



Lesson 5.3 “Who Declared Independence?”

Unit 5: New Hampshire and the American Revolution

Lesson Objectives

- Students will compare selections from the “Declaration of Independence” and the “Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People of 1779.”
- Students will use class resources to analyze vocabulary words.
- Students will discuss historical perspective as it applies to the documents.

Lesson Competencies

- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- When appropriate, I can use context to determine intended meanings of words and phrases. (ELA 1)
- I can explain that historical perspectives vary based upon the time period in which the person lived and that those perspectives shaped the historical sources they created. (Moose SS)

Essential Questions

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

Focus Questions

Why did people in New Hampshire want to become independent from Great Britain?
How did different voices shape the American Revolution in New Hampshire?

Estimated Time

Two 40-minute class sessions

Materials & Equipment

“Declaration of Independence” for projection or distribution
“Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People to the New Hampshire State Legislature” for projection or distribution
Class set of “Selections from the Declaration of Independence” student worksheet
Class set of “Selections from ‘Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People to the New Hampshire State Legislature’” student worksheet
Class set of “Venn Diagram: Petition and Declaration” student worksheet



Educator Introduction & Rationale

The Declaration of Independence was written and adopted by the Second Continental Congress in summer of 1776. It has since become a well-known and influential statement on human rights, especially the second sentence: "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." The founding fathers used this document to justify their rebellion against the rule of King George III and Great Britain, claiming that their natural rights were being harmed. It is notable, however, that when the founding fathers spoke of the "people's" rights, they meant people in power at the time—that is, white property-holding men. Though some of their ideas were revolutionary for their time, they did not intend natural rights to extend to people of a lower socio-economic class, people of color, or women. Nevertheless, their document has inspired people throughout history.

This is the third lesson in Unit 5: New Hampshire and the American Revolution. Achievement of the learning objectives in lesson 5.1 "Why Did We Have a Revolution?" is recommended before engaging with the activities in this lesson. In this lesson, students compare the Declaration of Independence with a petition for freedom submitted to the New Hampshire state legislature by 20 enslaved people in 1779. While slavery was not as common in New Hampshire as in Massachusetts or states farther south, slavery did exist in New Hampshire at this time. There were only a few hundred black people in the state, and while some were free, most were enslaved. In 1779, the petition for freedom was based on the grounds that their natural rights were being abused by enslavement. The legislature heard the petition, tabled it, and took no further action until it was accepted by Governor Maggie Hassan in 2013. Please reference the [Educator Overview](#) for more information. Also, the New Hampshire Historical Society's Timeline of New Hampshire History has an entry on the enslaved people's petition for freedom in 1779 at www.nhhistory.org/timeline with concise further information.

In this lesson, students first explore the definitions of the words "declaration" and "petition." They then compare the appearance of the original declaration and petition, and read selections of each while answering processing questions. Afterwards, they complete a Venn diagram for the two documents. Reflection is completed through considering whether the documents are more similar or more different and why the state legislature accepted the petition of the enslaved people in 2013. The class learns about historical perspective when thinking about why the two legislatures, 228 years apart, acted so differently. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of this document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

The reinforcement activity is designed for students who may need more help distinguishing between the words "petition" and "declaration." The extension activities are designed for students who would like to know more about either the history of slavery in New Hampshire or the law that posthumously freed the petitioners in 2013.

Teaching Tips:

It is more culturally sensitive when speaking of people who have been enslaved to use the words “enslaved people” rather than the dehumanizing “slave.”

Also, historical perspective, or understanding that people’s actions and beliefs are shaped by the time period in which they live, is a difficult concept for students. It is critical, however, to begin conversations in elementary school about how and why people’s actions in the past, often done in accordance with the morals of their time period, seem very different from or even morally at odds with what students are learning about how to be a good citizen today. Also, try not to excuse (or condemn outright) the actions and beliefs of people of the past, but to encourage students to try to understand why people of history acted the way they did.

Learning Activity

Activation

A difference of words. Write the words “petition” and “declaration” on the board and define them with students. It may be necessary for students to look them up in a dictionary if the class is not familiar with the words. Ask students what the difference is between the two words. Give examples to aid understanding.

Possible outcomes:

- **Petition:** something asked, a request made to an official person
- When a **petition** asks for something, it follows the rules in how to get it. Generally, people who petition have less power than the person or place they are petitioning.
- **Examples:** teachers petitioning the school board for smaller class sizes, voters petitioning the government for money for national parks, members petitioning a club for longer hours
- **Declaration:** making known officially, an announcement
- A **declaration** does not consider the rules when being made. The people declaring their ideas consider themselves to have enough power in order to challenge the rules, if necessary.
- **Examples:** people declaring independence from a government, citizens declaring a demonstration against unjust laws, a candidate declaring she will run for president

Have students talk in groups or pairs about times when they might make a petition or a declaration. Discuss as best for your class until you feel students are able to differentiate the words.

