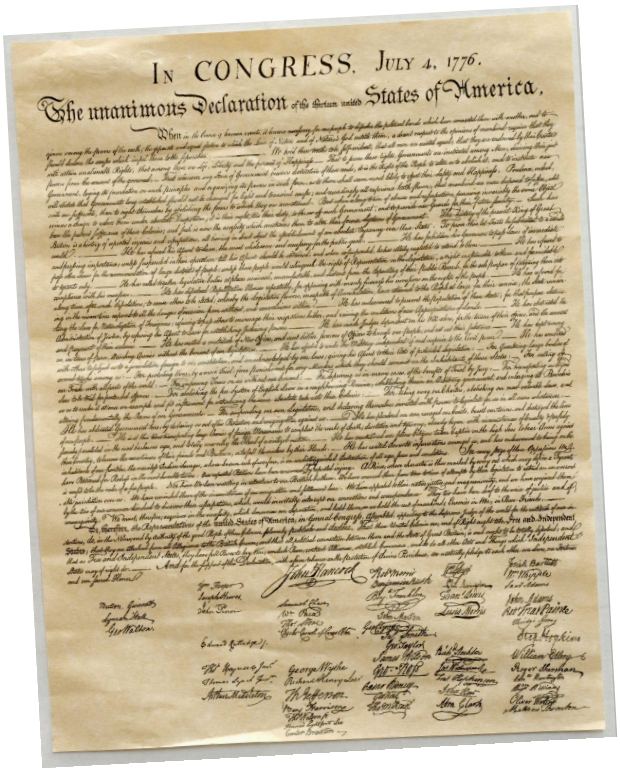
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
BIDEN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY & ADMINISTRATION

Delaware Center for Civics Education
Institute for Public Administration | IPA



Teaching and Commemorating the United States Declaration of Independence

1776-2026

Equality in the Declaration of Independence

About these Lesson Plans

Lessons developed for our Teaching and Commemorating the U.S. Declaration of Independence project are sponsored in part by the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Mid-Atlantic and US Territories Region Program, located at the American Historical Association. Content created and featured in partnership with the TPS Mid-Atlantic and US Territories Region does not indicate an endorsement by the Library of Congress.

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Equality in the Declaration of Independence

***Suggested Time**: 80-160 minutes (1-2 class periods)*

Lesson Introduction: In this lesson, students will explore how the Declaration of Independence shaped evolving ideas about equality in the United States. By analyzing excerpts from the Declaration and primary sources written by and to Thomas Jefferson, students will investigate how Jefferson's own views on equality were expressed, challenged, and interpreted over time. Using strategies like IREAD, document sourcing, and comparative analysis, students will unpack the complexity of what Jefferson meant when he wrote that "all men are created equal."

Delaware Social Studies Standard(s) Addressed:

- **History 1a, 9-12 [Chronology]:** Students will analyze historical materials to trace the development of an idea or trend across space or over a prolonged period of time in order to explain patterns of historical continuity and change.

Essential Question: What did Thomas Jefferson mean when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal"?

Enduring Understanding: Students will understand that the meaning of equality as presented in the Declaration of Independence was contested at the time of its writing, and yet it still inspired others within the United States and abroad to live up to an expansive definition of equality that may have even exceeded the intent of Thomas Jefferson.

Warm-up: Equality Word Map

1. Students will be asked to work with a partner using the Word Map. strategy to reflect on what they know about the concept of "equality." Students will use **Resource 1 - Word Map (Equality)** to brainstorm characteristics, examples, an image, and then use those portions to write a definition of equality.

2. The teacher will solicit student responses to each of the category prompts, take notes on a class version of the Word Map of equality, then use responses to induce a class definition of the term "equality." A possible definition to consider could be: equality is a state or condition in which people or things being considered are the same and treated as such.
3. Students will view an image of the first page of the **Resource 2 - Dunlap Declaration of Independence** as shown by the Library of Congress. Have students read the title which states: "In Congress, July 4, 1776, a declaration by the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled." As they view this image, students will be asked:
    a. What do you see?
    b. What do you think this document is?
    c. How might this document connect to the concept of equality?
4. The teacher will share that this image shows the Dunlap printing of the Declaration of Independence. In this lesson, students will explore the concept of equality more deeply by reading portions of the Declaration of Independence, examining sources revealing context on Thomas Jefferson's meaning of equality as written in the Declaration of Independence, and then reading and analyzing later documents that are thought to be inspired by the Declaration of Independence.

