerpts of the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution? How are the ideas from the Declaration of Independence connected to our government today? What does this tell you about the impact of the Declaration of Independence on the U.S. government?

Extension Suggestion – Provide students with copies of the full text of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights and instruct students to find additional connections between the three documents.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.
A DECLARATION
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

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 History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing Importance, unless suspended in their Operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the Accommodation of large Districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a Right inestimable to them, and formidable to Tyrants only.

He has called together legislative Bodies at Places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Depository of their public Records, for the sole Purpose of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly Firmness his Invasions on the Rights of the People.

He has refused for a long Time, after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean Time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries.

He has erected a Multitude of new Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance.

He has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the Consent of our Legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us;

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States;

For cutting off our Trade with all Parts of the World;

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent;

For depriving us, in many Cases, of the Benefits of Trial by Jury;

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended Offences;

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary Government, and enlarging its Boundaries, so as to render it at once an Example and fit Instrument for introducing the same absolute Rule into these Colonies;

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments;

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all Cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our People.

He is, at this Time, transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the Executioners of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.

Now have we been wanting in Attention to our British Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the Necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

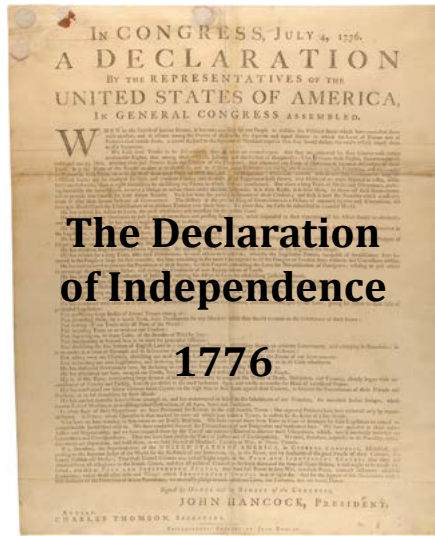
Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS,

JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST.
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

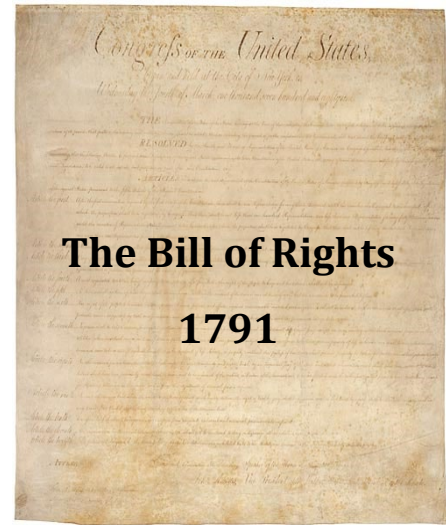
PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

STATION 1



The Declaration of Independence

1776



The Bill of Rights

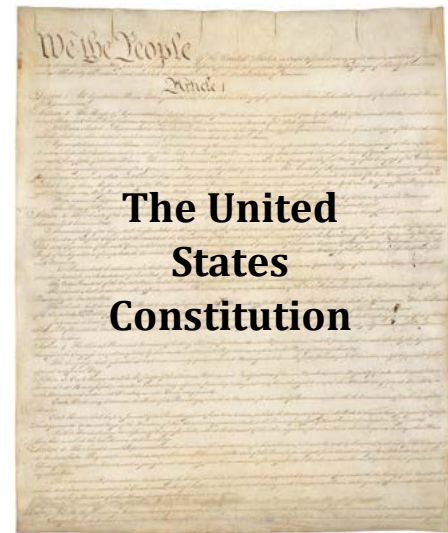
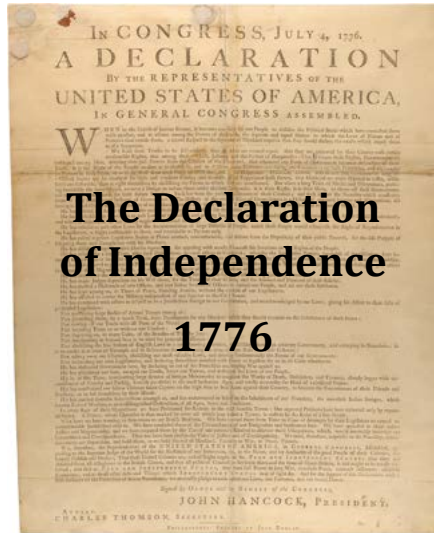
1791

	Declaration of Independence	First Amendment of the Bill of Rights
Actual Text	<i>That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...</i>	<i>Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.</i>
What does the text mean?	People create governments to guarantee their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.	???????

