

Pre-Visit Activity

History on Trial

Title: The Declaration as an Indictment

Objective: To analyze the Declaration of Independence, and for students to gain an understanding of some of the motivations behind the Revolutionary war of Independence.

Purpose: By analyzing the center section of the Declaration of Independence as an indictment against the King by British Citizens living in the Colonies students will gain an insight into some of the reasons the Colonists revolted. The revolutionary war had many roots to its origins; many of the reasons given for the beginning of the war can be traced back to the list of indictments listed in the Declaration of Independence.

Materials:

- Copy of the Declaration of Independence
- Handouts of list of indictments from Declaration of Independence (instructor and student copies)
- Suggested Vocabulary List: *Constrains, Derive, Despotism, Disposed, Indictment, Prudence, Tyranny, Unalienable*

Procedure:

- Read the Declaration of Independence out loud to the class. *Introduce the idea that the Declaration of Independence did not make the United States independent from Great Brittan; instead it was the colonist's list of complaints or indictments against their King. This list of grievances was the basis for the Revolutionary War; only by fighting a bloody war did we achieve independence.*
- Separate the class into 5 workgroups.
- Pass out a selection of indictments from the center section of the Declaration to each group (see Handout *student copy of list of indictments*)
- Instruct each group to read their selection of complaints/indictments that the British Citizens living in the colonies had against the King of Great Brittan.
 - Discussion points in groups*
 1. *What do your group of indictments against the King all have in common?*
 2. *Which indictment from your list do you think is the most important reason to go to war and why?*
 - Discussion points as a class*
 1. *Which group of indictments do you think present the strongest argument to go to war?*
 2. *Would you have grouped the indictments this way or do you see another major grouping that was missed?*
 3. *Name historical events that correspond with the indictments in the Declaration of Independence (see Timeline Pre-Visit Activity).*
- Note to instructor see Instructor Handout for grouping topics. (*Acts of War, Financial Hardship, Interference in Government, Manipulation of the Justice System, Reasons Why This Conflict Was Not the Colonist's Fault.*)