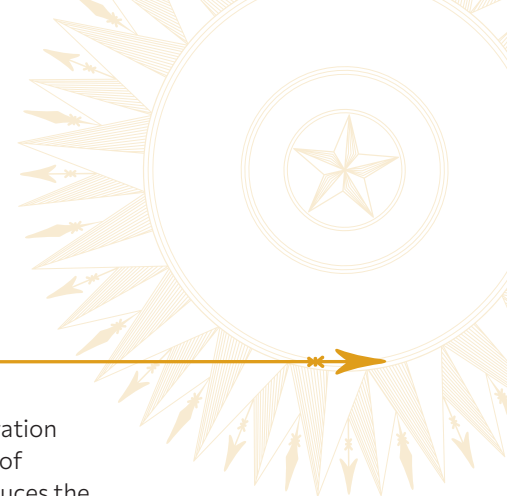


# INDEPENDENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES



The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the influence of the United States Declaration of Independence on independence movements of the 20th century and examine the history of independence movements around the world since the turn of the 20th century. It also introduces the influence of the Declaration and world events on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Students will engage in questioning the process of declaring independence by examining individual countries' independence movements and explore questions around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

All activities and resources are available online on the Museum of the American Revolution's Teacher Resource Guides page.

## MATERIALS

### Primary Sources

**Object:** Philippine Five Peso Note  
(Museum of the American Revolution)  
Art Card A

**Transcript:** Declaration of Independence

**Transcript:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
(United Nations)  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english>

**Transcript:** United Nations Charter  
(United Nations)  
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

**Transcript:** Atlantic Charter  
(Yale University Avalon Project)  
<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>

### Other Sources

**Big Idea 4:** Independence and Human Rights in the 20th and 21st Centuries

**Big Idea 2:** Age of Revolutions

**Video:** Aaron Copland's *Preamble for a Solemn Occasion*  
(Aaron Copland)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXpVJSWagc>

**Video:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Add Your Voice  
(Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Video Collection)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEyMBJOKv3o>

## AIMS/OBJECTIVES

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Understand the legacy and memory of the Declaration of Independence within public perception and in the emergence of independent countries over time.
- Analyze how people commemorate the founding of countries and organizations.
- Examine the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the debates over what should be included in it.

**Video Library:** UN Multilingual Video Collection  
(United Nations)  
<https://www.un.org/en/udhr-video/curated.shtml>

**Illustration:** Illustrated Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
(United Nations)  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/illustrated-universal-declaration-human-rights>

**Webpage:** Founding Members of the United Nations  
(United Nations)  
<https://research.un.org/en/unmembers/founders>

**Handout:** Mapping Declaration Inspiration

**Handout:** Excerpts from the Atlantic Charter

*A virtual version of this exhibit will appear online in January 2026.*

# PROCEDURES

## Engagement Activities

These activities can be used as hook activities, introductions to concepts, or shorter lessons.

### Commemoration on a Peso

**Objective:** Analyze how people commemorate the founding of countries and organizations.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to display or project the images of the five-peso note.

**Teacher Note:** Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy was a leader in the Philippines' fight against Spanish colonialism and was elected the first president of the Philippines. During the Spanish-American War (1898), Aguinaldo had allied with United States forces hoping that this would help his nation gain its independence. The United States, meanwhile, benefitted from the local expertise and military assistance Aguinaldo and his troops could provide. When it became clear that the United States would not help the Philippines achieve their independence, Aguinaldo separated from U.S. forces.

After the Philippines declared independence in 1898, Aguinaldo was elected president of the new republic. When Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States at the end of the war rather than either side acknowledging their independence, Aguinaldo declared war on the United States. He was captured two years later. The Philippines would not gain their independence until 1946.

Have students examine the images on both sides of the peso note for at least thirty seconds. Then, without providing the background information, ask students the following questions:

- What do you notice about the imagery on the front of the note?  
Students may notice the following: a portrait of a person, that his name is Emilio Aguinaldo based on the writing below the portrait, the historical marker with the title "Republika Pilipina," the cannon, or the laurel branch with a pyramid shape.
- Think about American currency. Based on that, why might this person have been put on Philippine money?  
Student answers may vary. They may suggest that the man is a president or an important figure in Philippine history.
- There is a historical marker pictured on the right of the note. Based on the title of the marker, what might it be about? What historical markers have you seen in your own life?  
The title "Republika Pilipina" implies that the historical marker has something to do with the history of the Philippine Republic.

- What do you think is going on in the image on the back of the note?  
Student answers may vary. They may point out that it is a celebration based on the decorations, hats being thrown, and the large crowd. They may also point out the man holding a flag in the center of the scene.

