

Our Forefathers Were People, Too:
Lessons in Perspective from the
American Revolution

Teaching American History
The Enduring Legacy of the American Revolution
Liberty, Freedom and Equality

Final Project

Kraig B. Hannum

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Project Overview

Grade Level: 8th grade, but can be modified up or down to suit other middle or high school grades.

Summary:

This is an interactive research project that puts the student in the place of actual historic figures to give them a better understanding of the difficulties involved with creating our country. This will also give students a chance to connect the past to the present and see how differing points of view must be considered whenever a decision is being made.

Essential Questions:

- What factors influenced the creation of our democratic government in America?
- What is the impact of individuals on historic events?
- Have personal viewpoints had an influence on group decisions?

Challenge Questions:

- Who were the influential people behind the creation of our Constitution?
- What links are there between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and Bill of Rights?

Lesson Length:

This will be a unit of 2 weeks in length, for the average class that meets five days a week for 45 minutes a day.

Prior Knowledge Required:

Students will need a basic knowledge of American history during the colonial period up to the beginning of the American Revolution. This unit can serve as a gateway to learning about the Declaration of Independence and our Nation's struggle to gain its freedom from Great Britain. It could be modified to use later to study the debates involved in the creation of our federal system.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

- Students will gain a better appreciation for the historic figures that were involved in the move for Independence and the creation of our government.
- Students will be able to link the ideas set forth in the Declaration of Independence with the government created by the Constitution.

National History Standards:

- Era 3, Standard 1B: The student understands the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence. Explain how key principles in the Declaration of Independence grew in importance to become unifying ideas of American democracy.

- Era 3, Standard 3A: The student understands the issues involved in the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution and the new government it established.

Vermont Standards:

- 6.1 Students examine complex webs of causes and effects in relations to events in order to generalize about the workings of human societies, and they apply their findings to problems.
- 6.3 Students analyze knowledge as a collection of selected facts and interpretations based on particular historical or social settings.

Preparation for Teaching:

Review existing classroom materials that were previously used for related units. Research and examine information on new subjects for class discussion. Hammer out details for class activities. Discuss reading possibilities with language arts teacher.

Proposed Schedule:

- Day 1 – Introduction & Coming to Consensus activity.
- Day 2 – Debrief and Explanation of Forefather’s research project.
- Day 3-7 Time for research and preparation.
- Day 8 – Viewing of a debate. Give students a visual understanding of what they will be doing by viewing a scene from *1776* (without the singing) or HBO’s miniseries, *John Adam’s*.
- Day 9 – The reenactment.
- Day 10 – Reflection and assessment.

This needs to be a flexible schedule to allow for varying access to technology and resource materials. If your school and students have more access to internet resources, your research time may be reduced. A trip to a local college library, such as Castleton State College, to use the resources obtained through the TAH program could be incorporated into this schedule.

Accommodations:

This project can include students of differing academic abilities with few additional accommodations. By mixing ability levels in the grouping for the Coming to Consensus activity, all students can take part and participate. For the Forefathers research project, students can be accommodated, either up or down, by the assigning of their delegate. Students who need more of an academic challenge to test their higher abilities could be given a lesser known delegate to increase the difficulty factor and make the assignment more challenging. Students who have difficulty with academic assignments could be given better known delegates, to allow them to meet with more success in their research and therefore become more engaged in the project. All students can be assessed on their effort and attitude towards the assignment, regardless of their academic level in school.

Lessons & Activities

Coming to Consensus & Making a Statement The American Revolution

The Declaration of Independence is one of our nation's most important documents. Students should learn its content and purpose, but it might also help for them to understand how difficult it was to write such a document. We can look back on our decision to become the United States of America as a “no brainer”, but prior to July 4th, 1776, this was not the case. According to John Adams, the population of the colonies was split with roughly a third in favor of independence, a third against, and the last third undecided. While these figures changed as events unfolded, it was still not a popular decision with all colonists to break away from their mother country, especially when their mother country was as strong, rich and powerful as Great Britain.