Activity 1: IREAD the Declaration Introduction

1. Students will read **Resource 3 - Declaration of Independence** using **Resource 4 - IREAD** which defines a modified version of the IREAD strategy to read and interpret the Preamble section and first paragraph of the Principles section of the Declaration of Independence. Students should try to discern what this section of the Declaration of Independence seems to say about the concept of equality. They will also need to consult the Grievances section to help complete the D(Determine) portion of IREAD. Teachers should consult **Resource 4a - IREAD (Key)** for possible student responses to each section of the IREAD questions.
2. Students will share their conclusions to the IREAD questions and the questions they still have about Jefferson's meaning. Teachers should flag that when this was written, there was no equality between races and genders, with white men like Jefferson holding the most substantial rights within the

colonies that became the United States. There is a need to further explore Jefferson's perspective to determine what he likely meant by "all men are created equal."

Activity 2: Analyze Jefferson's view of equality

1. Teacher note: Before students begin reading excerpts from Thomas Jefferson's writings, it's important to acknowledge that while Jefferson is often celebrated for his role in articulating ideals of liberty and equality, he also held and expressed racist beliefs, and enslaved over 600 people during his lifetime. Some of the texts examined will reflect these contradictions. Engaging with "hard history" like this is not about assigning blame to individuals based on modern perceptions, but about understanding the full complexity of our nation's past so we can think critically about the present and future. As historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries writes in *The Courage to Teach Hard History*, "Slavery is hard history. It is hard to make sense of the genocide that started it. It is hard to comprehend the inhumanity that defined it…And it is hard to learn about those who abided it…Hard history is not hopeless history." Jeffries elaborates by arguing that "promise and possibility" can be found in histories of enslaved and Indigenous people by learning about the "unbreakable bonds" they forged with one another, the "importance of family and community," and their resistance. You are encouraged to consult with your school administration prior to teaching.
2. By confronting these truths, we honor the experiences of those who were marginalized and silenced, and we build the critical thinking skills necessary for civic engagement and justice.
3. Students will read **Resource 5 - Jefferson's Views on Equality** which includes excerpts of primary sources written by and to Thomas Jefferson between 1781 and 1815. For each source, students will be asked to read and complete **Resource 6 - Sourcing Graphic Organizer** to capture notes about the author, quotes related to equality, and whether this source supported a more limited or expansive view of equality. Teachers could also use a jigsaw for this activity, assigning each source to a small group of students to complete the relevant sections of Resource 6, and then rotating into new

groups with one student presenting to their classmates about the document they read.

Check for Understanding

1. When students come back together, they will discuss the following questions:
    a. To what extent can you see the influence of the Declaration of Independence in these documents?
        i. *Notes on the State of Virginia (1781): Jefferson's writing reflects the Declaration's language about equality, but his belief in racial hierarchy shows that he did not apply those ideals universally.*
        ii. *Banneker's Letter to Jefferson (1791): Banneker directly cites the Declaration's equality principle to challenge Jefferson to live up to the ideals he wrote.*
        iii. *Jefferson's Reply to Banneker (1791): Jefferson echoes the Declaration by expressing hope that all people, including Black Americans, might someday fully enjoy the "rights of man."*
        iv. *Jefferson's Letter to Condorcet (1791): Jefferson's recognition of Banneker's intellectual abilities hints at the Declaration's ideals, suggesting that talent is not limited by race.*
        v. *Jefferson's Letter to David Barrow (1815): Jefferson's cautious support for gradual emancipation reflects a partial, slow-moving connection to the Declaration's principles about rights and equality.*
    b. What, if anything, do these documents reveal about how Jefferson may have been thinking about equality when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal?"
        i. *Taken together, the documents show that while Jefferson embraced universal ideals in theory, he personally limited equality mainly to white men, viewing Native Americans as equals, Black Americans as possibly but not clearly equal, and enslaved people as needing long, gradual preparation before they could share in the rights described in the Declaration.*
    c. Given the dates of these documents, what do they reveal about Jefferson's views on equality and how they stayed the same or changed over time?

