

Shannon Despain  
Colonial Williamsburg lesson plan

## **News of the Declaration of Independence Seen from Many Sides**

**Background:** The Declaration of Independence was approved by Congress on July 4, 1776. The Pennsylvania Evening Post printed it as early as July 6, 1776. Other parts of the colonies received newspapers containing the Declaration in the following days and weeks.

**Prerequisites:** Previous to this lesson, students should have had consistent practice looking at primary source documents and thinking like a historian. They should also have been taught the events and reasons leading up to the writing of the Declaration and the political climate at this time.

**Materials:** A copy of the text of the Declaration of Independence for each group of three in the class in small sections in large print so they can delve into the language.

**Hook:** Read the students a “break up” letter that you “found”. After it is read, tell them that it is from the 13 colonies. The Declaration of Independence is the greatest break up letter in history.

**Lesson:** Break the students up into groups of three. Together, study the preamble with annotations (you model, they copy). Talk about the themes, language, and purpose of writing this Declaration. Why did they write it? You will probably want to split up the reading of the Declaration into three or four days because it is heavy. Because of the difficulty of the language, you will probably have to guide them through the annotating of the entire document.

Who was there to write the Declaration and discuss it? Who was not there (slaves, women...)?

**Activity and Assessment:** Give each group a role; loyalist, slave, patriot, Member of Parliament in England, slave owner, or woman patriot. Have them write a journal entry on their reaction to the Declaration of Independence. Would they support it? Would they be happy or angry or worried? Would they riot against it? Would they think it was a passing fancy? They need to consider what the Declaration is asking and what the person of their role would think of it.

**Extension:** The British responded to the Declaration of Independence with a pamphlet entitled *An Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress*. In it, Britain questioned how the Americans could declare that “all men are created equal” when many Americans owned slaves. Put this question to the students as a discussion or as a something to research.