It is not easy to come to consensus on a subject, especially in a group of people from a wide range of backgrounds. The following activity will help students to better understand that and pave the way for a study of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution.

- Break the class into three groups. Make sure the groups are a mix of boys and girls and heterogeneous backgrounds. (Eventually you could make the connection to the three regions of the 13 colonies: New England, Middle and Southern.)
- Pass out the “Coming to Consensus & Making a Statement” worksheet. Explain the sheet and make the expectation clear that:
 - All students need to participate in the groups work.
 - The group needs to listen to all points of view.
 - There should be a facilitator, recorder and timekeeper in each group.
 - Notes should be written on the worksheets, but a final copy should be written separately. Read and edit the final draft with the group.
 - By the end of class, each group should have a written statement ready to read to the class.
- Pass out the topics to each group. Topics can include the following:
 - Sports: Girls should/should not play football.
 - Sports: The _____s are the best baseball team this year.
 - Entertainment: _____ is a movie that is good for the whole family.
 - Entertainment: One DVD that everyone should own is _____.
 - Food: Everyone should have _____ for dinner at least once a week.
 - Food: It is/is not good to be a vegetarian.
 - Food: The best flavor of ice cream is _____.

(Note: For older or more mature/advanced groups, you could use such topics as:

- For or against school uniforms.
- Raising or lowering the driving age.
- Capital punishment / use of the death penalty in your state.)

- Walk around the room to facilitate discussion and keep groups on task. Remind them that they must all agree with the statement that they make and be willing to sign their names to the final document saying so.
- Set an amount of time for work on the document and then stop them at the end so each group can read their statements.
- Discussion. Once all groups have shared their documents, hold a class discussion about the process they went through. What were the challenges in coming to consensus? Did they all come to consensus? Did they have to make compromises in order to come to consensus? (Do all students understand consensus and compromise? Make sure they do...) What was the editing process like, when writing the final document? What difference, if any, did it make that their statements were put in writing and signed? How would they feel if their statements were now put on the internet or published in the newspaper for everyone to read?
- Assessment: Because this is group work, individual grades might be difficult to give. A rubric could be created to use in order to evaluate how well each group met your expectations. Otherwise, informal assessments can be used based on your observations during the class. (When in doubt, Check-plus, Check, Check-minus...) Individual constructed responses can be written and collected to give the students a chance to reflect on this experience.
- Introduce the Declaration of Independence, explain its purpose, and link it to the activity done in class. (Like your groups, the Second Continental Congress was made up of colonial representatives from a variety of backgrounds. They had a wide range of ideas as to what was the right answer to any question.)

Name: _____ Grade/Teacher: _____
Date: _____ The American Revolution
Subject: social studies - 8
Assignment: Coming to Consensus & Making a Statement

Some will argue that there are two sides to every story, but others will argue that there are more than two. Getting a group of people to agree on a single point of view is not always an easy thing to do. Your task is to do just that.

Each group will be assigned a topic that they will have to discuss and come up with a unanimous statement about. Once the group has come up with a single point of view on the topic, they will write a statement that follows the format outlined below. When the document is complete, all group members must sign their names to it in show of their support. Statements will be read aloud to the class when they are complete. Use the spaces below to outline your work. Good luck!

Your topic: _____

Section One: Who is your group (in general, not specific names) and why are you writing about your topic.

Section Two: What are some specific reasons why you have chosen your position about your topic? Give at least three examples to support your position about your topic. These examples should help others to support your point of view.

1)

2)

3)

Section Three: Make a clear and strong statement that shows your groups position on your topic. The statement should indicate that you all stand behind your position. This last section should also include a place for the signatures of all group members.

Sports: Girls should/should not play football.

Sports: The _____s are the best baseball team this year.

Entertainment: _____ is a movie that is good for the whole family.

Entertainment: One DVD that everyone should own is _____.

Food: Everyone should have _____ for dinner at least once a week.

Food: It is/is not good to be a vegetarian.

Food: The best flavor of ice cream is _____.

Our Forefathers Were People, Too.

