



## The Inspiration and Influence of the Declaration of Independence on the World

Grade level: 9–12

Time estimate: 1 class period (50–70 minutes)

**BY STACI GARBER**

### Lesson Overview:

Students will warm up by analyzing two images of revolutions that occurred within 30 years of the American Revolution and discussing how the images relate to a quote from Thomas Jefferson. As a class, students will analyze and mark up an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. Next, students will read one of two revolutionary documents from another country, either France or Haiti. Students will then participate in guided civil discourse before forming pairs to complete an exit ticket. Through this lesson, students will identify the role rhetoric plays in inspiring and influencing individuals as well as whole communities throughout history. In particular, note the role of Enlightenment rhetoric by using Francis Bacon's definition of rhetoric as a guiding framework for how individuals in that era approached discourse.

### This lesson uses excerpts from the following:

- Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776
- A letter from Thomas Jefferson to William Smith, November 13, 1787
- Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, August 26, 1789
- "Liberty or Death" Proclamation by J. J. Dessalines on January 1, 1804 (considered the Haitian Declaration of Independence)

## Objectives:

- Students will apply visual literacy skills and discuss how they relate to a quote from Thomas Jefferson.
- Students will analyze the use of rhetoric through primary source documents from two democratic revolutions.
- Students will evaluate the impact of the Declaration of Independence on democratic revolutions around the world.

## Vocabulary:

- Equality
- Liberty

## Materials:

- Declaration excerpt markup
- The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen
- “Liberty or Death”
- Pyramid summary
- Venn diagram
- Exit ticket

## Prework:

This lesson includes whole-class work, a short fishbowl activity, and pairs work, so we recommend keeping the seating flexible. For recommendations on class setup, refer to our Civil Discourse [Primer](#). The time limit for the fishbowl activity will be based on the length of your class period. If necessary, you may cut a previous step in order to provide more civil dialogue time. All documents are designed to be single-sided when you make copies.

We also recommend teaching “[What is Rhetoric](#)” prior to beginning this lesson so students have foundational knowledge on the definition of rhetoric and its impact.

## Warm-Up:

- Distribute warm-up and give students a few minutes to look at the images and note what they see, think, and wonder. As students report out or ask questions, note the following in class discussion:
  - The French Revolution cartoon shows women leading the charge. Students who understand French might be able to read the caption and understand that the concept revolves around market women participating in the rebellion. The women in the drawing are armed. Students might wonder why this is the case. In fact, women played more open and direct roles in the French Revolution than they did in the American.
  - The Haitian image shows the burning of Cap-Français. Students may notice the smoke and the enslaved people chasing the ruling class into the sea. In the image, the targets of the violence include women and children. The Haitian revolution was a rebellion of the enslaved population of Haiti against French colonizers and did involve direct violence against the French colonists as well as the French government.
- Have students answer the following question: How do you think these two images are related to the Declaration of Independence?
  - Some students may think that these images are from the American Revolution. Remind them to always read captions and header information.
  - Some students may notice the French language and correctly identify that these are revolutions involving the French.
  - Some students may think these are simply all revolutions, which is an accurate inference.

## Lesson Activities:

**Distribute the excerpt of the Declaration of Independence. If you can, project your own copy to model appropriate annotating techniques.**

- Ask students to read the excerpt out loud once. This is a fun opportunity for choral reading in your best 18th-century voices.
- Have students identify which words are important to the understanding of the document. Circle these on your copy and have students circle them.

- Ask students to define these terms from the context and note the definitions in the right-hand column.
- Ask students for important phrases in the document. Underline these on your copy and have students underline them as well on their own copies.
- Ask students to identify any important themes in the document and note them in the right-hand column.
- Ask students to read one final time and make their own connections to their prior knowledge and understanding. Note them in the left-hand column.
- Have students share some of these out and/or circulate around the room to check for understanding.

### **Excerpt analysis**

- Distribute the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen to half of the students in the room and "Liberty or Death" to the other half.
- Give students a few minutes to annotate the document using the same method as for the Declaration of Independence.
  - Identify important words and circle them. Define them from context in the margin if possible.
  - Underline important phrases.
  - Identify key themes.
  - Make connections to prior knowledge.
- Distribute the pyramid summary and clarify the instructions. You may want to model the first few lines. You can use the Declaration excerpt to do this. Allow students several minutes to complete the following:
  - Independence
  - Equality
  - Consent
  - Life, liberty, happiness
  - Government protects rights
- Distribute the Venn diagram and give students a few minutes to complete it.
  - Students should note similarities between the two documents in the center.
  - Students should note at least two unique features of each document in the outer portions of the circles.