Work with your group members to answer the following questions on your handout:

- 1. What does the text of the First Amendment mean in your own words?**
- 2. What is the common idea between these two pieces of text?**
- 3. What is an example of this idea in life today?**

STATION 2

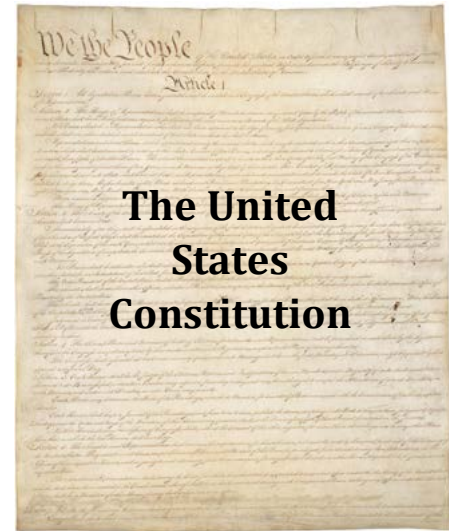
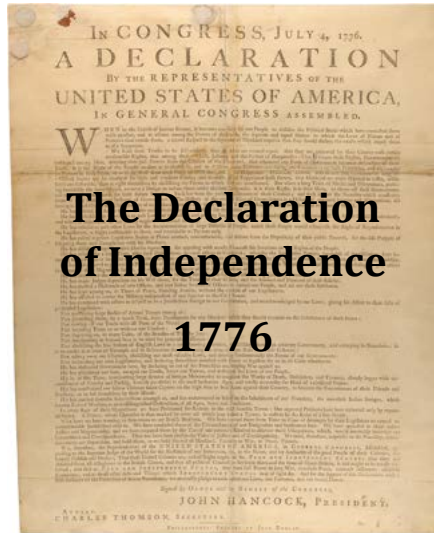


	Declaration of Independence	Article I of the U.S. Constitution
Actual Text	<i>Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...</i>	<i>The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States,</i>
What does the text mean?	Governments receive their power to act fairly from the consent of the people.	???????

Work with your group members to answer the following questions on your handout:

1. What does the text from Article I mean in your own words?
2. What is the common idea between these two pieces of text?
3. What is an example of this idea in life today?

STATION 3

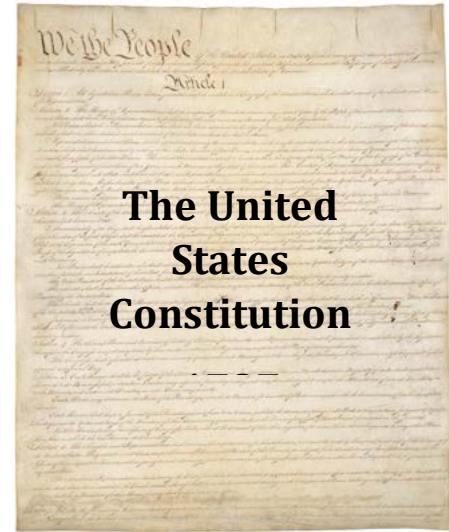
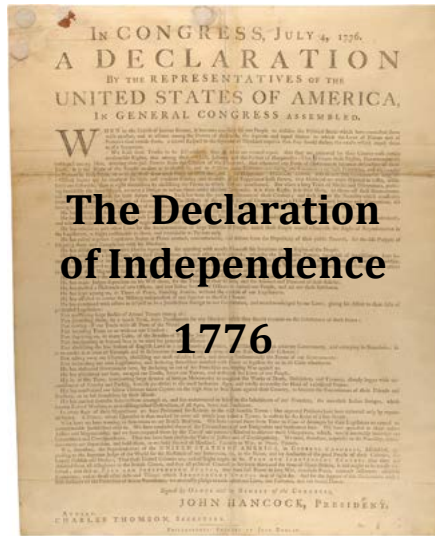


