



## Teaching Guide

### SEGMENT 9, WEBISODE 1

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide

On July 4, 1776, the delegates signed the Declaration of Independence. John Hancock wrote his name first in large clear letters. Afterwards the other fifty-five men of the convention signed the document. By doing this they placed themselves in great danger. They knew that, should they be captured, their signatures could cost their lives. Soon after

signing, John Dunlap, the official printer to the congress, printed about one hundred copies of the document. The next day couriers delivered the call to freedom. When a copy reached George Washington, in charge of the Continental Army, he ordered the declaration read to the troops. They cheered the new document. Other citizens were not as happy. Some thought that it would be better to make peace with Britain after the mother country met colonial demands for lower taxes and more rights. Many thought that by issuing the declaration the Continental Congress had rashly destroyed any chance of reunification. But most citizens approved of the declaration with the realization that now they were part of a new nation and could never return peacefully to the British Empire.



Segment  
Overview



Let's Discuss



History Sleuth

#### Teacher Directions

1. In small teams, students discuss.
  - How did people react to the Declaration of Independence?
  - In reality many people thought the Declaration of Independence was a bad idea. Why might they think that?

#### Teacher Directions

1. Introduce the varied reactions to the Declaration of Independence at the time it was issued. Explain that several interesting comments were made concerning the Declaration of Independence at the time it was issued.
2. Students read the quotes on the Student Sheet: *Comments about the Declaration of Independence* and identify what individuals thought of the declaration.

History Sleuth, Cont.

## 3. Ask the students.

- Do people have different reactions or similar ones?
- Which reaction do you think was most common?

## 4. Discuss the comments with the students incorporating the following ideas.

In reality this might be a trick question! Many people were unable to read the printed document. After all, only one hundred copies were printed for all of the thirteen colonies. Most ordinary people never even saw the document. Furthermore, many people did not know how to read. There was no public school system at that time. Furthermore, most colonists were not present for the public readings. So the vast majority of colonists did not really know what the declaration said or even that it had been issued.

For those who did read or hear the declaration, there were three ways to react to the document: for, against, and indifferent. While it seems today as if everyone should have supported the declaration, that was not true at the time. In reality, only about one-third of the population actually supported independence. Another third supported the English crown and did not think independence was a good idea. A final third had not made up their minds at this time! It would take years of war for the majority of the American public to fully support the declaration and the split with England.

## 5. Students write a letter in which they (as a colonist in 1776) respond to hearing the declaration.

**Teacher Directions**

## 4. In their small teams, students discuss the following ideas.

- The Declaration of Independence officially broke all ties between the colonies and England. Many colonists were upset because this prevented any chance of reconciliation between the colonists and England.
- Do you think it was a good idea for the Continental Congress to issue the declaration? What might have happened if the colonist had lost the war?



What do you  
Think?



### Teacher Directions

1. Students ponder the following questions.
  - What effect has the declaration had in other world situations?
  - Could the declaration have been used by other organizations as a framework for their own complaints and resolutions?
2. Discuss with the students.

The declaration changed concepts of government and freedom around the world. The American Declaration of Independence became the basis for later documents requesting freedom. For example, the French drafted a similar declaration during the French Revolution. The French people identified greatly with America after their union in the Revolutionary War. When the French Revolution started in 1789, its instigators looked on the America Revolution as a model.

The Declaration of Independence was also the pattern for the Declaration of Sentiments, a document written during the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 in the United States. The Declaration of Sentiments advocated rights for women. While the Declaration of Sentiments had little immediate effect, it created a framework for the women's rights movement that fostered unity and an organizational framework.

### Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

**Music** — Students listen to eighteenth century music.

**Library** — Students research type setting and early printing techniques.

**Language Arts** — Students create a Declaration of Independence crossword puzzle for others to solve.

**Library** — Students choose a person who signed the declaration and create a biography card.

**Language Arts** — Students read *Johnny Tremain* by Esther Forbes to learn about being an apprentice in colonial times.



# Comments about the Declaration of Independence

"We must all hang together. Or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

Benjamin Franklin

"Now we know what to depend on. For my part, I have been at a great stand: I could hardly own the King and fight against him at the same time; but now these matters are cleared up. Heart and hand shall move together."

Joseph Barton

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.  
A DECLARATION  
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

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 best, so that they may secure the most extensive, safe, and happy Enjoyment of them.

"There were bonfires, ringing bells and other great demonstrations of joy upon the unanimity of the Declaration."  
Christopher Marshall

"[There were a] very few respectable people much opposed to the Declaration."  
Nicholas Biddle