

Lesson Plan: Be a Founder! Declaring Your Own Independence

Subject: Social Studies / U.S. History

Grade Level: Ages 8-10 (3rd-4th Grade)

Time Allotment: 60-75 minutes

Materials Needed

- Large piece of paper or poster board (can be tea-stained beforehand for an "old" look)
 - Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
 - A pen that looks like a feather (optional, but fun!)
 - Computer or tablet with internet access
 - A printed, simplified version of the Declaration of Independence (easy to find online, search for "Declaration of Independence for kids")
 - A small bell (optional)
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1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Explain that the 4th of July celebrates the *adoption* of the Declaration of Independence, not the start or end of the Revolutionary War.
 - Describe the basic purpose of the Declaration of Independence: to explain why the colonies wanted to be free from British rule.
 - Connect the historical concept of "declaring independence" to their own life by creating a fun, personal "Declaration."
 - Reflect on the idea that the phrase "all men are created equal" was a promise that the country is still working to fulfill for everyone.
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2. Lesson Activities & Procedure

Part 1: The Mystery of the Date (10 minutes)

1. **Engage:** Start with a puzzle. Say, "We celebrate America's birthday on July 4th. But did you know that the leaders actually voted to be independent on July 2nd? And most of them didn't sign the famous document until August? So why do we have our big celebration on July 4th? It's a history mystery! Our job today is to be detectives and figure it out."
 2. **Investigate:** Watch a short, engaging video about the Declaration of Independence. The "Schoolhouse Rock: Fireworks" song is a perfect choice (search for it on YouTube). Ask the student to watch for clues about what happened on July 4th.
 3. **Solve the Mystery:** After the video, discuss what they saw. Guide them to the answer: July 4th is the date written on the top of the Declaration of Independence itself! It was the day the final wording was approved and sent to the printer to be shared with everyone. It was like the country's official birth announcement.
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Part 2: What's a Declaration? (15 minutes)

1. **Explain:** Lay out the simplified version of the Declaration. Explain that "to declare" just means "to say something officially and with confidence."
2. **Break It Down:** Explain the Declaration has three main parts, using a simple analogy:
 - **The Preamble (The "Why"):** "This is the part where they say, 'Hey world, sometimes you have to break up, and here's why we're doing it.' They talk about big ideas like 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness'."
 - **The Grievances (The "Complaints"):** "This is a big list of complaints against the King of England. Imagine if you made a list of all the unfair rules in the house, like 'He makes us pay taxes on our tea!' or 'He won't let us make our own rules!'" Skim the simplified list with your student.
 - **The Declaration (The "We're Done!"):** "This is the final sentence where they officially say, 'We are now our own country, the United States of America. Goodbye!'"
3. **The Hard Truth (Discussion):** Ask, "The Declaration says 'all men are created equal.' Was that true for everyone back then?" Gently explain that this amazing idea didn't include enslaved people, women, or Native Americans. Frame it as a powerful promise. Say, "It was like they wrote a goal for the country that America has been working on ever since—trying to make sure 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' is for *everybody*. It's a job that is still important today."

Part 3: Creative Application - Your Personal Declaration (30 minutes)

1. **Brainstorm:** Say, "Now it's your turn to be a Founder! You're going to write your own Personal Declaration of Independence. What is something you'd like to be independent from? It could be silly, like 'Independence from eating peas' or 'Independence from a messy room'." Help the student brainstorm some fun "grievances" (e.g., "My parents require me to go to bed when I am not tired," or "My sister/brother takes my toys without asking.")
2. **Create the Document:** Give the student the large piece of paper. Guide them to structure their declaration like the real one:
 - **Headline:** The Unanimous Declaration of [Student's Name]
 - **Preamble:** "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one kid to declare independence from things that are annoying..."
 - **List of Grievances:** "The history of the present Parents has been a history of repeated injuries..." (Then list the brainstormed complaints).
 - **The Declaration:** "Therefore, I, [Student's Name], solemnly publish and declare, that I am, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent from [the thing they chose, e.g., 'cleaning my room every Saturday']."
 - **The Promise:** Add a final section based on the "hard truth" discussion. "In declaring my own freedom, I promise to be fair and kind to others, including [sibling's name, the family pet, etc]."
3. **Sign and Share:** Have the student sign their name at the bottom with a flourish (using the feather pen if you have one!). Let them decorate it with drawings and color.

Part 4: Conclusion & Celebration (5 minutes)

1. **The Reading:** Have the student stand on a chair (their "soapbox") and read their Declaration aloud with great importance. If you have a bell, ring it when they are finished to announce the news, just like they did in Philadelphia.
2. **Reflect:** Ask, "Why do you think words on a piece of paper were so powerful? How does it feel to declare something?" Connect it back to the 4th of July: we celebrate with fireworks and parades because it was a very brave and important moment when the founders shared their declaration with the world. It was the moment they shared their big idea for a new country.

Differentiation & Extension

- **For Support:** Provide a pre-written template with fill-in-the-blanks for the personal declaration. Focus more on the discussion and the creative decorating part.
- **For a Challenge:** Encourage the student to use more "historical" sounding language in their declaration. Have them research one of the actual grievances against King George III and explain it in their own words.
- **Extension Activity:** Design a flag for the new "independent state" they declared.