    i. *From 1781 to 1815, Jefferson's writings show a partial evolution. He began with strong beliefs in Black inferiority, briefly showed more openness when corresponding with Banneker in 1791, but ultimately maintained his basic assumptions by late life, still supporting only slow emancipation and continuing to treat equality as an ideal achievable only in the distant future.*

2. Teachers should consult the **Resource 6 - Sourcing Graphic Organizer (Key)** for some ideas of what students should be able to pull from the sources they read and analyzed.

About the Delaware Center for Civics Education

Since 1999, the Delaware Center for Civics Education (DCCE) has provided resources and support for teaching and learning aligned to Delaware's civics standards so that preservice and professional educators are well-equipped to prepare their students for college, career, and civic life. DCCE is an initiative of the Institute for Public Administration, a research and public service center at the University of Delaware's Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration. For more information about DCCE visit: https://www.ipa.udel.edu/civics

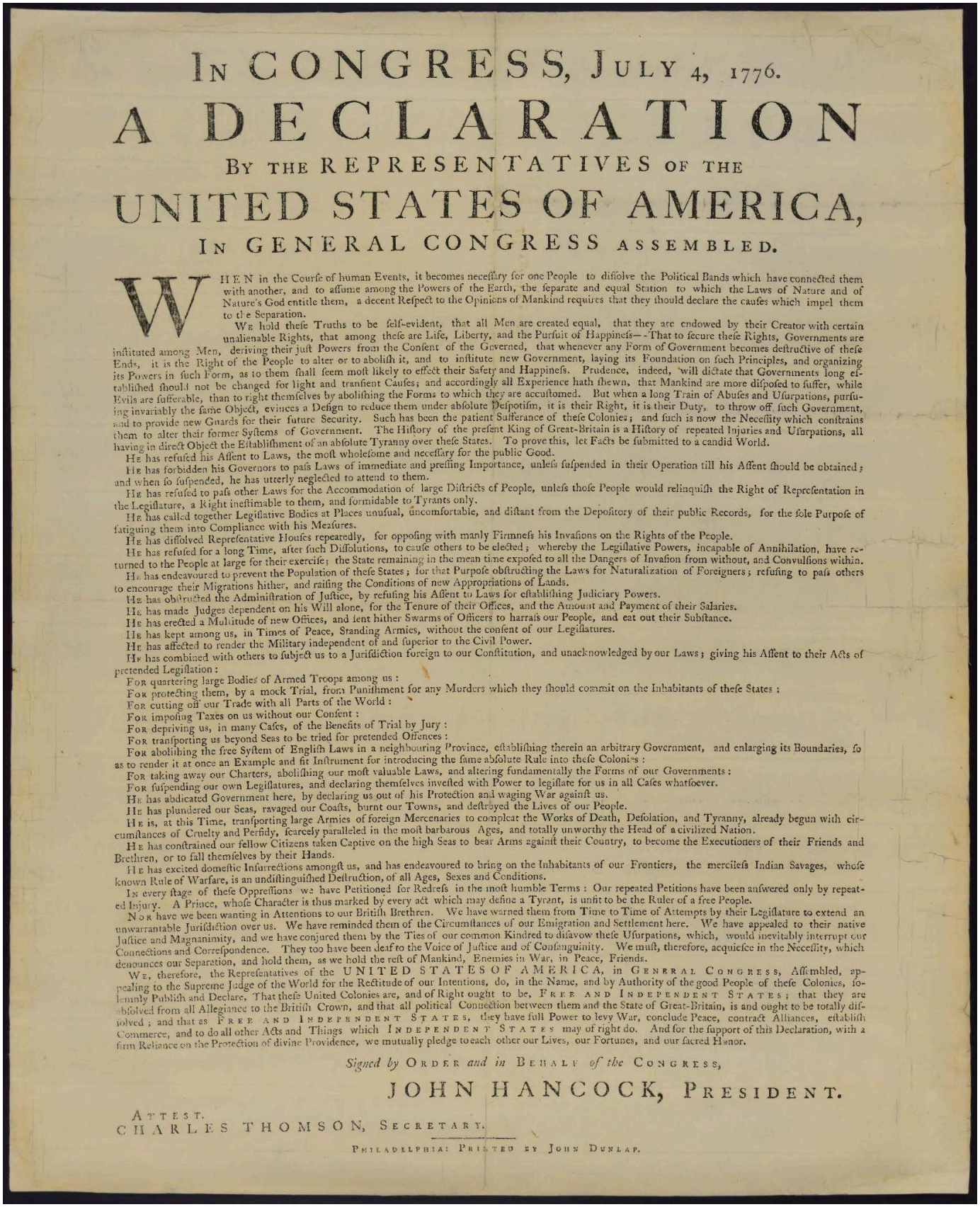
Resource 1: Word Map

Characteristics *(What is it like?)*	**Definition** *(What is it?)*
Examples *(current or historical)*	**Pictures** *(What does it look like?)*

Concept:

Equality

Resource 2: Dunlap Declaration of Independence



IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

A DECLARATION

BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

WHEN in the Courſe of human Events, it becomes neceſſary for one People to diſſolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to aſſume among the Powers of the Earth, the ſeparate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Reſpect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they ſhould declare the cauſes which impel them to the Separation.

WE hold theſe Truths to be ſelf-evident, that 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--That to ſecure theſe Rights, Governments are inſtituted among Men, deriving their juſt Powers from the Conſent of the Governed, that 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, laying its Foundation on ſuch Principles, and organizing its Powers in ſuch Form, as to them ſhall ſeem moſt likely to effect their Safety and Happineſs. