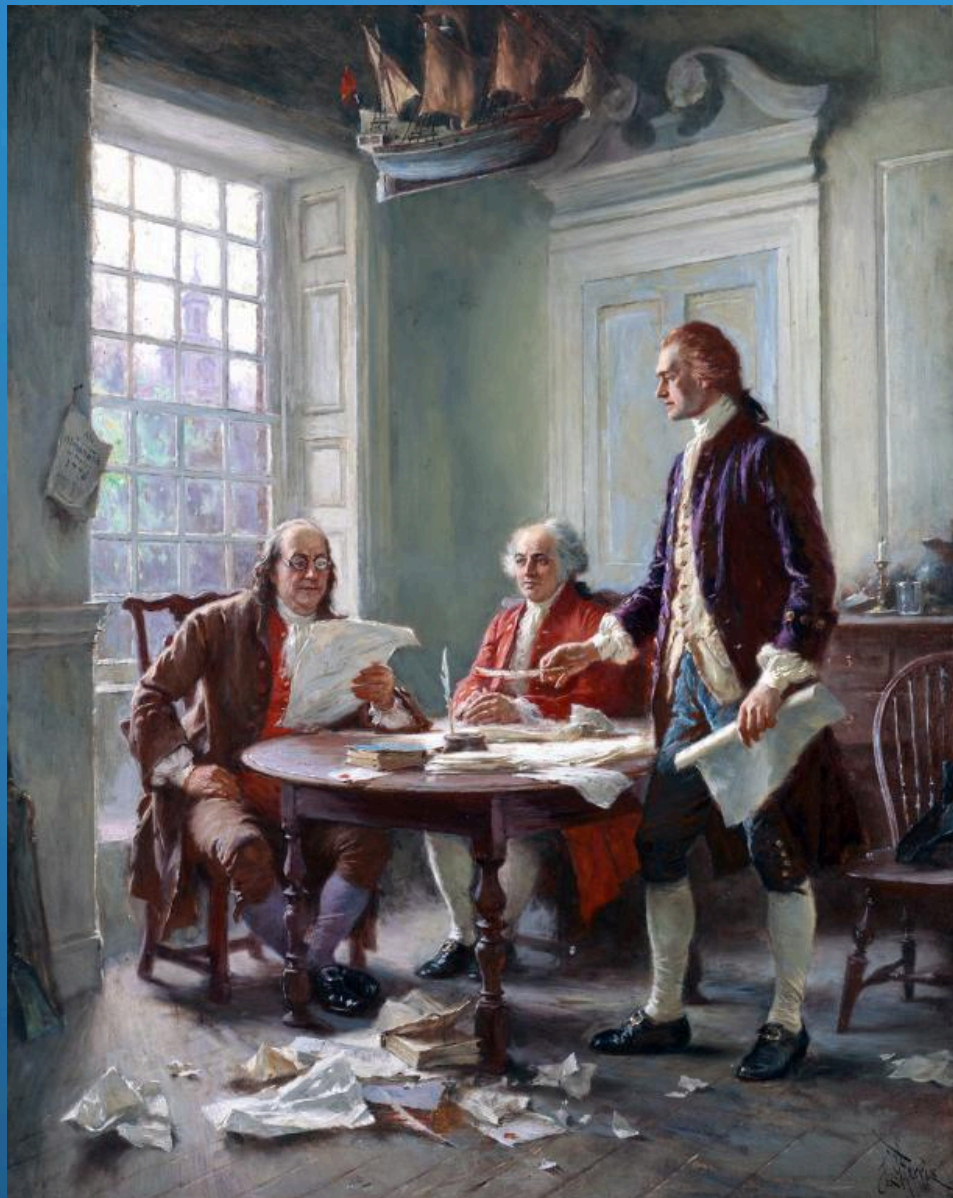




# AMERICAN REVOLUTION 250TH ANNIVERSARY LESSON

Analyzing the Grievances in the Declaration of  
Independence



**Objective:** After a close reading of the Declaration of Independence, students will be able to discuss and analyze the grievances put forth by the American colonists against King George III.

