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What Is the Declaration of Independence?
Grade Level: 5th (can be adapted for 8th)
Time Frame: 2-3 class periods

Enduring Understanding: Students will gain a basic understanding of the Declaration of Independence, its history and what it contains.

Essential Questions:

- What is the Declaration of Independence?
- Why was it written?
- Who wrote it?
- What are its basic parts?
- Why is it important in our history and today?

Resources:

- Large pictures (to show) and individual copies of the Declaration of Independence text for each student (There are pictures of the rough draft, the press copy, and the engraved copy on the Monticello website).
- Picture of Thomas Jefferson
- Picture of the Assembly Room in Independence Hall
- www.monticello.org
- NPS Independence app (available in the Apple app store)
- Book: The Declaration of Independence in Translation - What It Really Means, by Amie Jane Leavitt, Capstone Press, 2009.

Advance Preparation:

- Go to www.monticello.org. Click Jefferson on the menu bar. Go to Declaration of Independence, then to Jefferson and the Declaration. Review the information and be able to share it in story form.
- Have one display copy of the Declaration and individual text copies available for each student. Images and the text transcript are all available on the above website. The transcript, with the signers categorized by state, is also available easily on teachingamericanhistory.org.
- Download the app onto an iPad.

Lesson Outline:

- Introduce the lesson by telling the story of how and why the Declaration was written. Show the picture of Thomas Jefferson.
- Using the "Teach/OK" strategy on www.wholebrainteaching.com, have students turn to a neighbor and tell who wrote the Declaration, and why it was written. (Committee of 5 people chosen, but Jefferson did most of the actual writing. It was written to declare to the world that the American colonies were free from Great Britain).
- Show pictures of the Declaration House in Philadelphia, where Jefferson wrote the rough draft of the Declaration over a period of 17 days. Pictures can be found in the NPS Independence app, or they can be found online. Show where the Declaration was signed.
- Basic parts of the Declaration: If the app is available, project the section showing the 5 basic parts of the Declaration. Each part is explained in the app, and this can be projected from your iPad using Apple TV or a document camera. Look in the "Kids" section of the app, and go to the gold section.
- Using the "Teach/OK" strategy, have students turn to a neighbor and list the 5 basic parts of the Declaration. (Heading, statement of individual rights, unfair actions of the king and British government, statement of independence, signatures).
- Using their individual copies of the text of the Declaration, have students highlight or mark each section using a different color. Do a shared reading of the individual rights part, one or two of the grievances, and the statement of independence. Students can be required to memorize the well-known sections, if desired.
- Using the book, The Declaration of Independence in Translation, go over the difficult vocabulary. It gives excellent kid-friendly explanations.
- Why is it important? The above book lists "5 Reasons to Care About the Declaration of Independence" on page 28.

Lesson Extensions:

- Have students write a "Declaration of Independence" using the five basic sections. Example: "A Declaration of Independence From Bad School Lunches." They design a heading, they state that everyone has a right to a good lunch, they list grievances against the current school lunch, they declare their freedom from yucky lunches, and collect signatures. These essays can be humorous or serious.

- Fine arts connections: Have students pick a couple of grievances and design illustrations or political cartoons. Have students write an acrostic poem using ideas from the Declaration. See if anyone can write a song about the Declaration.
- Have students prepare a computer project, such as a PowerPoint or pamphlet about the history of the Declaration.
- Have students divide into teams and prepare reports on Thomas Jefferson, Independence Hall, the history of the Declaration since it was written, Declaration House, and the well-known signers.
- Show the YouTube videos, "Too Late to Apologize: A Declaration," and "Our Lives, Our Fortunes, Our Sacred Honor."
- www.classroomclassics.com has a CD of patriotic songs, including one about the Declaration of Independence. This is more appropriate for elementary students.

Assessment Ideas:

- Prepare a crossword puzzle on discoveryeducation.com and have students complete it.
- Have students write an essay about what they learned.
- Have students prepare a Reader's Theater about the Declaration.
- Prepare a standard paper/pencil test.
- Have students write a test about the Declaration.