Reenacting the debate on Independence

Standing up for what you believe in, even when it is not a popular idea, can be a very heroic thing to do. Many of the delegates at the Second Continental Congress were opposed to the notion of breaking away from their mother country, and with good reasons. It was filled with risk, both personal and economic. It was going against the country that bore many of their family's heritages. Also, it had never successfully been done before. To help students gain a better perspective into the personal struggles involved with this event in history, assign them a delegate from the convention to become in a reenactment of the debate for independence.

- Give students an overview of the task before them using the explanation above.
- Pass out the “Our Forefathers Were People, Too” worksheets to use as a template for their research.
- Assign each student one of the names of the 65 delegates from the Second Continental Congress.
- Refer to: www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/index.htm this site has an index of the signers of the Declaration with links to short biographies on each one.
- Explain that students will need to collect enough information on their delegate to be able to speak on the issue as that delegate would have spoken. Students can use their imagination on some aspects of how they would have argued, but they must be able to justify their position based on what they found out about their delegate through their research.
- Have students use the resources at your media center or the computer lab to complete their research.
- Set a date for the debate on Independence.
- Set up your classroom with the tables and chairs surrounding a center table where the president of congress will sit to run the debate. (You can choose a student for this position, or you can act as moderator yourself.)
- For an added impact, have students dress the part for the debate. (Contact your Teaching American History center for possible help with obtaining costumes.)
- Use Roberts Rules of Order as a guideline for your debate too give the students a realistic experience with meeting organization. (Don't forget the gavel!)
- When the debate is completed, have the delegates vote on the issue of Independence, but have them turn in a written explanation of why their delegate voted the way they did. Their explanation must include evidence from the debate to justify why they were swayed to either “Yay” or “Nay”.
- Use the rubric provided to assess the student's performance.

Name: _____ Grade/Teacher: _____

Date: _____ The American Revolution

Subject: social studies - 8

Assignment: Our Forefathers Were People, Too.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and other such icons from our American past did much to make this country what it is today. They were more than just names found in history books, they were people, too. Uncovering their personal side can sometimes make their accomplishments seem even more incredible, and can inspire us to strive for more in our lives. Use the resources of your computer or media center to find information about the “human” side of the delegates to the Second Continental Congress. Use your research to help you become that character in a classroom reenactment of the debate for Independence in 1776. All of your arguments in this debate must be justified by what you uncover about whom that person was and where they were from. Be sure to keep a list of the resources that you used.

Delegates Name: _____

Home Colony/State: _____

1) Physical description as an adult:

2) Married life/ Family life:

3) Occupations:

4) Hobbies and/or personal traits:

5) Role in the Revolution:

- 6) Life after the Revolution:
- 7) Resource List:

Critical Thinking:

A) Would this delegate have been immediately in favor of Independence? Why or why not? Explain using facts from your research to support your answer.

B) The signers of the Declaration of Independence pledged their, “lives, fortunes and sacred honor”, in order to support their cause. In thinking about the figure you researched, what specifically might they be risking to support the cause of Independence?

Assessment

Name:
Date:
Class:
Assignment:

Teacher:
Grade:

PROJECT RUBRIC

CRITERIA	A WOW!	B - C GOT IT	C - D GETTING THERE	F NEEDS WORK
Written work:	Meets all requirements: 1. Completed on time. 2. Neat and free of GUM errors. 3. Answers are accurate and based on research.	Meets 2 requirements:	Meets 1 requirement:	No requirements met:
Presentation:	Meets all requirements: 1. Student was prepared at the start of the reenactment. 2. Student took an active part in the reenactment. 3. Statements made could be justified by research. 4. Student stayed in character and assignment seriously.	Meets 2-3 requirements:	Meets 1 requirement:	No requirements met:
Research:	Meets all requirements: 1. All sources used are listed following MLA format. 2. Uses at least two sources of information. 3. Neat and easy to read.	Meets 2 requirements:	Meets 1 requirement:	No requirements met:

TOTAL (out of 10 points) =

COMMENTS:

Teacher Resources

A&E. *Biography of the Millennium: 100 People – 1000 Years* (Video). New York: A&E Television, 1999. An eclectic combination of people from history. Several segments are useful for this topic, but some segments are longer than others. This is useful for dropping in a clip here and there, but the video format makes this difficult to cue-up more than one segment per class. Find this in DVD, if you can, to get the most out of it.

