



LESSON PLAN

Applying the Principles of the Declaration of Independence at Arlington National Cemetery

Middle School (6–8)

OVERVIEW

Students review the Declaration of Independence, learn about five people buried at Arlington National Cemetery through primary and secondary sources, and then, as a class, discuss how those individuals' actions connect to quotes from the Declaration. The featured individuals are Denton Winslow Crocker, Jr., James Reese Europe, John F. Kennedy, George C. Marshall, and Anna Kelton Wiley. See the end of this document for more information on the featured individuals.

Resources include a PowerPoint, a primary source packet, and student worksheets.

Estimated time: 1 class period (45 minutes)

STANDARDS

Content standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following national standards, and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

- D2.Civ.8.6-8. Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
- D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- D2.His.16.6-8. Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.
- D4.I.6-8. Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and explain key ideals and principles found in the Declaration of Independence, including natural rights, equality, and the role of government.
- Analyze how historical figures buried at Arlington National Cemetery applied the principles of the Declaration of Independence through their actions and service.
- Use primary and secondary sources to connect historical evidence to specific quotes from the Declaration of Independence.



- Construct and participate in discussions that explain how the ideals of the Declaration have been used and reinterpreted from 1776 to the present.

RESOURCES NEEDED

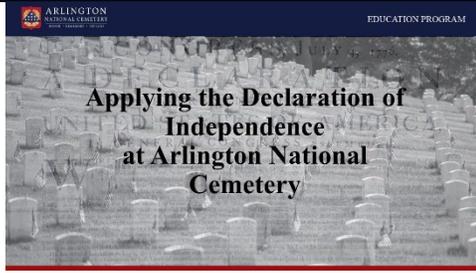
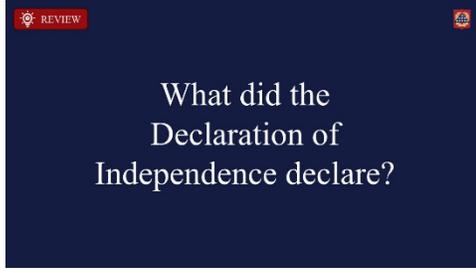
- PowerPoint
- Student Worksheets
- Student Sources
- Declaration of Independence text (optional)

LESSON ACTIVITIES

Introduction: (5 minutes)

- On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, declaring the American colonies to be free and independent states, separate from Great Britain yet united with each other.
- The Declaration of Independence marks a specific moment in United States history, and it is even associated with a specific date; however, its impact and importance goes far beyond 1776.
- Today, we’re going to explore how the ideas within the Declaration of Independence — rights, equality, the role of government — have served as a guide for the United States and its citizenry from 1776 through today.

Lesson: (10 minutes)

PowerPoint Slide	Instructor Notes
	<p>Today we’re going to look at how five individuals who are buried at Arlington National Cemetery applied principles and ideals from the Declaration of Independence to their lives and service.</p> <p>Before we start, we need to review the Declaration of Independence.</p>
	<p>Lead a group discussion/brainstorm. Make sure to emphasize in this discussion or while reviewing the next slide that the Declaration did not only declare independence from Great Britain, but it also declared ideals and founding principles for these newly united states — rights and ideals that still matter today.</p>



	<p><i>Optional:</i> Annotate, as a class, in small groups, or individually, the text of the Declaration of Independence to identify ideals and important sections within it.</p>
<p>Review: What did the Declaration declare?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The rights of man → "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" 2. Grievances against Great Britain → "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries..." 3. Legal basis for separation from Great Britain → "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed" "whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government" 4. Political separation from Great Britain → "The these United Colonies are ... Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, ... and that as free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do" 	<p>Let's take a moment to review what the Declaration of Independence actually says.</p> <p>First, the Declaration talks about the rights of man. It says that all people are created equal and are born with certain rights, like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are called natural rights, meaning the government doesn't give them to you — you're born with them. Now, it's important to know that in 1776, these rights didn't apply to everyone, but this idea became very powerful later on. People used it to argue for equality and civil rights in the future.</p> <p>Next, the Declaration lists grievances against Great Britain. A grievance is a complaint. The colonists explain all the ways that King George III treated them unfairly — things like unfair taxes and not having a say in government. This section is basically the evidence. The Founders are saying, 'Here's why we're so upset, and here's why something needs to change.'</p> <p>Then we have the legal basis for separation. This is where the Declaration explains how this group of Americans believes that government is supposed to work. It says governments exist to protect people's rights and only have power because the people allow it. That's what 'consent of the governed' means. And if a government stops protecting people's rights, the people have the right to change it. That idea is still important today in democracies like ours.</p> <p>Finally, the Declaration announces political separation from Great Britain. This is the moment when the colonies officially said they are no longer under British rule. This was a huge</p>

