



Unit 7 Activities

## Drafting the Declaration

This lesson will introduce students to the causes and rationale behind the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, as well as to its many audiences, both locally and abroad. It will explore structure and content of the Declaration, and consider how people first encountered the Declaration after it was drafted.

### Aims /Objective

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

- Investigate the audiences and purposes of the Declaration of Independence
- Explore primary source paintings, objects, and documents to develop a deeper understanding the Declaration and foreign involvement in the Revolutionary War
- Apply their newly learned knowledge to drafting their own version of the Declaration of Independence

### Materials

Unit 7 Big Idea: Drafting the Declaration

#### Primary Sources

- Portrait of Joachim du Perron, Comte de Revel  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/collection/portrait-of-joachim-du-perron-comte-de-revel>  
(Museum of the American Revolution)
- *Baron de Kalb introducing Lafayette to Silas Deane*  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/collection/enlisting-foreign-officers>  
(Museum of the American Revolution)
- French Gorget  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/collection/french-gorget>  
(Museum of the American Revolution)
- French Musket marked "United States"  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/collection/french-musket-marked-united-states>  
(Museum of the American Revolution)

- Declaration of Independence transcription  
[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/declare.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/declare.asp)
- Articles of Confederation printing  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/bdsdcc.n001001/?sp=1>  
(Library of Congress)

#### Other Resources:

- *Season of Independence* interactive
- Museum Virtual Tour
- Unit 7 Worksheet: Making a Case (included)
- Timeline of Protest and Independence (included)

# Procedures

## Engagement 10 – 15 minutes

### AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Begin by asking students what information writers/authors need to consider before they start writing a document. Review how writers need to decide on an audience and a purpose for what they are writing. Have students brainstorm a few examples of different books, documents, letters, etc. that were written with a particular audience and purpose in mind.

Next, display a copy of the Declaration of Independence using “The Declaration of Independence” gallery in the Museum’s virtual tour. Ask students to brainstorm, individually or in small groups, who they think the audience and what they think the purpose was for the Declaration of Independence were. Allow students to share their ideas, justifying their answers as they do so.

## Development 30 – 40 minutes

### DIFFERENT DECLARATIONS

Instruct students to locate the following examples of support for independence within the *Season of Independence* interactive:

- Virginia Instructions to Congressional Delegates
- Rhode Island Act Repealing Allegiance to Great Britain
- New Jersey Constitution Preamble
- Charlestown, South Carolina Grand Jury Presentments
- Barnstable, Massachusetts Resolution on Independence

After providing time for students to familiarize themselves with the 5 examples of support, ask them to compare and contrast the documents by asking:

- In what part of the colonies did these examples of support originate?
- How, specifically, are each of them showing support for independence in their own way?

**DEEPEN:** Have students read the sections entitled “13 colonies, 13 people”, “Uniting the Cause” and “Law and Precedent” in the Unit 7 Big Idea Essay to provide addi-

tional context to how different colonists viewed the Revolution. Afterward, ask students to identify and discuss the differences between colonists and the role that shared grievances and British history played in uniting them.

## Development 30 – 40 minutes

### FOREIGN FRIENDS

*Teacher Preparation: Prepare links to primary sources for sharing with students.*

Share links for the four primary sources pertaining to French involvement in the Revolutionary War (Joachim du Perron portrait, Baron de Kalb painting, French gorget, French musket). Assign one of the four sources to each student in the class and ask them to study their assigned historical object or painting and consider how it demonstrates the role of foreign powers in the Revolutionary War. Next, assign students to groups such that every student studied a different object and allow each of them time to present their object and their answer to their group members. Bring the full class together and allow students to share findings about each object as a class. Ask students to explain what all of the primary sources communicate about the importance of French involvement in the Revolution.

## Development 20 – 35 minutes

### MAKING A CASE

*Teacher Preparation: Prepare copies of the Unit 7 Worksheet: Making a Case and the Timeline of Protest and Independence for students.*

Share the Unit 7 Worksheet: Making a Case and the Timeline of Protest and Independence with students. Instruct them to read the excerpts taken from the Declaration of Independence and follow the worksheet’s instructions to analyze the different people the Declaration was trying to reach out to and the messages it had for them. Review answers as a class afterward and discuss the evidence they found showing that the Declaration tried to create unity between Revolutionary colonists and convince foreign allies like France and Spain to support the United States.

**ADAPT:** As an alternative to the worksheet for older students, instead provide them with the full transcript of the Declaration of Independence found in the primary sources and ask them to annotate where they think the Declaration is speaking to potential foreign allies and where they think it is speaking to Revolutionaries that Congress hoped to unite. Have them consult the Timeline of Protest and Independence to also help them identify which grievances listed in the Declaration impacted multiple colonies, possibly helping them empathize with each other. Allow students to share and compare their findings with their classmates, discussing and justifying their answers.