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long eſtabliſhed ſhould not be changed for light and tranſient Cauſes; and accordingly all Experience hath ſhewn, that Mankind are more diſpoſed to ſuffer, while Evils are ſufferable, than to right themſelves by aboliſhing the Forms to which they are accuſtomed. But when a long Train of Abuſes and Uſurpations, purſuing invariably the ſame Object, evinces a Deſign to reduce them under abſolute Deſpotiſm, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off ſuch Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security. Such has been the patient Sufferance of theſe Colonies; and ſuch is now the Neceſſity which conſtrains them to alter their former Syſtems of Government. The Hiſtory of the preſent King of Great-Britain is a Hiſtory of repeated Injuries and Uſurpations, all having in direct Object the Eſtabliſhment of an abſolute Tyranny over theſe States. To prove this, let Facts be ſubmitted to a candid World.

HE has refuſed his Aſſent to Laws, the moſt wholeſome and neceſſary for the public Good.

HE has forbidden his Governors to paſs Laws of immediate and preſſing Importance, unleſs ſuſpended in their Operation till his Aſſent ſhould be obtained; and when ſo ſuſpended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

HE has refuſed to paſs other Laws for the Accommodation of large Diſtricts of People, unleſs thoſe People would relinquiſh the Right of Repreſentation in the Legiſlature, a Right ineſtimable to them, and formidable to Tyrants only.

HE has called together Legiſlative Bodies at Places unuſual, uncomfortable, and diſtant from the Depoſitory of their public Records, for the ſole Purpoſe of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Meaſures.

HE has diſſolved Repreſentative Houſes repeatedly, for oppoſing with manly Firmneſs his Invaſions on the Rights of the People.

HE has refuſed for a long Time, after ſuch Diſſolutions, to cauſe others to be elected; whereby the Legiſlative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exerciſe; the State remaining in the mean time expoſed to all the Dangers of Invaſion from without, and Convulſions within.

HE has endeavoured to prevent the Population of theſe States; for that Purpoſe obſtructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refuſing to paſs others to encourage their Migrations hither, and raiſing the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

HE has obſtructed the Adminiſtration of Juſtice, by refuſing his Aſſent to Laws for eſtabliſhing Judiciary Powers.