## **Fishbowl discussion**

- Have the students who read the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen arrange themselves into a circle or conference table type of arrangement. Students who read "Liberty or Death" should arrange themselves in an outer circle around the first one.
  - Students in the inner circle will discuss the excerpt while students in the outer circle observe. If numbers are even, you may assign each student observer to a specific student in the inner circle.
  - Establish discussion norms, including that no one should speak twice until everyone has spoken once.
  - Ask students in the inner circle to discuss the following questions:
- What stood out to you most about this document? (All students in the group should answer this question.)
- How was this document influenced by the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence? How could you tell? (About half of the students in the inner circle should answer this question.)
- Do you think this document or the Declaration of Independence makes a better argument for the protection of human rights? Why? (About half of the students in the inner circle should answer this question.)
  - Provide an opportunity for students in the outer circle to add questions to the discussion, but keep in mind that you have a second round of discussion to run and an exit ticket to complete.
  - Provide opportunity for the outer group to give feedback and to refine their discussion expectations before conducting their own discussion round.
  - Have the inner circle and outer circle switch places.
  - Ask the students in the inner circle to discuss the following questions:
- What stood out to you most about this document? (All students in the group should answer this question.)
- How was this document influenced by the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence? How could you tell? (About half of the students in the inner circle should answer this question.)
- Do you think this document or the Declaration of Independence makes a better argument for the right to self-government? Why? (About half of the students in the circle should answer this question.)
  - Provide an opportunity for students in the outer circle to add questions to the discussion, but keep in mind that you have an exit ticket to complete.

## **Exit ticket**

- Have students form pairs in which one student has read each document.

- Students will work together to answer the following questions. Answers will vary on the basis of perspective and should be scored according to use of relevant evidence from the documents.
  - Consider this quote from Francis Bacon: "The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will." How did the language of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution that followed help people globally to apply "reason to imagination for the better moving of the will"? Provide evidence from both documents.
  - How did the French and Haitian revolutions build on or add to the ideas of the Declaration of Independence? Provide evidence from both documents.
  - Which ideals in the Declaration of Independence were not embraced by France and Haiti? Why might this have happened?
  - Do you agree or disagree with Jefferson's statement that liberty has to be defended with war? What arguments from the readings influenced your conclusion?

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### Warm-Up

Directions: Look at both images below and note what you see, think, and wonder about each image. Answer the question at the bottom of the page.



Pariser poisarden. Aquatint and etching by C. Katz, 1794.  
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c00359>.

I see . . .

I think . . .

I wonder . . .



Incendie du Cap [Burning of Cap-Français], Saint-Domingue, 1820. Frontispiece by unknown creator. Originally published in *Saint-Domingue, ou Histoire de ses revolutions* (Chez Tiger, 1820). Image is in public domain.

I see . . .

I think . . .

I wonder . . .

How do you think these two images are related or different to the Declaration of Independence?

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# The Inspiration and Influence of the Declaration of Independence on the World

## Declaration Excerpt Markup

Explanations and Connections	Text	Words and Themes
	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	

	<p>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.</p>	
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## The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

The following is an excerpt of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, written during the French Revolution in 1789. The chief author of the document was the Marquis de Lafayette, who had served in the American Revolution. Lafayette reportedly had assistance from Thomas Jefferson. The full text can be found at [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/rightsof.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp).

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all. Therefore the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen:

### Articles:

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.
4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.

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17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

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## Liberty or Death

The excerpt of the proclamation made by Jean Jacques Dessalines on January 1, 1804. It is considered Haiti's Declaration of Independence, even though it was written nearly three years after the Haitian Constitution. The Haitian Revolution was largely a rebellion of enslaved people against the French ruling class. Although the revolution was inspired in part by the ideals of the American and French Revolutions, the United States, fearing rebellions by enslaved people in its own territory, did not support or recognize the Haitian cause. The full text can be found at [Rediscovering Haiti's Declaration of Independence | The Declaration's Text \(in Translation\)](#).

Citizens:

It is not enough to have expelled the barbarians who have bloodied our land for two centuries; it is not enough to have restrained those ever-evolving factions that one after another mocked the specter of liberty that France dangled before you. We must, with one last act of national authority, forever assure the empire of liberty in the country of our birth; we must take any hope of re-enslaving us away from the inhuman government that for so long kept us in the most humiliating torpor. In the end we must live independent or die. Independence or death... let these sacred words unite us and be the signal of battle and of our reunion.

Citizens, my countrymen, on this solemn day I have brought together those courageous soldiers who, as liberty lay dying, spilled their blood to save it; these generals who have guided your efforts against tyranny have not yet done enough for your happiness; the French name still haunts our land.

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## Pyramid Summary

Directions: Carefully read the text assigned to you. Choose one word that captures the main theme of the text and write it on the top line. Choose two subtopics or important ideas that exist within the text and write them on the lines in the second row. Choose three important vocabulary words that are meaningful for understanding the text. Write a four-word sentence that effectively summarizes a portion of the text. Write a five-word sentence that effectively summarizes a portion of the text. Write a six-word sentence that effectively summarizes a portion of the text. Write a seven-word sentence that effectively summarizes a portion of the text.