I accessed this source through our school media center, but it can also be ordered on-line.

Ankeney, K., Del Rio, R., Nash, G., Vigilante, D., (Ed.). *Bring History Alive! A Sourcebook for Teaching United States History*. Los Angeles: National Center for Teaching History in the Schools, 1996. This book links history lessons to the national standards by grade level. I suggest using it as what it is: a sourcebook. Use it for ideas and for guidance in coming up with lessons to fit your curriculum and grade level.

I accessed this source from a social studies activities catalog.

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the struggle for America's independence*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005. This is a great resource for the teacher who wants to learn more about the life and contributions of women during the American Revolution. The author uses a wide variety of women to give the reader a broad perspective of the different challenges and lifestyles of women in revolutionary America. I would not assign this for a middle school student to read in its entirety, but selected chapters or sections of chapters can be assigned or read to the class. Reading from the daily diary of a country doctor's wife will be a lesson in itself, and give anyone living in the twenty-first century an appreciation for how easy our lives are compared to theirs.

I accessed this book through the Teaching American History (TAH) program.

Brownell, David. *Heroes of the American Revolution*. Santa Barbara, CA.: Bellerophon Books, 1999. This has the look of a coloring book, but it contains some short, concise biographies on key figures from the American Revolution. They are much more Middle-Level-Student friendly than those printed in the Dictionary of American Biography.

I accessed this source from a social studies activities catalog.

Brownell, David. *Heroines of the American Revolution*. Santa Barbara, CA.: Bellerophon Books, 1998. This book IS a coloring book, but the biographies and focus on women make it worthwhile for the upper elementary and lower middle level classrooms. It must not be forgotten that our nation was not created by men alone. Women in history are often overlooked, and shouldn't be.

I accessed this source from a social studies activities catalog.

Butterfield, Herbert. *The Whig Interpretation of History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1965. read this book because you have a true love for the proper teaching of history, or because you have a sleeping disorder. This is a very dry presentation of an intellectual topic. Do not use this for direct instruction of your students unless they have been bad.

I accessed this book through the Teaching American History (TAH) program.

Carnes, Mark (Ed.). *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*. New York: Henry Holt, 1995. This book gives a critical look at Hollywood's attempts to show history on the big screen. It is important that we understand what really happened at an event and what Mel Gibson wants to sell tickets with.

I accessed this book through my local library, but it can also be found through bookstore searches and the internet.

“Created Equal?”, The Learning Page: The Library of Congress. 18 January, 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/01/equal/overview.html> Lesson plan website provided by the Library of Congress. This lesson (grades 6-12) looks at the meaning of “created equal.” The Library of Congress is often overlooked as a practical classroom resource, but it has more than you would think. From documents to pictures, their primary source listing is constantly being added to through web-access.

I accessed this site through a Google search.

Davis, Kenneth C. *Don't Know Much About Thomas Jefferson*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005. Written in a question-and-answer format, this book has many useful facts, for students aged 8 – 12, about the life and times of Thomas Jefferson.

I accessed this book from my school media center, but it can also be found through bookstore searches and the internet.

Davis, Kenneth C. *Don't Know Much About American History*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. Also written in a question-and-answer format, chapters 2 and 3 have many useful facts, for students aged 8 – 12, about the American Revolution and the founding of our country.

I accessed this book from my school media center, but it can also be found through bookstore searches and the internet.

“The Declaration of Independence”, The Independence Hall Association. 18 January, 2008. www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/index.htm An index of the signers of the Declaration with links to short biographies on each one. This is probably the most useful web-source for this unit. While the biographies may not provide all of the information needed for the student, it will give them a solid base to start from and add to.

I accessed this site through a Google search.