Explain that this note was designed by Romeo Mananquil in 1985 and commemorates the first president of the Philippines and the celebration of the Declaration of Philippine Independence. Engage students in a conversation around the following questions:

- Why do you think they chose these images to include on the peso?
- Compare to the peso note to U.S. currency — specifically the \$2. How is this note similar to U.S. currency? You may wish to show students images of the \$2 bill.  
Both the ₱5 and the \$2 bill include images involving their country's declaration of independence.

### Mapping Declaration Inspiration

**Objective:** Understand the legacy and memory of the Declaration of Independence within public perception and in the emergence of independent countries over time.

**Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Provide students with a printed copy of a world map — you may wish to use large paper — or a digital world map that they can edit/markup on their devices. Print enough copies of the handout Mapping Declaration Inspiration for all students or ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to access it online.

As an opening discussion, ask students: How do countries become independent?

Student responses may vary. They may mention wars, treaties, declarations, etc.

Explain that though not every country had a declaration of independence, the U.S. Declaration of Independence inspired or influenced the declarations of many countries that did.

Provide students with the list of declarations of independence in the handout Mapping Declarations and have them create a mark of their choice (circle, dot, square, star, etc.) for each declaration on their world map. Each marker should also include the date of that declaration.

Have students use the map to help visualize the influence of the U.S. Declaration of Independence around the world by asking the following:

- What do you notice when looking at this map? Do you think this is a lot of places? Or a few?  
Explain to students that these declarations are only a selection from over 100 countries' declarations that have been inspired by the U.S. Declaration of Independence.
- How do you think we know that these declarations were influenced by the U.S. Declaration of Independence? What similarities might we look for?
- What do you think it says about the U.S. Declaration of Independence that other countries have been inspired by it or used its language in their own declarations?

**EXTEND:** Have students choose or assign each student one of the declarations to research and provide a presentation or summary around that declaration.

**EXTEND:** Give students time to explore the Declarations Theater section of [The Declaration's Journey virtual tour](#) (available online in January 2026).

### Illustrated Rights

**Objective:** Examine the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the debates over what should be included in it.

**Time:** 15–25 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Provide students with drawing, printer, or similar paper.

Begin by briefly discussing with students the definition of a right. Then, tell students that they are going to create an illustrated version of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Assign each student one of the rights from the document. Have students create an illustrated page for their right that includes both a short (1–2 sentence) summary of their right and a visual representation of what that right means or what it looks like to use that right.

Hang each page around the classroom or create a class book of their illustrations to share. Have students report out on why they chose to illustrate their right as they did.

**EXTEND:** Have your students explore the [illustrated Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) by the United Nations Human Rights Commission and compare their decisions to those of the artists.

## Development Activities

These activities are suitable for diving deeper into a particular concept and can be used for an entire class period.

### The Declaration: Remembrance and Recognition

**Objective:** Understand the legacy and memory of the Declaration of Independence within public perception and in the emergence of independent countries over time.

**Time:** 45–55 minutes, plus homework

Students should read the Declaration of Independence in full, either for homework or at the beginning of class. Encourage students to use underlining, highlighting, and/or other methods to note things that stand out to them as significant. Have them discuss with a partner or small group what key points stood out to them and why. Encourage students or groups to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

Have students engage in a debate using the following question, explaining the reasoning behind their responses:

Do you think the public today would recognize the Declaration of Independence if they read it?

Explain that there were at least two recorded instances where some members of the public did not recognize the Declaration of Independence and had a negative reaction to the document:

<p><b>Miami Herald, 1970</b></p>	<p>In 1970, a <i>Miami Herald</i> reporter set out with a typed copy of the Declaration of Independence. They asked 50 random people to sign it — only one did. Two others called it “commie junk,” some threatened to call the police and FBI, one called it the “work of a raver,” and another said, “Be careful who you show that kind of antigovernment stuff to.”</p>
<p><b>NPR Twitter, 2017</b></p>	<p>In 2017, NPR used Twitter (now known as X) to continue their annual tradition of reading the Declaration of Independence line by line (previously it had been done exclusively on radio). The action was met with mixed responses. Some said NPR was “calling for a revolution” and violence, others were questioning the poster’s state of mind, and one said that this was “not the place” for it.</p>

*Both events took place on July 4.*

Ask students what events were happening during these years that might have influenced these reactions?

**Note:** The first took place during the Cold War, six years before the Bicentennial sparked a renewed interest in the Declaration of Independence and the nation's founding. The second took place during Donald Trump's first year as President, after a contentious election. It was also NPR's first attempt at tweeting the Declaration, using a platform that had been used to share heavily politicized messaging during the campaign process.

Ask students how context might impact how various Americans react to hearing the Declaration at different points in history. You may need to remind students that not all British colonists in North America agreed with the Declaration of Independence or the idea of declaring independence at all.

