

WILL YOU SIGN HERE, JOHN HANCOCK?

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by Jean Fritz, ill. by Trina Schart Hyman

Ages: 9-12

Themes: U.S. History, Declaration of Independence, Revolutionary War, Biography

Running Time: 30 minutes

SUMMARY

Known for his memorable signature at the bottom of the Declaration of Independence, the rest of John Hancock's life is not as well known to many students and citizens. This movie humorously and clearly depicts Hancock's life as a young privileged boy in Boston to his rise to political power and prestige. Both personal and political details come to life in this movie, which highlights Hancock's fondness for fine clothing as well as his roles in pivotal points in history. Students will gain a better understanding of the Stamp Tax, the Tories and the Rebels, the Declaration of Independence, and the Revolutionary War. This entertaining and highly informative movie is sure to spark interest of students in the history and lives of our founding fathers.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will investigate the history of the founding of the U.S.A.
- Students will learn about the life and influence of John Hancock upon this history.
- Students will identify the causes and key figures of the American Revolution.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Use a **KWL** chart to elicit background knowledge (a three-columned chart: What I **K**now, What I **W**ant to Know, What I **L**earned). 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 or curiosities of what they want to know. Record these ideas in the next column. Ask students if they are familiar with John Hancock. Most students will be familiar with his famous signature, but little else. Tell them that the movie that they are about to see will answer many of the questions that they want to know about the Revolutionary War as well as introduce them to John Hancock, a very important Revolutionary figure. Revisit the KWL chart after viewing the movie 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 John Hancock and others forming a government that would.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Revisit the KWL chart. Students should independently make a list of what they learned from the movie. 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 John Hancock's life. First, list all of the important events and match them with their dates. Transfer these onto a large timeline that the students should illustrate to show each event. Display these in the classroom.

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 movie to gain further understanding into John Hancock's feelings and actions.

Other videos based on books by Jean Fritz available from Weston Woods include:

**AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED, PAUL REVERE?
GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOTHER
JUST A FEW WORDS, MR. LINCOLN
SHH! WE'RE WRITING THE CONSTITUTION
WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA, BEN FRANKLIN?
WHO'S THAT STEPPING ON
PLYMOUTH ROCK?
WHY DON'T YOU GET A HORSE, SAM ADAMS?**