

Content Spotlight:

Happy Birthday America: Celebrating 250 Years



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UNITED STATES

250

★★★ ANNIVERSARY ★★★
1776-2026

Current events can quickly turn U.S. civics lessons into polarized political debates. But educators can diffuse tensions by framing such discussions in a historical context. Studying primary sources—especially the nation’s foundational

documents—builds insight into the era’s contemporary challenges that ultimately shaped the U.S. government.

This July 4 marks the 250th anniversary of the United States proclaiming its independence from Great Britain. The national celebrations provide an opportunity for students to read and interpret the Declaration of Independence as a primary source. Using the featured lesson, students can investigate the founders’ concerns and gain a deeper understanding of why they established a governmental system of shared authority.

Why It Matters

Reading primary sources connects students to the original ideas of historical figures and allows them to consider arguments and motivations free from secondary interpretation. Additionally, students recognize historical figures as real people and understand past and current events as related parts of a continuing timeline.

Check out how Britannica experts teach the featured lesson!

Expedition: Learn! Expedition: Learn! is an instructional platform with standards-aligned, interdisciplinary lessons that build content knowledge, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills. Explore how our experts use the **Ideas and Grievances in the Declaration of Independence** lesson to help students deconstruct, explain, and summarize complex primary source texts.

GRADES 6 - 8



Ideas and Grievances
in the Declaration of
Independence

10 Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

Primary Source Text Analysis

Instructions: Begin by identifying key information about the source, such as the time period, author, audience, purpose, and bias. Then deconstruct the primary source text into sections. Define unfamiliar words by annotating the primary source text. Then explain the meaning in your own words. Finally, summarize the meaning of the primary source text.

Primary Source Text	Meaning

Summary

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In Practice

Use the following questions to help students develop a historical context for the document:

1. During what time period was the document written?
2. Who wrote the document?
3. Who was the intended audience for the document?
4. What was the author’s purpose in writing the document?
5. What bias did the author have that influenced the text?

Then have students use the Teach Britannica **Primary Source Text Analysis** graphic organizer to break down the language of the text and summarize it in their own words.

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Content Spotlight:

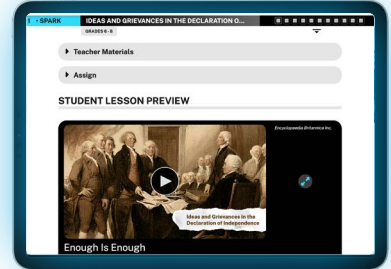
Happy Birthday America: Celebrating 250 Years



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Spark

- Have students play the **Spark** video and respond to the question independently.
- Invite a few student volunteers to share their answers in a brief class discussion.
- Reinforce the historical context: the colonists in America were British subjects, and many had been protesting laws and taxes they believed were unfair; the British government had responded by enacting additional laws that punished the colonists and treated them differently from other British citizens.



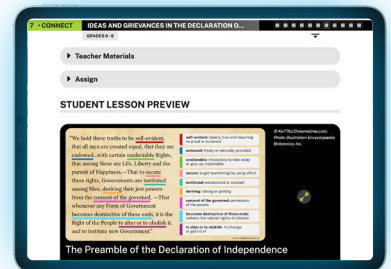
Build

- For **Build** page 2, have students take turns reading the article aloud. Model using the Teach Britannica **Primary Source Text Analysis** graphic organizer to analyze the text of the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence.
- Complete the assessment item as a class and review the correct responses, ensuring that students understand the key ideas of natural rights and the social contract.
- Assign student pairs to read one article on **Build** pages 3–6, using their graphic organizers to analyze the grievances highlighted in the article and respond to the assessment item. Then group partners with three other pairs who read different articles. Using the Teach Britannica **Jigsaw instructional strategy**, have students share their analyses of the grievances in the Declaration of Independence.
- Review the assessment items on pages 3–6 as a class to ensure comprehension.



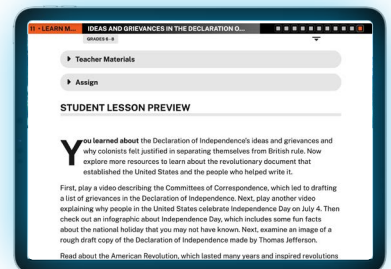
Connect

- Read aloud the assessment item on **Connect** page 7. Model using the graphic organizer to evaluate each response choice and determine the correct answer.
- Invite student pairs to work together to read and respond to the assessment item on **Connect** page 8.
- Ask students to use their completed graphic organizer to independently answer the assessment item on **Connect** page 9 and respond to the short answer question on **Connect** page 10.



Learn More

- After students submit their short answer assessment responses, lead a brief class discussion about the various potential audiences for the Declaration of Independence. Encourage students to consider the effect the authors hoped the Declaration would have on the British government, colonists, and world leaders.



Keep the exploration going!
Discover these resources and
more in Expedition: Learn! on
Teach Britannica.



Compare the Preambles

- Using printed copies, guide students in analyzing the texts of the preambles to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
- Invite students to identify the ideas present in both preambles and those that are unique to each text using annotations such as color-coding. Direct them to build a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the preambles.
- Challenge students to write a reflection summarizing how the common ideas and differences reflect the purposes and audiences of the two documents.

Make a Scene

- Invite student groups to reimagine the Declaration of Independence as a breakup between two characters. Have them develop and rehearse a scene that uses modern language, slang, texting conventions, etc., to express the ideas and grievances in the Declaration as the reason for the colonies leaving Britain.
- As time allows, have groups perform their sketches for the class.
- As a class, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a breakup as an analogy for the Declaration. Of note, encourage students to consider the risk colonial leaders took by drafting and signing the Declaration.

Posts for Independence

- Invite students to write brief social media posts (300 characters or less) from the perspective of a colonist reacting to two grievances of their choice.
- Encourage them to use at least two creative hashtags that reflect the main idea of their grievances.
- Additionally, students can comment on each other's posts, simulating a colonial online social media debate.

Continue the *Expedition* with these related lessons!

GRADES 6 - 8



The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution

5 Questions



GRADES 6 - 8



Crafting the Constitution

10 Questions



GRADES 6 - 8



The Bill of Rights: Safeguarding Individual Liberties

10 Questions



GRADES 6 - 8



The Emancipation Proclamation

10 Questions



Learn more:
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