HE has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries.

HE has erected a Multitude of new Offices, and ſent hither Swarms of Officers to harraſs our People, and eat out their Subſtance.

HE has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the conſent of our Legiſlatures.

HE has affected to render the Military independent of and ſuperior to the Civil Power.

HE has combined with others to ſubject us to a Juriſdiction foreign to our Conſtitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Aſſent to their Acts of pretended Legiſlation:

FOR quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us:

FOR protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Puniſhment for any Murders which they ſhould commit on the Inhabitants of theſe States:

FOR cutting off our Trade with all Parts of the World:

FOR impoſing Taxes on us without our Conſent:

FOR depriving us, in many Caſes, of the Benefits of Trial by Jury:

FOR tranſporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended Offences:

FOR aboliſhing the free Syſtem of Engliſh Laws in a neighbouring Province, eſtabliſhing therein an arbitrary Government, and enlarging its Boundaries, ſo as to render it at once an Example and fit Inſtrument for introducing the ſame abſolute Rule into theſe Colonies:

FOR taking away our Charters, aboliſhing our moſt valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

FOR ſuſpending our own Legiſlatures, and declaring themſelves inveſted with Power to legiſlate for us in all Caſes whatſoever.

HE has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War againſt us.

HE has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coaſts, burnt our Towns, and deſtroyed the Lives of our People.

HE is, at this Time, tranſporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the Works of Death, Deſolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumſtances of Cruelty and Perfidy, ſcarcely paralleled in the moſt barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.

HE has conſtrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms againſt their Country, to become the Executioners of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themſelves by their Hands.

HE has excited domeſtic Inſurrections amongſt us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers, the mercileſs Indian Savages, whoſe known Rule of Warfare, is an undiſtinguiſhed Deſtruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

IN every ſtage of theſe Oppreſſions we have Petitioned for Redreſs in the moſt humble Terms: Our repeated Petitions have been anſwered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whoſe Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.

NOR have we been wanting in Attentions to our Britiſh Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legiſlature to extend an unwarrantable Juriſdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumſtances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Juſtice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to diſavow theſe Uſurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correſpondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Juſtice and of Conſanguinity. We muſt, therefore, acquieſce in the Neceſſity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the reſt of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

WE, therefore, the Repreſentatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Aſſembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of theſe Colonies, ſolemnly Publiſh and Declare, That theſe United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are abſolved from all Allegiance to the Britiſh Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally diſſolved; 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. And for the ſupport of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our ſacred Honor.

Signed by ORDER *and in* BEHALF *of the* CONGRESS,

JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST.
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

Accessed at https://www.loc.gov/item/2021667578

Resource 3 - Declaration of Independence

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence during their session at the Pennsylvania State House (later known as Independence Hall) in Philadelphia, PA. The document was primarily written by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, later elected as the 3rd President of the United States.

Preamble

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel [cause] them to the separation.

Principles

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that 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.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That 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, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

Grievances

- He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.
- He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.
- He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.
- He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.
- He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

- He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.
- He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.
- He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.
- He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.
- He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.
- He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.
- He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.
- He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:
    - For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:
    - For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:
    - For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:
    - For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:
    - For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:
    - For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:
    - For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:
    - For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:
    - For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
- He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.
- He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.
- He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.
- He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.
- He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

Justification

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

Declaration

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; 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. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Resource 4: I R E A D

Identify the author's argument in response to the essential question: What did Jefferson mean when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal?"

- How would the author respond to the essential question?

Read the sections called Preamble and Principles and ask about the <u>author's main idea</u>.

- What is the author describing in each section?
- What is the main idea of each section?
- How does the main idea of each section relate to or help to answer the essential question?
- Underline sentences or phrases that tell you the author's main ideas

Examine the author's *reliability*.

- Who wrote this document and what judgements can we make about him?
- Why did he write this?
- Write 1 reason to doubt the author and 1 reason to trust the author.

Assess the influence of ⟶context ⟵.

- How might ⟶place ⟵ have influenced the writing of this document?
  Clue = Compare document location to location of events
- What else was going on at this ⟶time⟵ in history?
  Clue = Identify historical events & when docs were written.