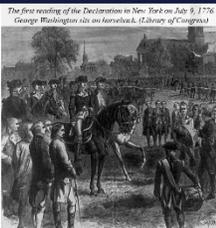


	<p>decision and a big risk. By declaring independence, the colonies were agreeing to govern themselves and deal with the consequences.</p> <p>So, when we look at the Declaration, it's not just about the past. The ideas in it — rights, equality, and the role of government — still shape how we think about our country today.</p>
<p>The Declaration in 1776</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence • To spread the news, the Continental Congress printed about 100-200 copies • The Declaration declared American independence... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Great Britain • To the new U.S. citizenry • And to the world (especially France and Spain)  <p><small>One of the 26 surviving copies of the Declaration. (Library of Congress)</small></p>	<p>Now that we know what the Declaration declared, let's review how the colonists shared these new ideas.</p> <p>On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. However, the Declaration did not matter if no one knew about it. The next step was to spread the word.</p> <p>To do that, the Continental Congress printed 100-200 copies, known as the Dunlap Broadside. Riders on horseback were sent across the colonies with copies of the Declaration to read aloud and share with the populace. Copies were also shared with officers of continental troops.</p> <p>The Declaration declared American independence...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Great Britain • To the new U.S. citizenry • And to the world (especially France and Spain, which the United States hoped would support the nation's fight against Great Britain) <p><i>Broadside: A large, single sheet of paper, printed on one side only.</i> <i>Broadside were cheap and quick to produce and therefore a popular way to spread news.</i></p>



The Declaration in 1776

- The Declaration was used to:
 - **Unite** the nation under the moral principles of liberty, equality, and freedom
 - Convince the residents to **support and fight for independence**
 - **Motivate** troops by explaining what they were fighting for



In the new United States, the Declaration of Independence was used to:

- Unite the nation under the moral principles of liberty, equality, and freedom
- Convince residents to support and fight for independence
- Motivate troops by explaining what they were fighting for

The Declaration Throughout History

<p>1848 Seneca Falls Convention Declaration of Sentiments</p> <p><i>"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal..."</i></p> <p><i>"The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman..."</i></p>	<p>1863 President Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address</p> <p><i>"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal..."</i></p>	<p>1963 Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech</p> <p><i>"When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men - yes, Black men as well as white men - would be guaranteed the same inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."</i></p>
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Let's look at three examples of how historical actors have used and referenced the Declaration of Independence to achieve their own goals.

Declaration of Sentiments

- The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention was the first large meeting focused on women's rights in the United States. At the convention, women and men discussed unfair laws and treatment of women, especially the fact that women could not vote. At the end of the convention, its leaders wrote The Declaration of Sentiments, which outlined the social, legal, and political inequalities that women faced and argued that women were entitled to the same rights and freedoms as men, including the right to vote.
- *Ask:* Can someone please read the quotes aloud?
- *Ask:* How do these quotes reference or use the Declaration of Independence?
- *Possible student answers:* These quotes copy the language in the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Sentiments also mirrored the format of the Declaration of Independence, including elements such as the prologue, "We hold these truths...", a list of grievances, and a declaration that women deserve the same rights and privileges as male citizens.
- *See full text:*
<https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/declaration-of-sentiments.htm>