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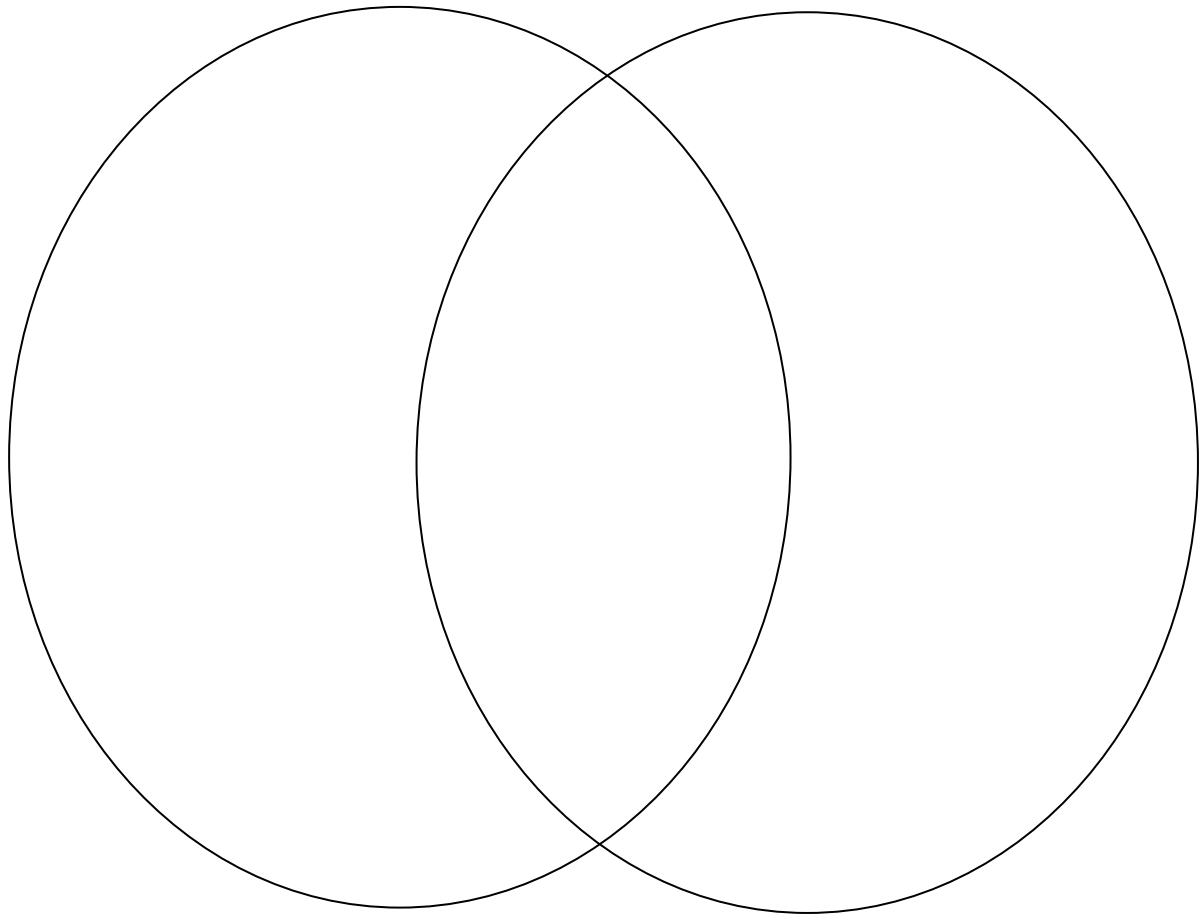
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## The Inspiration and Influence of the Declaration of Independence on the World

### Venn Diagram

Directions: Label one circle below "Declaration of Independence." Label the other circle with the name of your assigned document. Note at least two similarities in the areas in which the circles cross. Note at least two unique features of the documents in their assigned circles.



# The Inspiration and Influence of the Declaration of Independence on the World

## Exit Ticket

Directions: Pair with someone who read the opposite excerpt and answer the following questions:

1. Consider the quote from Francis Bacon: "The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will." How did the language of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution that followed help people globally apply "reason to imagination for the better moving of the will?" Provide evidence from both documents.

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2. How were the French and Haitian Revolutions continuations of the practices and principles or departures to the ideas of the Declaration of Independence? Provide evidence from both documents.

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3. Which principles in the Declaration of Independence were not embraced by France and Haiti? Why might this have happened?

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4. Do you agree or disagree with Jefferson's statement that liberty has to be defended with war? What arguments from the readings influenced your conclusion?

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