“The Declaration of Independence”, The History Place. 18 January, 2008.

www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/revolution/decindep.htm The History Place website. This contains a copy of the Declaration of Independence and an audio link to listen to it. Audio sources can be useful accommodations to those students with or without reading issues. The Declaration is a beautifully written document, but due to the writing style of the age, it can be difficult for many middle level readers to understand.

I accessed this site through a Google search.

Edwards, Sherman & Stone, Peter. *1776* (Video/DVD). Columbia Tristar, 1972.

A movie of the Broadway musical that depicts the Second Continental Congress with their struggle over the Declaration. This G-rated film has a few words and phrases that might make you blush, but it also has an abundance of historical quotes and facts. This works best as a culminating activity when the students can watch it with a historic-eye and check it for accuracy. Read the review in *Past Imperfect* for more information.

I accessed this film through Amazon.com, it can also be found in video stores.

Fink, Sam. *The Declaration of Independence: The Words that Made America*. New York:

Scholastic, 2002. This book takes the words of the Declaration and presents it in picture-book form. Many of the illustrations make the text more meaningful. An overall explanation, chronology of events and glossary are included. Don't let the format put off older students. This book is useful for any age group.

I accessed this book from my school media center, but it can also be found through bookstore searches and the internet.

Hakim, Joy. *A History of US: From Colonies to Country*. New York: Oxford Press, 1993.

A textbook for middle level students that is written in a very readable format. This is not your standard textbook and it does not weigh more than a canned ham.

I accessed this book through a textbook catalog received from the publisher.

King, David. *America's Story: Forming a New Nation 1756-1796*. Littleton, MA:

Sundance Publishers, 1993. A variety of lessons in a small book. Primary and secondary sources are used to help the students find answers to a variety of questions. These are thought provoking and highly useful.

I accessed this source from a social studies activities catalog.

McCullough, David. *John Adams*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Not a book for the average student, but a good one for the teacher who wants to really get to know about one of our legendary forefathers. HBO now has a mini series based on this work that is outstanding. It will be available on DVD for purchase and will be a must-have for the classroom. While the entire work may be too much to show, selected segments would enhance any lesson on this time period.

I accessed this book through my local library, but it can also be found through bookstore searches and the internet.

McCullough, David. *1776*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Once again, not a book for the average student, but a good one for the teacher who wants to really get to know about the year in which our country declared its freedom. At times you will wonder just how they did it, based on the challenges put before them. David McCullough is a gifted writer and describes the people and events in a very readable manner.

I accessed this book through the Teaching American History (TAH) program.

“Online, The Adams Family”, The Massachusetts Historical Society, 18 January, 2008.

www.masshist.org/DIGITALADAMS/AEA/letter.htm

An electronic listing of letters between John and Abigail Adams. The letters are shown in text form as well as images of the actual documents. Love letters as history? These are very informative about life in this era, as well as the historic events that Adams was a part of. Middle school students can relate to writing notes or letters to a special someone, and can gain an appreciation of the personal side of history from many of these writings.

I accessed this site through a Google search.

Randall, Willard S. *Alexander Hamilton: A Life*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

This is a very detailed and accurate account of the life and times of one of our nation’s more interesting and influential forefathers. Tracing his life story from childhood to the duel that ended his life years before it should have naturally, this is a fine example of the “rags to riches” American dream. The reading level is higher than most middle level students would be comfortable with, but it will give the teacher or the more advanced student a great insight into the personal life of a great American.

I accessed this book through the Teaching American History (TAH) program.

Sabin, Francene. *Freedom Documents*. Mahwah, NJ: Troll Associates, 1985.

A simple paperback picture book, this has many facts in very few pages. This will get the basic points across to those students who need it black-and-white terms. This could act as an accommodation for students that need help with their research or understanding of historic events.

I accessed this source from a social studies activities catalog.

Silver, James. *Ready-to-Use American History Activities for Grades 5-12*. West Nyack, NY.: Center for Applied Research Education, 1995. A wide variety of lessons and skill sheets for the teacher looking for the quick-fix lesson plan. Some are better than others. This can be used to provide additional learning opportunities to those students who finish their work before the majority of the class has, and need something more to keep them on task.

I accessed this source from a social studies activities catalog.