Gettysburg Address



- During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address in 1863 at the Gettysburg National Cemetery. In the speech, Lincoln honored soldiers who died at the Battle of Gettysburg and reminded Americans why they were fighting the war. He explained that the nation must stay united and protect the ideas of freedom and equality.
- *Ask:* Can someone please read the quote aloud?
- *Ask:* How does the quote reference or use the Declaration of Independence?
- *Possible student answers:* Abraham Lincoln referenced the Declaration of Independence in the Gettysburg Address by echoing its core ideas and language. He began by recalling the nation’s founding in 1776 and emphasized the Declaration’s belief that all people are created equal. By doing this, Lincoln connected the Civil War to the original purpose of the United States and argued that the war tested whether a nation built on equality and liberty could survive.
- *See full text:*
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.24404500/?st=text>

“I Have a Dream”

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In the speech, he spoke against racism and injustice and shared his dream of a future in which people of all races could receive equal rights and treatment. He encouraged Americans to work together peacefully to make that dream a reality. Giving the speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial connected Martin Luther King Jr.’s message to Abraham Lincoln’s legacy and underscored King’s demand that the promises of the Emancipation Proclamation and racial equality be fully realized for Black Americans.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ask:</i> Can someone please read the quote aloud? • <i>Ask:</i> How does the quote reference or use the Declaration? • <i>Possible student answers:</i> Martin Luther King Jr. referenced the Declaration of Independence by reminding Americans that it promises freedom and equality for everyone. He compared those promises to a “check” that the nation has not fully honored for Black Americans. By using the Declaration, MLK showed that the civil rights movement sought to fulfill America’s original ideals. • <i>See full text:</i> https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety
<p>The Declaration as an Aspirational Document</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Declaration of Independence is a document specific to 1776, but also relevant today • The Declaration did not solve every issue that the U.S. has faced, but it became a tool to achieve the aspirations within it • It is a reference guide for American ideals and goals  <p><small>Martin Luther King, Jr. during the March on Washington, August 28, 1963. (National Park Service)</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Declaration of Independence originated in the specific historical context of 1776, but it is still relevant today. • The Declaration did not solve every issue that the U.S. has faced, but it became a tool to achieve the aspirations within it. • It is a reference guide for American ideals and goals.

Gallery Walk: (20 minutes)

<p>ACTIVITY</p> <p>Your task:</p> <p>Compare the actions and stories of people buried at Arlington National Cemetery to the ideals within the Declaration</p>	<p>Today we’re going to examine the Declaration of Independence as a guide and toolkit for the United States. We’ll do this by comparing the actions and stories of people buried at Arlington National Cemetery to the ideals within the Declaration.</p>
<p>Arlington National Cemetery (ANC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located outside of Washington, D.C. • Established during the Civil War to bury war dead • As of 2026, over 430,000 service members and their family members are buried at Arlington • Includes gravesites for Americans from every major U.S. conflict, from the Revolutionary War to today  <p><small>Arlington in November 2017. (ANC/Elizabeth Frasier)</small></p>	<p>Before we start our analysis activity, let’s learn a little bit about Arlington National Cemetery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington is located in Virginia outside of Washington, D.C. • The cemetery was established during the Civil War because the military needed a place to bury the service members who were dying in battles and hospitals in the region. • It is one of many national cemeteries across the country.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today, over 430,000 service members and their family members are buried at Arlington. • There are gravesites for Americans from every major U.S. conflict, from the Revolutionary War to today. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Note:</i> Service members who served in conflicts prior to the Civil War were reinterred at Arlington.
<p>Activity Directions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visit 5 stations to learn about someone buried at Arlington <p>At each station:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Read a short history and analyze primary source <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Take notes on your worksheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We’re going to start by learning about people buried at Arlington National Cemetery. • You’ll visit five stations to learn about five people buried at Arlington. • At each station, you’ll read some secondary source facts about the person and analyze 1-3 primary sources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ask:</i> Can anyone remind us what primary and secondary sources are?
<p>Declaration Quotes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “All men are created equal” 2. “[All men] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” 3. “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” 4. “That these United Colonies ... have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.” 	<p>We’re going to focus our analysis on four quotes from the Declaration.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “All men are created equal” 2. “[All men] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” 3. “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” 4. “That these United Colonies ... have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.” <p>Once you’ve visited all five stations, we’ll come back together to discuss as a group.</p>