Determine the quality of the author's facts and examples.

- What facts or examples does the author give to support his/her argument?
  Clue = Check the Grievances section
- How do facts or examples support the author's argument?
- Where do the facts or examples come from?
- Are the author's facts and examples convincing? Why or why not?

Resource 4a: I R E A D (Key)

Identify the author's argument in response to the essential question: What did Jefferson mean when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal?"

• How would the author respond to the essential question?	*He might say that equality means every person is born with the same natural rights and no ruler has the right to violate them. Governments exist to protect these rights, not to take them away. If a government does violate them, the people have the right to change or replace it.*

Read the sections called Preamble and Principles and ask about the **author's main idea**.

• What is the author describing in each section? • What is the main idea of each section? • How does the main idea of each section relate to or help to answer the essential question?	*Preamble: explains why the colonies feel it is necessary to separate from Great Britain. It states that when people break political ties, they should explain their reasons.* *Principles: lays out the core beliefs behind the revolution: natural rights, the purpose of government, consent of the governed, and the people's right to replace abusive governments.* *Grievances: lists specific complaints against the King of Great Britain, describing how the king repeatedly violated the colonists' rights and ignored their needs.* *Justification: explains that the colonists tried many times to resolve these problems peacefully, but Britain continually rejected their petitions and acted unfairly.* *Declaration: formally announces that the colonies are now free and independent states, no longer controlled by the British Crown.*
• Underline sentences or phrases that tell you the author's main ideas	*"all men are created equal"* *"unalienable rights"* *"consent of the governed"* *"right to alter or abolish"* *"long train of abuses"* *"free and independent states"*

Examine the author's *reliability*.

• Who wrote this document and what judgements can we make about him?	*Thomas Jefferson wrote it. He was a colonial leader, a landowner, and later a president. He was highly educated, influenced by Enlightenment ideas, and involved in the political conflict with Britain, but he also enslaved people.*
• Why did he write this?	*He wrote it to explain why the colonies were declaring independence and to justify the decision to the world.*
• Write 1 reason to doubt the author and 1 reason to trust the author.	*Reason to doubt: Jefferson came from a privileged class and did not apply his ideas of equality to everyone in society. His perspective may not represent all groups.* *Reason to trust: He was directly involved in the events leading to independence and had firsthand knowledge of the colonists' grievances.*

Assess the influence of ⟶**context** ⟵.

- How might ⟶place ⟵ have influenced the writing of this document?
  Clue = Compare document location to location of events

  The colonies were far from Britain, and local problems often went unanswered. Distance made British rule feel unfair and out of touch, increasing frustration and influencing the decision to separate.

- What else was going on at this ⟶time⟵ in history?
  Clue = Identify historical events & when docs were written.

  The American Revolutionary War had already begun. Colonists had protested taxes, British soldiers were present in major cities, and tensions had grown after events like the Boston Tea Party and the Intolerable Acts. Enlightenment ideas about rights and government were also spreading.

Determine the quality of the author's facts and examples.

- What facts or examples does the author give to support his/her argument?
  Clue = Check the Grievances section

  He lists specific complaints about the king such as blocking needed laws, dissolving colonial governments, taxing the colonies without consent, keeping soldiers in the colonies, interfering with trials, and harming colonial trade.

- How do facts or examples support the author's argument?

  These examples show repeated abuses that violated the colonists' natural rights. By listing them, Jefferson tries to prove that the king acted like a tyrant and that independence was justified.

- Where do the facts or examples come from?

  They come from the colonists' experiences under British rule in the years leading up to the Revolution. Many are related to real laws passed by Parliament or actions taken by the king or British officials.

- Are the author's facts and examples convincing? Why or why not?

  Students may say "yes" because the examples show a long pattern of unfair treatment, making the argument for independence strong. Others may say "somewhat" because the facts are presented from the colonists' viewpoint, and we do not hear Britain's side. Either response is acceptable if supported with reasoning.