Inform students that many historians specializing in the study of the Declaration of Independence have emphasized the importance of reading the whole Declaration of Independence for annual events and events for the 250th anniversary. Ask: Do you think reading the whole thing rather than excerpts is important? Why or why not?

**EXTEND:** Have students brainstorm how they might help their school or community recognize and appreciate the Declaration of Independence, considering both its historical and contemporary contexts.

## Anniversary Tunes

**Objective:** Analyze how people commemorate the founding of countries and organizations.

**Time:** 35-45 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to play [Aaron Copland's Preamble for a Solemn Occasion](#) through classroom speakers and/or make the song accessible for students to listen to on their own. You may wish to provide students with copies of *Big Idea 4: Independence and Human Rights in the 20th and 21st Centuries* or ensure they have access to it online.

Open with a class discussion centered around the question: how do people celebrate or commemorate important events? Student answers will vary, but may include responses such as: with fireworks, parties, holidays, songs, poems, performances, or documentaries.

Explain to students that Aaron Copland wrote Preamble for a Solemn Occasion to celebrate the first anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If students need background on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have them read the section Universal Declaration of Human Rights in *Big Idea 4*. Copland's song was also heavily inspired by the UN's Charter, which he included in the narration of the song.

Have students first listen to the song in full. Then have them analyze each section of the song using the following questions:

- What mood is this section setting?
- What makes you say that?
- What might it symbolize?

0:00-1:30	Sorrowful, soft sounds mixed with loud thundering sounds that evoke doom – possibly representing the sorrows and horrors of the world wars.
1:30-3:20	Triumphant sounds, plentiful use of brass and percussion, possibly evoking victory over war.
3:20-4:30	Quiet reprise of the opening sounds of the song, supposed to be played in the background of the narration of the UN's charter.
4:30-5:53	More triumphant sounds to wrap up.

Though unrecorded in its full original performance, as a wrap up have students mimic that performance to get a sense of the celebration using the following instructions:

- Have a student or students read the preamble of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Play first and second sections (through 3:20 on the accompanying link).
- Have a student read the UN Charter while the third section plays (through 4:30 on accompanying link).
- Finally, have students listen to the end of the song.

If you would like, you may choose to view a [narrated version](#) of the *Preamble for Solemn Occasion* with the original narrator Laurence Olivier.

**EXTEND:** Discuss music as a primary source. How can listening to music from a specific time period help us to better understand that era?

## Culmination Activities, Research Projects, and Group Projects

### Eras of Independence

**Objective:** Understand the legacy and memory of the Declaration of Independence within public perception and in the emergence of independent countries over time.

**Time:** Multiple day research and presentation activity

**Teacher Preparation:** Provide enough copies of Big Idea 4: Independence and Human Rights in the 20th and 21st Centuries and Big Idea 2 Age of Revolutions for each group as needed or ensure students have access to the Big Ideas online.

Assign students, individually or in four groups, one of the four eras of independence movements:

1. Age of Revolutions (1790-1848)
2. Post World War I (1918-1939)
3. Post World War II (1945-1980)
4. Post Cold War and Dissolution of the USSR (1980-Today)

Using Big Idea 4 (students assigned to Era 1 should use Big Idea 2) and any extra research, have students research their assigned periods. In a written report or media presentation, have students present their research on the following questions:

- What events during this era sparked the creation or increased efforts of the independence movements within it?
- What were at least 3 of the independence movements that arose or succeeded during this era? Summarize them.
- Aside from independence, were there any other goals that revolutionaries were fighting/pushing for? What were those goals and why did the revolutionaries fight for them?
- Choose one declaration of independence from your era. How does it compare to the United States Declaration of Independence?
- How successful were these movements? What makes you say that?

If they choose a media presentation, students can present the information via a presentation media of their choice (PowerPoint, Canva, Prezi, tri-fold poster, song, performance, etc.)

**EXTEND:** Have students compare the eras of independence to each other.

### Self-Determination, Human Right?

**Objective:** Examine the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the debates over what should be included in it.

**Time:** 45-55 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to project or provide students with copies of the handout Excerpts from the Atlantic Charter.

**Teacher Note:** The Atlantic Charter was a statement of principles created by Franklin D. Roosevelt (United States) and Winston Churchill (United Kingdom) in August 1941. The purpose of this document was, in part, to outline steps to promote global cooperation, avoid another world war, and support peoples' right to choose their own government. Some historians credit this document as the first step to the creation of the United Nations.

#### **Vocabulary: Self-Determination**

The right for a people to determine their own state/country and government, and pursue their own economic, social, and cultural development.

Have students read the handout Excerpts from the Atlantic Charter and discuss the meaning/purpose behind these three points. What are they saying?