Wrap-Up Discussion: (10 minutes)

<p> DISCUSS </p> <p>How do the ANC connections and sources relate or not relate to the Declaration of Independence?</p>	<p>Now that we've learned about these five individuals buried at Arlington and examined primary sources related to their lives and service, let's bring our discussion back to the Declaration of Independence.</p> <p>I'm going to share four quotes from the Declaration on the screen, one at a time, and we're going to discuss how the people and stories we examined relate or do not relate to that quote.</p>
<p> DISCUSS </p> <p>"All men are created equal"</p>	<p>Lead a group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anna Kelton Wiley: Women should have the right to vote. • James Reese Europe: African Americans should have the right to serve in the military.
<p> DISCUSS </p> <p>"[All men] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."</p>	<p>Lead a group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Reese Europe: Maintaining morale (happiness) is important in the military. • Denton Crocker: Sacrificed his life protecting individual life and liberty. • George Marshall: Marshall Plan helped secure European citizens' rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
<p> DISCUSS </p> <p>"That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."</p>	<p>Lead a group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anna Kelton Wiley: Women, as citizens, have the right to have a say in the actions of the government. • John F. Kennedy: All citizens have the right to know what the government is doing, to judge its actions, and to demand change.
<p> DISCUSS </p> <p>"That these United Colonies ... have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do."</p>	<p>Lead a group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Marshall: Marshall Plan helped conclude war, maintain peace, maintain alliances, and establish commerce.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John F. Kennedy: The president has the power to send the military to war, to make alliances, and to establish peace.
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Homework: (optional)

Homework	
<p>Select one of the short response prompts below to answer. Your response must include at least <u>one quote</u> from the Declaration of Independence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option #1: What does the Declaration mean to you? How is it relevant to your life and the world today? • Option #2: Connect the Declaration to a historical event we've studied in class that we did not discuss today 	

PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?

The individuals included in this lesson are all buried at Arlington National Cemetery. You can use the [ANC Explorer app](#) to visit their graves and find more information about them in the cemetery's [walking tours](#) and in the background information on the next page.

- Anna Kelton Wiley, Section 13, Grave 5959-B. Included in the Women's Rights Walking Tour.
- Denton Winslow Crocker, Jr., Section 13, Grave 9088-A
- George C. Marshall, Section 7, Grave 8198. Included in the World War II Walking Tour.
- James Reese Europe, Section 2, Grave 3576. Included in the Arts & Culture Walking Tour and the African American Trailblazers Walking Tour.
- John F. Kennedy, Section 45, Grave S-45. Included in the Cold War Walking Tour.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Denton Winslow Crocker, Jr.:** U.S. Army (1947–1966) —Denton Winslow “Mogie” Crocker Jr. was an American infantryman whose sense of duty and idealism led him to serve during the Vietnam War. Born on June 3, 1947, in Ithaca, New York, Crocker grew up in a family that valued education and service, and from a young age he developed a keen interest in history and world affairs. Determined to serve his country, he left home in the fall of 1964—while still in high school—to enlist in the U.S. Army, even though his parents hoped he would pursue college first. He completed basic training on his 18th birthday and began his tour of duty in Vietnam in October 1965. Crocker fought in the jungles of South Vietnam with courage and conviction, believing deeply in the defense of individual freedom. On June 4, 1966—just one day after his



19th birthday—he was killed in action near Dak To in Kontum Province. He was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and other honors.