Direct Instruction

Encounter the documents. Tell students you will project two documents. These documents are more than 200 years old, and are written in script that is hard to read. They will look at the documents and see what they can observe about them, but are not expected to read the script words. They will read a transcription of selections of the documents.

Project first the Declaration of Independence. Inform students the basic facts about the Declaration:

- It was written in 1776.
- It was written by colonists who were telling the king of Great Britain that they were no longer part of his empire.
- It was a key event in the beginning of the American Revolution.
- The New Hampshire signers were Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, and Matthew Thornton.
- The American Revolution was successful for the colonists and led to the founding of the United States.

What do students observe? **Possible outcomes:**

- There are a lot of words written in cursive, which make up most of the document.
- There are two lines of text up at the top, which are likely titles of some kind.
- There are many signatures at the bottom in six columns, and they are different sizes.
- The document seems to be formal because of the script and how fancy some of the title is.
- There are no decorations or pictures.
- It is dated July 4, 1776.

Next, project the "Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People to the New Hampshire State Legislature." Inform students that:

- It was written in 1779.
- It was written by 20 enslaved people from Portsmouth, NH, who were asking for their freedom.
- Petitioners included Nero Brewster, who was the leader of the black community in Portsmouth, and Prince Whipple, who was enslaved by William Whipple.
- It was tabled by the legislature, meaning that nothing happened after it was presented.
- It was not successful.
- Seven of the petitioners, including Prince Whipple, received their freedom at some point during their lifetimes, and the remaining 13 people died in slavery.
- The petition was three pages long, and pages one and three are provided for students to examine.

Teaching Tip: Some students may be unaware of the fact slavery existed in New Hampshire. While the slave trade and slavery of the American south is more generally studied than slavery in the north, it is important to recognize the history of enslavement of people in the north as well. Reference the student content for more information.

What do students observe? **Possible outcomes:**

- The writing is in cursive and there are a lot of lines.
- The first letters of paragraphs are more decorative.
- It seems like a formal document because of the cursive and the care taken to make it neat.
- The words "State of New Hampshire" are written at the top of the first page.
- On the third page, there are two paragraphs of text, then two columns of signatures at the bottom, with "Nero Brewster" as the first signature.
- There are no decoration or pictures, and the paper is likely old because it is yellowed.

Discuss with students: Do the documents appear more similar or more different to them?

Guided or Independent Practice

Read the documents. Distribute the student worksheets, "Selections from the Declaration of Independence" and "Selections from Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People to the New Hampshire State Legislature." Depending upon the makeup of your class, you may wish to divide the class into two groups and have each half do one worksheet, then share answers. Alternatively, all students can do both worksheets.

Complete worksheets and share answers so that all students have correct answers for both worksheets.

Teaching Tip: This is a good spot to pause if you will divide the lesson between two teaching periods.

Student Reading

The Freedom Petition. Before moving into Formative Assessment, direct students to read Unit 5: Learn It! "[New Hampshire on the Home Front](#)," page 3. Encourage students to read the biographies, definitions, and timeline entries highlighted in the selection.

Formative Assessment

Comparing the documents. Distribute the student worksheet "Venn diagram: Declaration and Petition." Students should work in pairs or independently to complete the Venn diagram to the best of their abilities. Once students have been given enough time to work, project the Venn diagram, and review as a class.

Understanding choices. Once the Venn diagram is complete, ask the students if they think the documents are more similar or more different. Encourage them to provide evidence for their answers.

To complete assessment of the documents, write or project the following question: Why do you think the colonists choose to declare their independence, while the enslaved people choose to petition for their independence? This is a complex question and may need a lot of teacher guidance in discussion.

Possible outcomes:

- The colonists felt angry and wanted to break the rules and declare their independence. They felt empowered and thought they could win against England because they had money and support from the 13 colonies.
- The petitioners also felt angry and wanted to be independent, but they did not have enough power to take their independence. They had to work within the rules of the society and the government because they had no money and little support in the wider community for their independence.

Discussion & Reflection

Historical Perspective. Tell the students to take a step back from history and think about different generations of people. Do they know anyone two generations (or more) older than them, like a grandparent or elder in the community? Have they ever heard that children of the past were expected to behave differently or use their time differently? Maybe they felt what the person described was really different or strange compared to how they think and act as a kid today.

A person's perspective is shaped by the time in which they grew up and lived. This is called **historical perspective** which means understanding that people's actions and beliefs are shaped by the time period in which they live.

Current events and historical perspective. In 2013, after the New Hampshire government passed a bill that granted freedom after their deaths to 14 individuals who had not been freed during their lifetimes. This coincided with other efforts to shed light on New Hampshire's history of slavery, including the consecration of a forgotten African Burying Ground in Portsmouth.