**Grade Level(s) Based on 2015 Standards:**

- World History II: WHII.5e
- Virginia and United States History: VUS.1a, VUS.4e
- VA-US Government: GOVT.1a, GOVT.2b, GOVT.2d, GOVT.2e

**Grade Level(s) Based on 2023 Standards:**

- World History II: WHIIa, WHII.4c
- Virginia and United States History: VUSa, VUS.5b, VUS.5d
- VA-US Government: GOVTa, GOVT.1b-c

**Materials Needed:**

- Transcript of Declaration of Independence:
  - <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- Youtube Readings of the Declaration of Independence:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETroXvRFoKY>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uE-tqe0xsQ&t=13s>
- Google Slides:
  - [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1pi14FFL4pInbcxWviPWA5WQ81GQm2p\\_huc\\_hajQxWvc/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1pi14FFL4pInbcxWviPWA5WQ81GQm2p_huc_hajQxWvc/edit?usp=sharing)
- Annotated Declaration:
  - <https://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/rebellion/text8/decindep.pdf>
- Numbered and cut apart grievance slips
  - Note: teacher will need to print and cut apart grievance slips

**Intro/Hook (15-20 minutes):**

1. Pass around a transcript of the Declaration of Independence to each student.
2. Have students listen to a reading of the Declaration of Independence and follow along with their transcript. Have them mark words or phrases they don't understand. Have students share out some of those after the reading is complete. Explain this lesson is going to help them understand the Declaration of Independence in more modern language, starting with the Preamble.

**Part One (15 minutes):**

1. Analyze and reword the Preamble as a class, going line by line. Feel free to make your own slides or use linked Google slides. See an example of potential rephrasing at end of the lesson plan.
2. Explain to students that we generally hear about taxes and representation as the main reasons for the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence – but the colonists list 27 specific grievances in this document. Today we'll try to figure them out and see which ones we think are the most important.

## Part Two:

1. Divide the students into six or seven groups. Pass out four or five grievance slips (without red example modern rephrasing) to each group. Note – group sizes and numbers will vary depending on the size of the class.
2. Give the students time to work in groups and read and rephrase the grievances as they are able into modern language. Students can either write on the back of the paper, or you can leave room below the grievance on each slip of paper. Circulate to answer questions. See examples at the end of the lesson.
3. Call on each group and have them read a few examples of the Declaration of Independence language and their modern rephrasing. Note: it could take quite a while to go through all of them, so use your best judgment as to how long you'd like this portion to last and how long your class session is. Make sure each group shares at least one.
  - a. Note – all students should still have their copy of the Declaration, so they can reference that OR you can use the slideshow featuring each grievance to have something on the screen. Numbering them will make it easier to keep track.
4. Ask the students – okay, now we have a slightly better idea of **WHAT** they are saying, but...what events & laws are they referring to? Some grievances are pretty easy to understand and guess:
  - a. Ex: For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent aka **The colonists did not agree to, or vote on, the taxes the king/Parliament implemented.**
  - b. This is pretty clearly “no taxation without representation.” What were some of the taxes? Tea, Sugar, Stamp, etc.
5. Before we look at the others, do the students think they know what any of the other grievances are referring to? Discuss as needed.
  - a. Note - This will depend on what specifically the teacher has taught so far in their class.
  - b. Some more well known might be the Intolerable Acts, which include Boston Port Act (preventing trade), Massachusetts Government Act (king appointing certain positions as opposed to colonies electing), Act for Impartial Administration of Justice (colonists might have to travel somewhere overseas for their trial AND eliminated right to fair trial by one's peers), and Quartering Act (British military troops could demand better housing at the colonists' expense).

## Part Three:

1. Pass out an annotated Declaration of Independence so the students can see which specific events match up to specific grievances.
2. Have the groups highlight the events that match up to the grievances they have been working with. The language might start making more sense once students know what events the grievances are talking about!
3. Go group by group and have them explain what events some of their grievances are referring to or ask questions if they aren't sure about what their grievance means. Engage in classroom discussion about these grievances.
  - a. Ex: Why do students think this/these events made the colonists mad?

4. Have each group choose the one grievance that they think is the worst thing out of their set of grievances to form a set of “top grievances.” Vote as a class for the top three and ask them to explain their choices.

