



Lesson 6.7 “Foundational Principles in the Declaration of Independence”

Unit 6: Establishing Government

Lesson Objectives

- Students will discuss the purposes of government.
- Students will define the foundational principles of U.S. government.
- Students will examine the Declaration of Independence and identify evidence of the foundational principles.

Lesson Competencies

- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can describe how citizens can participate in the government. (Moose SS)
- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?
How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

Focus Question

What are the foundational principles of our government?

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

Materials & Equipment

Unit 5: Learn It! “[America Moves Towards Independence](#)” and “[New Hampshire Moves Toward Independence](#)”
“Declaration of Independence” for projection
Class set of “Foundational Principles in the Declaration of Independence”
Foundational Principles infographics for distribution
Class set of “List of Grievances”





Educator Introduction & Rationale

During and immediately after the American Revolution, Americans were faced with the challenge of creating new forms of government that embodied their views and beliefs while effectively promoting their economic and political development. They had before them a unique opportunity—to create a national government from scratch and shape it any way they wanted.

As a group, the Founders were educated men, and many of them prided themselves on thinking deeply about political philosophy—e.g., the beliefs and ideas that shaped the way governments functioned. They believed that governments must carefully balance the freedom of the people with the need to maintain law and order. At heart, their beliefs centered around the idea that the people were capable of governing themselves.

This is the first lesson for middle school students in Unit 6: Establishing Government, and it is strongly recommended that students first complete the introductory lesson [Foundational Principles](#) so that students can become familiar with these ideas.

In this lesson, students build on what they've learned about foundational principles by examining the text of the Declaration of Independence for evidence of those foundational principles that guided America's founders:

- That the people and their rulers enter into a social contract of mutual responsibilities;
- That governments are established to balance community and individual needs, but that balance usually tips in the favor of the common good;
- That representative democracy provides the best means to be responsive to the will of the people while moderating their passions;
- That America is governed by the rule of law and no one is above the law; and
- That limited government offers the best chance to curb government abuses through the separation of powers and the use of checks and balances.

After creating their own summarizing statements of these foundational principles, students examine excerpts from the "List of Grievances"—i.e., the portion of the Declaration of Independence that outlines the particular offenses of the British King and Parliament against the colonies. Students will match grievances to the relevant principles and discuss their reasoning.

Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Sections of Unit 5 "Learn It!" are recommended for students who do not have sufficient background knowledge about the causes of the American Revolution; this reading should be completed before moving into the learning activity for this lesson. Note that lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.





Learning Activity

Activation

Why a Declaration of Independence? Ask students to talk with a partner about what they know already about the Declaration of Independence. They can write their ideas on sticky notes and add them to a chart paper. Then, as a whole group talk about why students think the colonists who wished to separate from Great Britain felt it was necessary to write this document.

Note: If students need a refresher on the Declaration of Independence, direct them to read Unit 5 Learn It! "[America Moves Towards Independence](#)" and "[New Hampshire Moves Toward Independence](#)."

Direct Instruction

What makes a better government? Before discussing each foundational principle, help students understand where these ideas came from by explaining that the Founding Fathers were educated men who spent a lot of time thinking about how governments were organized and how they could be improved to better serve the people. They studied the ideas of other leading thinkers of the day who wrote books about their ideas in political science and philosophy. What would be the best form of government that would allow people to have as much freedom as possible without the world descending into chaos? How could a government both protect people from harm and allow them to do what they wanted? Political leaders of the time realized it was a balance between liberty and order.

For many political philosophers of this period, five central ideas emerged as the best way to establish a balanced government. We refer to these guiding ideas as foundational principles, and they influenced the Framers and their ideas about good government.

Then hand out "American Foundational Principles" and project the infographics for each foundational principle one at a time. Discuss each concept as a class and then allow students time to write a brief summary of each principle. Or, complete this activity in stations with printed copies of the infographics at locations around the room, possibly allowing students to work with a partner or in small groups. Review summarized statements as a whole group to ensure all students understand each principle.

Guided & Independent Practice

Defining Foundational Principles. Distribute "Foundational Principles in the Declaration of Independence" and copies of the "Declaration of Independence," taking a moment to map the Declaration into its four parts (preamble, statement of human rights, list of grievances, and resolution).

Explain that there is evidence of the five foundational principles in the Declaration and ask students to focus on the "List of Grievances." In this list are violations that King George III has committed against the colonists, and many of these are violations against what we now refer to as the five foundational principles. Discuss as a class and keep a





tally of which foundational principles are mentioned the most. Explore with your students why some Americans might have been more concerned about some foundational principles than other and whether any particular foundational principles are more important to democratic government.





Supporting Materials

Other Resources

- Declaration of Independence: A Transcription. Retrieved from www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript
- Declaration of Independence (Print #3). Retrieved from catalog.archives.gov/id/1656604





Standards

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:8:1:1)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Structure and Function of United States and New Hampshire Government (SS:CV:8:2:3)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✓ Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civics Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.3.6-8, D2.Civ.5.6-8)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.8.6-8, D2.Civ.10.6-8)
- ✓ Developing Claims and Using Evidence (D3.3.6-8)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1.B Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.
- ✓ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.B Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.





Lesson Vocabulary

common good	(noun) A phrase in the preamble of the Constitution; what is best for the community
Declaration of Independence	(noun) document signed in 1776 in which the 13 American colonies officially declared independence from British rule
foundational principle	(noun) An idea on which something stands; one foundational principle of the United States is the rule of law
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
limited government	(noun) When the power of the people who rule a community is controlled so that no person or group gets too much power
representative democracy	(noun) When a group of people select someone to communicate their views and make laws for them
rule of law	(noun) The idea that everyone in a community agrees to a set of written rules and then everyone follows the same rules
social contract	(noun) An agreement between people and their government to give up some rights in exchange for security and law and order