Resource 5 - Jefferson's Views on Equality

Directions: Read the excerpts below which help to shed light on Thomas Jefferson's views on equality so that you can better understand what he may have meant when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." For each document, take notes about sourcing in the Resource 6 - Sourcing Graphic Organizer.

Notes on the State of Virginia (1781)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT: In 1781, Thomas Jefferson completed Notes on the State of Virginia, a detailed response to a questionnaire from the French government about the newly independent American states. Written while Jefferson was serving as Governor of Virginia, the document covers topics ranging from geography and economy to religion and government. It also includes Jefferson's controversial views on race and slavery, which have been widely studied and debated. This excerpt is taken from Jefferson's original manuscript.

I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind... Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid... The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions... The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances... Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever.

I believe the Indian then to be in body and mind equal to the whiteman... He is brave, and strongly attached to his country, and his friends... We shall probably find that they are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the 'Homo sapiens Europaeus.'

Benjamin Banneker's Letter to Thomas Jefferson (1791)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT: On August 19, 1791, African American mathematician and astronomer Benjamin Banneker wrote to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, challenging him to live up to the ideals of liberty and equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Banneker, a free Black man, used the letter to argue against slavery and racial prejudice, appealing to Jefferson's reason and moral conscience. This document has been excerpted from the original letter.

Sir, I freely and cheerfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race... and it is under a sense of the most profound gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that state of tyrannical thraldom and inhuman captivity to which too many of my brethren are doomed... I apprehend you will embrace every opportunity to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions

which so generally prevails with respect to us... I hope you will not be offended if I mention this as a reflection on your own words, when you declared that you 'considered all men to be created equal'... Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which he hath conferred upon them... that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression.

Thomas Jefferson's Reply to Benjamin Banneker (1791)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT: On August 30, 1791, Thomas Jefferson responded to Benjamin Banneker's letter with a brief but respectful reply. Jefferson acknowledged Banneker's accomplishments and expressed hope that Black Americans might one day be recognized for their intellectual capacities. While Jefferson did not directly address Banneker's criticisms of slavery, the letter remains a significant moment in early American discourse on race and equality. This excerpt is taken from Jefferson's original response.

I thank you sincerely for your letter of the 19th instant, and for the almanac it contained... I have taken the liberty of sending your almanac to Monsieur de Condorcet, Secretary of the Academy of Sciences at Paris, and member of the Philanthropic Society, because I considered it as a document to which your whole color had a right for their justification against the doubts which have been entertained of them... No one wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren talents equal to those of the other colors of men... I hope to see the time when the prejudice against color shall cease, and when those who are held in bondage shall be restored to the rights of man.

Thomas Jefferson's Letter to Marquis de Condorcet (1791)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT: On August 30, 1791, Thomas Jefferson wrote to French philosopher Marquis de Condorcet, reflecting on the progress of liberty and education in the United States. In the letter, Jefferson referenced Benjamin Banneker, a free African American mathematician and astronomer, whose recent correspondence had challenged Jefferson to confront the contradictions between American ideals and the reality of slavery. Jefferson acknowledged Banneker's intellect and accomplishments, suggesting that they offered hope for the broader recognition of Black Americans' equality. This excerpt is taken from Jefferson's original letter.

I am happy to be able to inform you that we have now in the United States a negro, the son of a black man born in Africa, and of a black woman born in the United States, who is a very respectable Mathematician... I procured him to be employed under one of our chief directors in laying out the new federal city on the Patowmac, and in the intervals of his leisure... he made an Almanac for the next year, which he sent me in his own handwriting... I have seen very elegant solutions of Geometrical problems by him... Add to this that he is a very worthy and respectable member of society. He is a free man... I shall be delighted to see these instances of moral eminence so multiplied as to prove that the want of talents observed in them is merely the effect of their

degraded condition, and not proceeding from any difference in the structure of the parts on which intellect depends.

Thomas Jefferson's Letter to David Barrow (1815)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT: On December 28, 1815, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Baptist minister David Barrow in response to Barrow's anti-slavery writings. Jefferson expressed cautious support for gradual emancipation but reiterated his long-held belief that slavery was a complex issue best resolved slowly and peacefully. The letter reveals Jefferson's conflicted views on slavery and race late in his life. This excerpt is taken from Jefferson's original letter.