**DEEPEN:** Assign Unit 7 Big Idea Essay sections entitled “A Unanimous Declaration” and “Spreading the Word” for homework reading to provide additional context to the Audience and Purpose of the Declaration of Independence.

## Culmination 30 – 50 minutes

### DRAFTING A DECLARATION

*Teacher Preparation: Prepare copies of the Timeline of Protest and Independence for students. Prepare poster-size paper for students.*

Divide students into small groups and instruct them to draft their own version of the Declaration of Independence. Distribute poster-size paper so that their Declaration can resemble a broadside. Require that they use their own original language but keep the same audience and purpose as the original. Students should create a preamble in paragraph form that makes a case for independence in such a way that it won't sound hostile to monarchies whose support they are hoping to receive. After they have completed the preamble, share a copy of the Timeline of Protest and Independence with students. Instruct them to choose exactly five grievances to support their case for independence. Ask students to choose grievances that will serve to unify as many revolutionaries from different colonies as possible. Once students complete their drafts, provide them with an opportunity to read them aloud, explaining their rationale for the grievances they chose afterward.

**DEEPEN:** Ask students if they found it challenging to create impactful and strategic language from scratch. What about it was difficult? What kind of pressure do they think that Congress and the drafters of the Declaration were under? What was the source of that pressure and how do they think it affected those drafting and editing the document?

## Extensions and Adaptations

### BRITISH LIBERTIES

Share links for the transcription of the Declaration of Independence (<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>) and the English Bill of Rights ([https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/england.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/england.asp)) with students. Have them compare and contrast the documents. Students can focus on the list of grievances within each document (The English Bill of Rights lists many of them starting with the words “by” or “and”). Afterward, ask students if they think these similarities would have been advantageous when sharing the Declaration of Independence with British colonists who were familiar with the English Bill of Rights.

### FRIENDS OF THE REVOLUTION

France was the United States' first official foreign ally, but there were many other nations that provided assistance or fought against Britain as part of the larger conflict. Assign one or more of the following topics for students to research foreign involvement in the Revolution: Casimir Pulaski, Tadeusz Kościuszko, The Serapis flag, The Siege of Gibraltar, The (first) League of Armed Neutrality. Have students create a presentation that explains their assigned person, event, etc. and explains how it demonstrates foreign allies aiding the United States during the Revolution. Challenge students to research and discover other ways that nations such as Poland, Spain, and the Dutch Republic aided the United States.

## UNITING THE COLONIES

Display the tableau featured in the “A Brawl at Harvard Yard” gallery in the Museum Virtual Tour. Ask students who is in the tableau and what is happening in it. Explore with students where the different soldiers in the tableau are from and how they are all Revolutionaries. Note that despite resisting British policy and even fighting the British Army, many of them still did not get along.

Have students read the sections entitled “13 colonies, 13 people”, “Uniting the Cause” and “Law and Precedent” in the Unit 7 Big Idea Essay and explore the “A Brawl at Harvard Yard” gallery in the Virtual Tour to provide additional context to the relationship between different colonies and colonists. Afterward, ask students to create a comic strip depicting the brawl at Harvard Yard, as well as the events preceding and following it. Have students use speech bubbles and/or captions along with their drawings to help show the different people and perspectives within the Continental Army camp outside Boston and the challenge that General George Washington and the Continental Congress faced in uniting them.

**DEEPEN:** The Articles of Confederation was the first governing document of the United States. Share the printing of the Articles of Confederation from the Primary Sources list and have students explore it. Instruct students to analyze how it establishes the relationship between the different States. Ask: Which has more power, Congress or the individual States? What powers are reserved for the States? How did the Articles promote, or fail to promote cooperation between States?

## THE SEASON OF INDEPENDENCE

Instruct students to access the Season of Independence online interactive. Once in the interactive, have them explore each month, starting in April. Ask them the following questions after giving them time to explore:

- What do each of the blue dots represent?
- What are some of the different types of groups making declarations of their own?
- In which colonies are the first declarations being made?
- During what timeframe do most of the declarations take place? How might a surge in Declarations in an area affect whether or not a colony was willing to vote for independence?
- Are there other ways that British Americans could have “declared” their support for or opposition toward independence without holding a vote and issuing a document/statement? What are some possibilities?

After discussing, have students research the state or town they are living in, or one of the original 13 United States. Instruct them to search for other documents (or reports of events) showing support for dependence or independence that were created there during the *Season of Independence* from January to July 1776. Ask students to report the details of the event or document, how it demonstrates support for dependence or independence. Allow students to share and then discuss whether they think these also qualify as declarations of support for dependence or independence like those in the *Season of Independence* interactive.