Use this example to help students understand historical perspective. What's different about today's legislature compared with the legislature in 1779 that the petition was accepted now? Create a T-chart to help students understand the difference between the two legislatures, what they believed, and their actions.

Possible outcomes:

1779 New Hampshire: Legislature & Governor

- Made up of white, land-owning men
- Elected by white, land-owning men
- Did not have a variety of perspectives and experiences represented in the government
- Slavery and discrimination were a fact of life, whether a person thought they were wrong or not
- Many groups did not have equal rights, including women, people of color, and people with lower socio-economic standing

2013 New Hampshire: Legislature & Governor

- Made up of men and women
- Elected by men and women from across the state, no matter their race or land-owning status
- Informed by a variety of perspectives and experience
- Slavery is outlawed in the United States, and people recognize it is not right to own another person
- Equal rights for all people are valued
- While there is still discrimination in New Hampshire today, the goal is to fight it rather than accept it as normal

Discuss the differences between the two times and legislatures and help students understand that historical perspective means that a person is shaped by their time period, which may lead to actions that are viewed as unjust or wrong today. The goal of historians is to understand people within their time period, rather than judging them by today's beliefs.

In 2013, the petition was accepted to show people that New Hampshire has learned that while the founding fathers are honored for their role in the American Revolution and their ideas (which were revolutionary for their time), it is now understood that their ideas needed to include everyone.

- Reinforcement**
1. **Petition or declaration?** Have students read and discuss the examples on the “Petition or Declaration?” worksheet to further understand the differences between the two words.
- Extension**
1. **Additional information.** If students are interested in learning more about the actions of the legislature and governor in 2013, give them the article “Gov. Hassan’s signature frees 14 Portsmouth slaves from 1779” found at www.seacoastonline.com/article/20130607/news/130609815. The article further compares the Declaration of Independence with the Petition for Freedom.
 2. **Literature connections.** Read the novel *Amos Fortune, Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates, Newbury Medal winner in 1951. The historical fiction novel chronicles the life of freed enslaved man, Amos Fortune, who lived circa 1710–1801, and died in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. This book is for advanced readers or could be an appropriate read-aloud book for the class.

Supporting Materials

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

Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People to the New Hampshire State Legislature, pages 1-4. Courtesy of the New Hampshire State Archives.

McDermott, Deborah. June 7, 2013. Gov. Hassan's signature frees 14 Portsmouth slaves from 1779. Retrieved from www.seacoastonline.com/article/20130607/news/130609815

New Hampshire State Papers. Retrieved from sos.nh.gov/archives-vital-records-records-management/archives/publications-collections/new-hampshire-state-papers/, Volume XVIII, page 705, Freedom Petition Submitted by Enslaved People to the New Hampshire State Legislature.

Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that growing conflicts between England and the 13 colonies over issues of political and economic rights led to the American Revolution. They will understand that people in New Hampshire played a part in both sides of the revolution. (3-5.T3.1)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence (3-5.S1.2)
- ✓ Effective Historical Thinking (3-5.S3.2)
- ✓ Understanding and Participating in Government (3-5.S6.1)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:4:1.1)
- ✓ US / NH History: Social/Cultural (SS:HI:4:5.1, SS:HI:4:5.4)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.3.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.10.3-5)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.14.3-5)
- ✓ Perspectives (D2.His.4.3-5, D2.His.6.3-5)
- ✓ Communicating Conclusions (D4.2.3-5)

Common Core ELA Grade 3:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Informational Text (RI.3.1, RI.3.3)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.3.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.3.3)
- ✓ Fluency in Foundational Skills (RF.3.4a)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.3.1d)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.3.4a, L.3.6)

Common Core ELA Grade 4:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Informational Text (RI.4.1, RI.4.3)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.4.10)
- ✓ Phonics and Word Recognition in Foundational Skills (RF.4.3)
- ✓ Fluency in Foundational Skills (RF.4.4a)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1d)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.4a, L.4.6)

Common Core ELA Grade 5:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details in Reading Informational Text (RI.5.1, RI.5.3)
- ✓ Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity in Informational Text (RI.5.10)
- ✓ Fluency in Foundational Skills (RF.5.4)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.5.1d)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.5.4a, L.5.6)

Lesson Vocabulary

Britain	(noun) The country, also known as England or Great Britain, that governed the original 13 colonies
declaration	(noun) An official announcement, spoken or written
historical perspective	(noun) Understanding that people's actions and beliefs are shaped by the time period in which they live
legislature	(noun) A group of people chosen or elected to make the laws for a colony or state
petition	(noun) A written request made to an official person or group
revolution	(noun) Actions taken with the goal of making major changes in a government
self-evident	(adjective) Obvious, not needing explanation
tyranny	(noun) Oppressive control by a government
unalienable	(adjective) Unable to be taken away from a person