### **Wrap Up/Final Discussion:**

1. So...was King George III allowed to do these things? Were the colonists mad because he was actually breaking rules? Historians still argue about that today!
2. The Magna Carta in 1215 set a precedent that no one was above the law – even the king! And, The Virginia Company Charter guaranteed Virginia colonists the rights of British citizens. However, what exactly those laws/rights were vs. what the spirit of the laws/rights were, was often undefined or able to be manipulated.
3. The colonists asserted that King George III was abusing his power, though that might not have been entirely true by the measure of the day.
  - a. Just because something is legal...does that make it right? Or mean it should last forever?
  - b. How does this complicate our understanding of the American Revolution?
4. Is it possible that King George III was not a Tyrant, and the Founding Fathers were people who were looking to expand their own power, control, and ideas of liberty through persuasive writing and speaking? Optional readings to assign:
  - a. <https://time.com/6115140/george-iii-americas-last-king-tyrant/>
  - b. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/stylistic-artistry-of-the-declaration>
  - c. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2019/07/the-declaration-of-independence-the-twenty-seven-grievances/>

### **Extension:**

Have students find more modern issues that seem to relate to the grievances of the Declaration of Independence. This can be local, national, or international.

## In Congress, July 4, 1776

**The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America**, 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.

All of the 13 colonies of the united States of America agree that it is time for them to step out and form their own country and their own government. They feel entitled to equality with Great Britain and so these are the reasons for their 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.

It is obvious that all men are equal and have certain rights, such as "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." For governments to work correctly, they should listen to the voice of the people, and when they stop doing that, it is okay for the people to change or end that government, and then start a new one. They are allowed to organize a new government that will give them the best chance at 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.

However, people should be careful when overthrowing or changing a long-running government. They should not do it for silly or short term reasons, because that could make things worse. But, if the government has a long history of abuses or unfairness, then it is only right for people to overthrow that system and start a new one for their own safety. The colonies are now going down that path because it has turned into a necessity to overthrow Great Britain.



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.

King George III has been a bad king and Great Britain has been a bad government. Here's proof:

### Examples: Grievances

1. He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He didn't agree with laws we tried to pass, even though they were good for the public.

2. 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 told his political representatives not to pass important laws until he could look at them and give his approval, and then he didn't even take the time to look at them.

3. 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 refused to pass laws for certain groups of people unless they would give up representation in the government. Representation is something important to people and only dangerous for a bad government.

4. 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 made the colonial governments meet at places that were weird, uncomfortable and far from where they lived/their courthouses, and only did this to make them so tired that they would agree with anything he said.

5. He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He forced the colonial governments to stop meeting because they were discussing how the king was not treating the people well and taking away their rights.

6. 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.

The king refused to allow local governments to operate as usual, like electing new representatives, which isn't safe.

7. 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.

The king is making it hard for the colonies to grow either through immigrating people or new lands.

8. He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

The king has made it hard for colonies to carry out "justice" by refusing to allow certain laws.

9. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

Judges depend on the king for everything, like how long they have their jobs and how much money they make.

10. He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He created new jobs that he then sent to the colonies to bother the colonists.

11. He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

The king kept a military presence in the colonies even during peaceful times and against the wishes of the people.

12. He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

The king has given the military more power than the local governments.

13. 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:

The king is ignoring local governments and making new laws that colonists think shouldn't exist/might be illegal.

14. For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

The king forced colonists to allow armed military members to stay with them.

15. For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

The king protected the British military from accusations of murder of the people who lived in the colonies.

16. For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

The king made it harder for the colonies to trade with other parts of the world.

17. For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

The colonists did not agree too, or vote on, the taxes the king implemented.

18. For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

The king did not allow Trial by Jury in some cases.

19. For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

The king made some colonists go to England for their trial – apparently for something they might not have done.

20. 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 doing something shady in a close by area showing that it could also be done in the Colonies

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

For changing how the colonies handle their own governments

22. For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

For pausing/ending the colonial legislatures and saying that the royal government can legislate for the colony whenever they want

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

Since the king said he would no longer protect the colonies and started violence against them, he has no right to run their governments

24. He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He stole from them and ruined their property and the lives of the colonists



25. 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.

The king is sending foreign soldiers over the colonies to continue to fight them, which is NOT cool and is the worst thing a king has done in a long time and is not something the leader of a civilized nation should do

26. 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 taken sailors captive and forced them to fight against the colonists

27. 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.

He has tried to get people living in the colonies to fight against us, as well as encouraged indigenous people to also fight against the colonists