

# THE JOURNEY OF THE ONE AND ONLY DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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by Judith St. George, ill. by Will Hillenbrand

Ages: 7-12

Lexile ®: n/a; Guided Reading Level: Q

Themes: U.S. History, Declaration of Independence, Writing, War, Technology, Problem-Solving, Historic Preservation

### SUMMARY

The Declaration of Independence has been around through every stage of American History and its journey is followed through pivotal points in U.S. History in this informative and entertaining program. From its creation during the Revolutionary War, to countless hiding and resting places throughout the turmoil and change of a growing America, to its final resting place in the National Archives, the Declaration of Independence has always been protected and valued, perhaps more than any other American document. Students will gain a better understanding of the causes leading up to the American Revolution, the ideas in the Declaration of Independence, and the many wars that changed and defined America. This entertaining and highly informative movie is sure to spark students' interest in the history of the Declaration and the American states that it united.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify the causes of the founding of the U.S.A.
- Students will create a timeline of U.S. military conflicts and their impacts on the U.S.
- Students will interpret the Declaration of Independence.

### BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Use a KWL chart to elicit background knowledge (a three-columned chart: What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned). Allow students to brainstorm what they know about the American Revolution, important Revolutionary figures, and the causes of the Revolutionary War. Record all of this information in the What I Know column of the KWL chart. Next, have students generate a list of questions of what they want to know. Record these ideas in the next column. Ask students if they are familiar with the Declaration of Independence. Record the students' background knowledge, if any. Tell them that the program that they are about to watch follows the Declaration of Independence from its birth through the important events in U.S. history. Revisit the KWL chart after viewing the program to fill in the What I Learned column.

Teach the Statement of Rights of the Declaration of Independence ("We hold these truths to be self-evident..."). Discuss with students the main message of this statement. A suggested summary would be: *The beginning of the Declaration tells what rights the founding fathers believed that all people should have. These are that all people are equal and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These rights cannot be taken away. If a government tries to take away these rights, then the people have the right to change the government or make a new government that will uphold those rights.* Using this summary as a basis, list all of the ways that the English government did not uphold these rights and discuss how and why this led to the writing of the Declaration and the forming of a government that would.

### AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Revisit the KWL chart. Students should independently make a list of what they learned from the program. Then, have students share what they learned and record it on the KWL chart. Students can choose one of the most important or interesting things that they learned to do a project or research report on. Help them find resources on the internet or in the library. Provide project ideas such as a skit of one of the events, a research paper, or a newspaper article about the event.

Have the students make a timeline of the major events and wars highlighted in the program. First, list all of the wars and have the students match them with their dates. Next, provide short summaries of each war, based on information from the program. These summaries and the events in chronological order should be transferred onto a large timeline that the students should illustrate to show each event. Display these in the classroom. To extend this activity, students can research the conflicts more thoroughly and write their own annotations for each event.

Do an activity that shows students the meaning of taxation without representation. Give each student a bag of about ten pretzels upon entering the classroom. These students will be the colonists. Choose about 4-5 students to be British tax collectors. Tell the students that the pretzels represent money that they have earned. Then, have the colonists work on a crossword puzzle or comprehension questions. During this time, the British tax collectors should vote on a tax to impose (example: Chair Tax = 3 pretzels, Pencil Tax = 2 pretzels, etc.). As soon as the tax collectors have decided on some taxes, they should go around collecting them from the colonists. If there are any colonists working very hard, they can receive a small "wage" of one or two pretzels. Continue this activity long enough for students to feel slightly angry about the taxes.

After stopping the activity, pretend that you are the king and collect most of the taxes from the tax collectors, allowing them to divide the rest among themselves. At this point, have students write about how they felt during the lesson. They should also write about how the colonists reacted to being taxed without representation. Tie this back to the program to gain further understanding into the colonists' feelings and actions leading up to the American Revolution.

Divide the students into groups to investigate and write a report about each of the different places that the Declaration resided. The students can compare and contrast the modern-day locations with the way they were when the Declaration was housed there. Alternatively, students can create travel guides for Washington, D.C. that highlight important sites in the city, including the Library of Congress and the National Archives, the former and present homes of the Declaration.

Discuss historic preservation with the class. Ask students why preservation of historic documents is important. Find a copy of the actual Declaration of Independence in a book or on the internet and invite students to study it closely, noting the unusual handwriting and other physical features. Ask students to look for the creases or other signs of wear described in the program. Then plan a visit to your local library or a local museum and arrange for the librarian or other specialist to share historic documents (including maps or books) from their archives with the class. Perhaps they also have an interesting story they can share with the group of how that document (or map or book) came to be part of their collection!

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