**Lesson Plan: *Declaring a Nation***

**Grade Level**: 5+

**Time**: 45 minutes + (can be stretched over several days, if desired)

**Materials**:

* Declaration signers biography cards
* Colony name tags
* Jefferson’s rough draft of the Declaration of Independence
* Declaration recording (on flash drive)
* Dunlap Broadsides
* Inscribed Declaration of Independence
* Worksheets & activities

**Questions**

Introduce questions for the conclusion of the lesson. Tell students to keep them in mind during lesson so that they can answer them at the end.

* How did we go about declaring ourselves independent from England?
* What reasons did the colonists have for finally breaking away?

**Background**

Try and get students into the mindset of the 1770s.  Have a reminder discussion about how different life was from today.  It is difficult to analyze and understand history from the modern perspective, so encourage students to imagine as if they were living in the 1770s.  Have students close their eyes and imagine what life was like- the teacher can play colonial music in the background to help set the mood.

**Handout/Reading Activity**

Tell students that they are going to learn about what it took for the men to create the Declaration of Independence.  Each student will get a “signer” card(s) with information on it about his/her colony’s particular delegate(s).  Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the person on their card(s).

* **Divide students into 13 groups (colonies)**
	+ Pass out “signer” cards to the students which correspond to their colonies.  There are 56 signers of the Declaration, so there will be more than enough cards and some students can get two or more cards if the teacher chooses.  The cards contain individual information about each signer.
* **Introduction to the Declaration**
	+ Discuss 1st and 2nd Continental Congresses – differences and reason for needing a second one
		- Governing body for the colonies from 1774-1789
		- 1st Continental Congress met in 1774 after King George III introduced the Coercive Acts
		- 2nd Continental Congress met in 1775 (after Revolutionary War had already started)
* **Discusses which processes were in place or needed to be created to start forming the Declaration**
	+ Committee of Five
		- Benjamin Franklin (PA), John Adams (MA), Roger Sherman (CT), Robert Livingston (NY) and Thomas Jefferson (VA)
	+ Jefferson’s drafts and notes
		- Pass around Jefferson’s rough draft (2 pages)
		- The continental Congress made several revisions to Jefferson’s draft
			* Total of 86 changes
			* ¼ of the original draft was removed by Congress
			* Removed a paragraph which attacked the institution of slavery
* **Discuss which documents and writings may have influenced the creation of the Declaration**
	+ Magna Carta: Took away/limited power of King John of England, created to make peace between rebel barons and king, provided some protection for barons
	+ Native Americans: Idea of Native American democracies, egalitarian systems, chiefdoms, and confederations
	+ Greek Writings: Democracy, nobility and morality, Jefferson influenced

**Hands-On Activity**

Students take on the role of the signers and pretend to be in 2nd Continental Congress, reviewing the document before signing.

* **Introduce signers & classroom assignment for day**
	+ Say something along the lines of: “Today, you will each take on the role of one of the signers of the Declaration. You will learn his background, decide if he should/should not have signed the declaration, and in some instances, learn about his fate later in life after signing. Put yourself in his shoes! It was very risky to sign this document, and most signers had a lot to lose. They put their lives on the line and many of them paid the price!”
* **Pretend to be in the Continental Congress, reviewing the document before signing** (pass out the large printed Dunlap Broadsides for each “colony” to look at and review the text)
	+ Preamble (listen to “recording” of John Taylor Gilman reading Declaration to the town of Exeter)
	+ List of Grievances (refer to Dunlap Broadsides)
	+ Fixing problems/dealing with the king
	+ Conclusion- officially declare independence, pledge lives to one another, etc.
* **Document Review**
	+ Ask the students to discuss the document within their “colonies.” Will each “colony” come to an agreement about whether or not to sign the Declaration of Independence?
	+ Each colony must be unanimous in its decision. The teacher plays the role of President of the Continental Congress and asks each colony to vote one at a time. For example, one delegate from Rhode Island will stand up and say “Rhode Island votes [yes/no].” Take turns until each colony has placed its vote.
	+ Teacher says “ By a vote of XXX to XXX the colonies [will / will not] vote in favor of independence”
* **Discussion**
	+ Discuss the vote. If the vote is not unanimous, discuss the ramifications of this for the colonists. Would they be stronger as a united group of 13 colonies, or could they be ok as a few colonies going against the king?

**DUNLAP BROADSIDES**

* How did they colonists get out the news of independence? Could they just email/text/post online about what had just happened? How did news travel in the 1770s?
* After the Declaration was approved by the Congress (on July 4, 1776), the document was sent to the official printer of the Congress, named John Dunlap. He worked through the night creating 150 or more printed, poster-sized (broadsides) copies of the Declaration. What did they do with all of these copies?
* Copies were sent to all of the colonies to be read to the townspeople. News did not travel fast. It took 11 days for it to travel from Philadelphia, PA to Exeter, NH. It was read to the town of Exeter on July 16, 1776 by John Taylor Gilman, a young man of only 22 years old.
	+ John Taylor Gilman lived in the Ladd-Gilman House, which is now part of the American Independence Museum
	+ There are 26 surviving copies of the original Dunlap Broadsides. One copy is part of the collection of the American Independence Museum.

**Declaration of Independence**

* The Dunlap Broadside looks different from what everyone thinks of when they hear Declaration of Independence. On July 19,1776, Congress decided to have an official “inscribed”, or signed copy of the Declaration created. It was handwritten by Timothy Matlack and on August 2, 1776, the delegates signed the official copy.
* The first signer was the President of the Continental Congress and his signature is the largest on the document-John Hancock
* The document was signed by delegates in order of their colonies, geographically, from north to south. NH was the first colony to sign, with Josiah Bartlett signing at the top of the column farthest to the right.
* Fun Fact: Matthew Thornton (NH’s 3rd signer) did not sign in order with his fellow delegates. He did not arrive in Philadelphia until November of 1776, due to a number of reasons. If you look at the signatures, Sam Adams’ name is in the space in which Matthew’s should be.

**Conclusion**

Who would be willing to sign their own name to this document? The outcome of the war was uncertain and colonists would be risking a lot by signing.

**Discussion**

* A sigh of relief or more tension for colonists?
* Would signing this document be considered treasonous? What would you do?
* If the American colonists had lost the war- what could have happened to them?
* Why is this single document so important?
* What is its impact today in a modern world?

**Additional Activities**

* Analyze Jefferson’s Notes
	+ Pick out which words are underlined/capitalized, ask what they mean and why they are capitalized
	+ Discuss differences between Jefferson’s notes, the Declaration of Independence and the Dunlap Broadside
* What are they Saying?
	+ Analyze the grievances listed against the king. Using the worksheet, have students try to figure out what they mean.
	+ Have students put parts of the Declaration (sentences or paragraphs) into their own words and in modern terms

* Trivia!
	+ Read trivia questions aloud, quizzing students to choose the answers
* Pick a side!
* Have students raise hands or move into groups to show who would and who would not sign the Declaration. Tell them they can choose whatever side they want, but have to have evidence to back up their decision. Remind them of the consequences and what they have to lose – putting their lives on the line!
* Dear King George III
* Write a letter to King George telling why you would or would not sign the Declaration. Give evidence and reasons to back up your decision!
* Further Discussion:
	+ During the discussion about the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin said: “We must all hang together, or, assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”
	+ Share this quote with your students. Ask them what they think it means. Have them consider what they would have done if they were presented with the decision to sign the treasonous document that was the Declaration.
	+ What do they think might have happened to the Founding Fathers if England had won the war?