The particular subject of the pamphlets [slavery and emancipation] you inclosed me was one of early and tender consideration with me... The only practicable plan I could ever devise is stated [in] the Notes on Virginia, and it is still the one most sound in my judgment... [that is, gradual emancipation and colonization] The mind of the master is to be apprised by reflection, and strengthened by the energies of conscience, against the obstacles of self-interest, to an acquiescence in the rights of others; that of the slave is to be prepared by instruction and habit for self-government, and for the honest pursuits of industry and social duty... Some progress is sensibly made in it; yet not so much as I had hoped and expected... Where the disease is most deeply seated, there it will be slowest in eradication... In the Southern [states] it is incorporated with the whole system, and requires time, patience, and perseverance in the curative process... That it may finally be effected, and its progress hastened, will be the last and fondest prayer of him who now salutes you with respect and consideration.

Resource 6 - Sourcing Graphic Organizer

Directions: In the chart below, capture notes for each document about its Source & Context, the views it reveals about equality, and whether this source supported a more limited or expansive view of equality.

Document	**Sourcing/Context** *(Author, time & place of writing, context of the writing)*	**Views on Equality** *(What is revealed about Jefferson's views on equality?)*	**Impact on Equality** *(Does this document expand or contract Jefferson's conception of equality?)*
Notes on the State of Virginia (1781)			
Benjamin Banneker's Letter to Thomas Jefferson (1791)			
Thomas Jefferson's Reply to Benjamin Banneker (1791)			
Thomas Jefferson's Letter to Marquis de Condorcet (1791)			
Thomas Jefferson's Letter to David Barrow (1815)			

Resource 6 - Sourcing Graphic Organizer (Key)

Document	**Sourcing/Context** *(Author, time & place of writing, context of the writing)*	**Views on Equality** *(What is revealed about Jefferson's views on equality?)*	**Impact on Equality** *(Does this document expand or contract Jefferson's conception of equality?)*
Notes on the State of Virginia (1781)	Written by Thomas Jefferson while serving as Governor of Virginia; a response to questions from a French diplomat about Virginia's geography, society, and laws.	Jefferson expresses belief in white superiority, especially in intellect, and doubts the capacities of Black people. He views Native Americans as equal in body and mind but needing "civilization." Women are largely excluded.	Contracts Jefferson's conception of equality by explicitly excluding Black people and women, and conditionally including Native Americans.
Benjamin Banneker's Letter to Thomas Jefferson (1791)	Written by free African American scientist Benjamin Banneker; sent with his almanac to challenge Jefferson's views on race and slavery.	Banneker appeals to Jefferson's own words in the Declaration of Independence, urging him to recognize the hypocrisy of slavery and racial prejudice.	Expands the conception of equality by confronting Jefferson with the moral and intellectual capabilities of Black Americans, but also reveals Jefferson enslaved people as well.
Thomas Jefferson's Reply to Benjamin Banneker (1791)	Jefferson's brief response to Banneker's letter, acknowledging receipt and praising Banneker's accomplishments.	Jefferson expresses cautious optimism that Black people may possess equal talents, but does not commit to political or social equality.	Slightly expands Jefferson's conception of equality by recognizing individual merit, but avoids addressing systemic injustice.
Thomas Jefferson's Letter to Marquis de Condorcet (1791)	Written to French philosopher Condorcet, discussing liberty and education; includes mention of Banneker.	Jefferson praises Banneker's intellect and character, suggesting that such examples may prove racial equality is possible.	Expands Jefferson's conception of equality by publicly acknowledging Banneker as evidence against racial inferiority.
Thomas Jefferson's Letter to David Barrow (1815)	Written to a Baptist minister advocating for emancipation; Jefferson reflects on slavery and his plan for gradual emancipation.	Jefferson supports gradual emancipation and education for formerly enslaved people, but maintains a cautious and slow approach.	Partially expands Jefferson's conception of equality by affirming the moral need for emancipation, though limited by his gradualist stance.