	Declaration of Independence	Article V of the U.S. Constitution
Actual Text	<i>That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it and to institute new Government...</i>	<i>The Congress, whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution, or, on the Application of the Legislatures of two thirds of the several States, shall call a Convention for proposing Amendments,</i>
What does the text mean?	When the government fails to protect the rights of the people, the people have the right and responsibility to change it or overthrow it and start a new government.	???????

Work with your group members to answer the following questions on your handout:

- 1. What does the text from Article V mean in your own words?**
- 2. What is the common idea between these two pieces of text?**
- 3. What is an example of this idea in life today?**

STATION 4

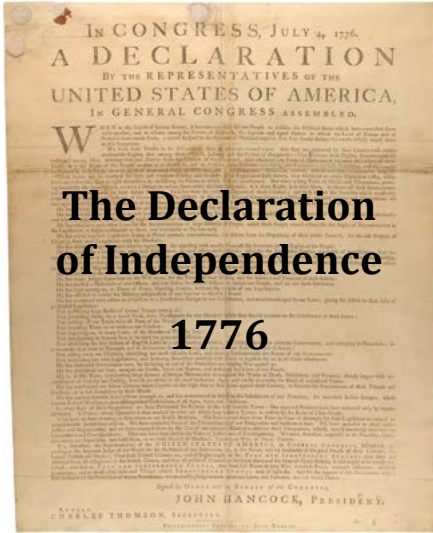


	Declaration of Independence	Article III of the U.S. Constitution
Actual Text	<i>He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.</i>	<i>Section 1: The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish. The Judges of both the Supreme and inferior Courts, shall hold their Offices during good Behavior, and shall, at stated Times, receive for their services, a Compensation, which shall not be diminished during their Continuance in Office.</i>
What does the text mean?	The king has taken away judges' independence to make decisions. Instead, judges have to make decisions that will please the king in order to continue to stay in their position and get paid.	???????

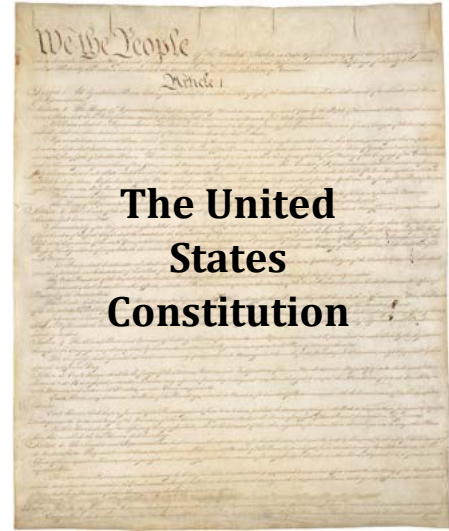
Work with your group members to answer the following questions on your handout:

- 1. What does the text from Article III mean in your own words?**
- 2. What is the common idea between these two pieces of text?**
- 3. What is an example of this idea in life today?**

STATION 5



The Declaration of Independence
1776



The United States Constitution

	Declaration of Independence	Article I of the U.S. Constitution
Actual Text	<i>He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance</i>	<i>All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.</i>
What does the text mean?	He has forbidden the legislature to pass laws	???????

Work with your group members to answer the following questions on your handout:

- 1. What does the text from Article I mean in your own words?**
- 2. What is the common idea between these two pieces of text?**
- 3. What is an example of this idea in life today?**

Name: _____

Date: _____

Forward to the Future: The Declaration of Independence in Our Lives

How are the ideas from the Declaration of Independence connected to our government today?

	STATION 1	STATION 2	STATION 3	STATION 4	STATION 5
What does the text mean in your own words?	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
What is the common idea between the two pieces of text?	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
What is an example of this idea in life today?	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____