Explain to students that during WWII, Winston Churchill (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) and Franklin Roosevelt (President of the United States) pushed for the self-determination of European countries under Nazi control. This document stated their goals and influenced the post-WWII creation and wording of the UN Charter.

Share with students the original list of the 51 UN countries, and analyze it using the following questions:

- What stands out to you about this list?
- Whose voices are included on this list? Whose are not?
- Why might voices from colonized nations have been omitted?
- Do you think colonies or former colonies at the time of the UN's formation would have embraced the lines from the Atlantic Charter that you read? Why or why not?

Discuss the meaning of self-determination with students. Though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was not originally going to list self-determination as a right, several countries, especially former colonies, pushed for it. Have students debate the following question: Should self-determination be a human right? What limits, if any, should be considered?

After the debate, explore the 21st and 30th points of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. How did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights include self-determination within these two points?

**Alternative:** You may wish to provide the full document of the Atlantic Charter.

**EXTEND:** Have students research other debates surrounding the inclusion of rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For each right, have them explore arguments both for and against inclusion at the time of the document's writing.

### Assorted States

**Objective:** Understand the legacy and memory of the Declaration of Independence within public perception and in the emergence of independent countries over time.

**Time:** Multiple-day research and timeline activity

**Teacher Preparation:** Provide students with time to find countries that have gained or are fighting for their independence. You may wish to assign this for homework.

Using the countries students found during their research, create a class list.

Using the list, have students sort the countries by era (noted below) and whether or not they had a declaration of independence. Tell students to choose 10 of these independence movements to explore and create a 2-3 sentence summary for each. Their chosen 10 should vary by era and whether or not they had a declaration of independence.

1. Age of Revolutions (1790-1848)
2. Post World War I (1918-1939)
3. Post World War II (1945-1980)
4. Post Cold War and Dissolution of the USSR (1980-Today)

Once students have created their summaries, have them create a timeline using their short summaries. Ask students to discuss what similarities they noticed between states that successfully achieved independence. For example, did they include a war, were the lengths of their movements comparable, were their leadership structures stable or did they change over time? Is there any correlation between having a declaration and any of the other similarities you identified? Which independence movements seem to have been impacted by or connected to the United States Declaration of Independence? You may want to provide these discussion points to the students while they research so that they can reference them as they go.

## Extension Activities

### Unrecognized States

**Objective:** Understand the legacy and memory of the Declaration of Independence within public perception and the emergence of independent countries.

**Time:** Multiple-day research and poster project

**Teacher Preparation:** You may need to review the term "state" with your students.

**Teacher Note:** Current events may mean that students have strong feelings about certain states on this list. Use your judgement in assigning research and in structuring debriefing conversation.

Explain to students that there are several unrecognized or partially recognized states around the world. They will be spending time researching one of these states. Divide students into small groups. Assign, or allow students to choose, one of the following unrecognized or partially recognized states to research:

- Cook Islands
- Kosovo
- Niue
- Palestine
- Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh)
- Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
- Somaliland
- South Ossetia & Abkhazia
- Taiwan
- Transnistria
- Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

Have students create a poster about their state's independence or autonomy movements using their research. You may wish to post the discussion questions below to help guide student research. Post students' finished products around the classroom (or on a learning management system for virtual classrooms) and give students time to read through their classmates' work as a gallery walk.

After they have viewed all their classmates' posters, have students write down similarities and differences between the movements – they are free to revisit any of the states while they do so.

Debrief by discussing their findings. Use the following questions to help guide the debrief:

- Why are these states partially recognized or not recognized by others? Are there any trends?
- What similarities are there between these movements and fully recognized independence movements, like that of the United States? What differences exist?

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- Based on these examples, what is necessary for a state to be recognized?
  - What role might a declaration of independence play in their recognition?

### Declaration Translations

**Objective:** Examine the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the debates over what should be included in it.

**Time:** 30-45 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** *This activity is designed to be cross-curricular with a foreign language class. Prepare to share or display the video “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Add Your Voice.”*

Play the video “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Add Your Voice” for students. Explain that for its 70th anniversary, the UN encouraged people around the world to record themselves reading an article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their native language and posting it to the UN’s Audiovisual Library. Discuss

the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights being translated into multiple languages and the significance of a project like this one.

Assign or have students choose one of the articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and have them translate their article into the foreign language they are currently studying. English Language Learners can translate their article from their first language into English. Complete translations from 555 languages can be found on the [United Nations Human Rights Commission](#) website.

Encourage students to write and decorate their translations on a piece of computer or construction paper and display the finished pieces around the classroom. You may wish to have students present their translations to the class in a format of your choice (video, live presentation, song, etc.)

**EXTEND:** Encourage students to explore [additional videos](#) of people saying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their own languages in the Multilingual Video Collection.