- **James Reese Europe**, U.S. Army (1881-1919) — Fellow jazz great Eubie Blake called James Reese Europe "the Martin Luther King of music." The renowned bandleader and musician first studied violin as a child with the assistant director of the Marine Corps Band. By his twenties, Europe had become an acclaimed musician, performing at Carnegie Hall with the Clef Club, the all-Black orchestra he founded in 1910. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Europe enlisted and was commissioned as a lieutenant with the 369th Infantry, the "Harlem Hellfighters." Europe was ordered to form a military band of the best musicians he could muster. Known as the Hellfighters Band, the ensemble performed across continental Europe to great enthusiasm and praise. Europe credited the band's success to the fact that the musicians played only their own original music — Black music. Tragically, Reese lost his life during a dispute with another band member in 1919. His military service in a segregated military and his influence on the development of early jazz remain key parts of his legacy.
- **George C. Marshall**, U.S. Army (1880-1959) — One of the most distinguished military, diplomatic and political leaders of the 20th century, General George C. Marshall served as chief of staff of the U.S. Army during World War II (1939-1945). He directed the largest expansion of the Army in U.S. history, from fewer than 200,000 men before the war to more than eight million, with an unmatched arsenal of modern weapons and equipment. He also played a key role in shaping American military strategy, advocating for an invasion of Nazi-occupied France via the English Channel. On December 16, 1944, Marshall was promoted to General of the Army (five stars), the nation's highest rank. After the war, President Harry Truman appointed him secretary of state (1947-1949) and secretary of defense (1950-1951); he is the only person to have held both positions. Marshall's diplomatic career was as historically significant as his military one. Most notably, he conceived an ambitious, highly successful program for the postwar economic recovery of Western Europe — known as the "Marshall Plan" — for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953.
- **John F. Kennedy**, U.S. Navy (1917-1963) — John F. Kennedy, the 35th president of the United States, was one of the most influential and recognizable leaders of the 20th century. Born into a prominent Massachusetts family, Kennedy graduated from Harvard University before serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II. As commander of Patrol Torpedo Boat 109 in the Pacific, he displayed notable courage after his vessel was sunk by a Japanese destroyer. He earned the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his efforts to rescue injured crewmen. After the war, Kennedy entered politics, serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate before being elected president in 1960 at age 43, becoming the youngest person elected to the office. His presidency



was marked by the challenges of the Cold War, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion and the early years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Domestically, he advanced a vision of progress known as the “New Frontier,” promoting civil rights, space exploration and public service. His inaugural address — with its famous line, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” — infused a new spirit of civic responsibility into Americans, particularly the younger generations who would lead the protest movements and dramatic social transformations of the 1960s. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. His brief but transformative presidency left a lasting legacy defined by idealism, leadership and a call to civic duty.

- **Anna Kelton Wiley (1877–1964)** — Anna Kelton Wiley was a prominent suffragist and civic leader whose life was devoted to public service and the advancement of women’s rights. She earned a degree in physics from Columbia College (now George Washington University) in 1897 and later worked in library science at the Department of Agriculture and the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress. A lifelong champion of women’s suffrage, Wiley served as president of her local Elizabeth Stanton Suffrage Club and played a leading role in major demonstrations, including the 1912 Baltimore Suffrage Parade and the 1913 Washington, D.C. Suffrage Procession. She twice served as president of the influential National Woman’s Party. In 1918, during World War I, Wiley picketed the White House and was arrested and jailed for obstructing traffic. Her activism, along with that of other imprisoned suffragists, helped shift public opinion and contributed to President Woodrow Wilson’s eventual support of the 19th Amendment.



SOURCES

Activity Sources:

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James Reese Europe's 369th U.S. Infantry "Hell Fighters" Band. "Memphis Blues." YouTube, provided by The Orchard Enterprises. Originally released November 12, 1996; recording © 2005 Inside Sounds. Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CUkTUZbTpE>.

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Lesson Images:

Elizabeth Fraser, Arboretum Horticulture Tour, Arlington National Cemetery, November 17, 2017,
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Elizabeth Fraser, Old Guard Soldiers Participate in Flags In 2018, Arlington National Cemetery, May 24, 2018,
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