

“Old” Speak to “New” Speak: Uncovering Principles in America’s State Papers

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Lesson Description: In this lesson students will apply various techniques to help interpret and analyze documents from the 17th and 18th centuries. They will then apply these techniques to analyze and interpret American state papers with an eye toward uncovering principles and ideals of American democracy as well as efforts to achieve them.

This lesson works as a “stand-alone” during your initial discussions of the Declaration of Independence, but works more effectively if presented in conjunction with your examination of the Constitution.

Grade Level: 8

Standard: Civics Standard Two: Students will understand the principles and ideals underlying the American political system.

End of Cluster Expectations (Benchmarks): Students will understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the *Declaration of Independence*, *United States Constitution* (including the *Bill of Rights*), and the *Federalist Papers*.

The Standards Clarification document recognizes the magnitude of this benchmark and narrows expectations to the prime task of understanding the principles of American State Papers and their practical applications. Rather than trying to memorize the content of all four state papers, students should seek out the main principles reflected in these documents and look for ways (evidence) that the American people have tried to live up to them over time. Start the search for evidence in the Constitution. Where, for example, in the “supreme” law of our land (i.e. Constitution) does one find evidence of our commitment to the principle of equality? A proficient student might point to the Constitution’s prohibition against granting titles of nobility (Article 1, Section 9, Clause 8) as an attempt to live up to the principle that “all men are created equal.”

Essential Question: What are some main principles enunciated in major American state papers and how have they been applied in the American political system?

Assessment: See Handouts 6 and 7.

Assessment: Multiple Choice.

Objective(s): Students will be able to:

- Analyze 17th and 18th century documents, to find relevant meaning.
- Explain major principles found in the Declaration of Independence and explain how the American people have attempted to uphold those principles.

Prior Knowledge and Skills:

- Use of a Dictionary and Thesaurus
- Basic grammar skills for sentence construction

Time to Complete: Three 50-minute class periods or 1½ 85-minute blocks.

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Classroom set of Dictionaries and Thesauri.
- Transparency of Overhead 1 – “*Excerpt from the Federalist Papers.*”
- Copies of Handout 2 – “*Steps for Analyzing Texts.*”
- Transparency of Overhead 3 – “*Guided Practice.*”
- Copies of Handout 4 – “*Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence.*”
- Copies of Handout 5 – “*Principle Cards.*”
- Copies (8-10) of the *Declaration of Independence* (available at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/declare.htm>)
- Copies (8-10) of the United States *Constitution* (available at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/usconst.htm> or at <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore/TheU.S.Constitution/index.shtml>)
- Pairs (8-10) of scissors
- Balls of yarn (8-10)
- Rolls of tape (8-10)
- Copies of Handout 6 – “*Extended Response Assessment*”
- Copies of Handout 7 – “*Selected Response Assessment*”

Procedure Steps: Sample answers to questions are in parentheses and italicized.

Day 1

1. Think-Pair-Share: Write the words **Principle** and **Ideal** on the board and ask the students to do the same on a piece of paper. Tell the students that you will give them a few minutes to silently write down anything (definition, example) they know about these terms. After a few minutes, ask the students to pair up with a partner to refine their lists. Invite volunteers to share the best items on their lists and write them on the board under the appropriate term. Then, have the students construct their own definitions of “principle” and “ideal.” (10–15 minutes)
2. Tell the students that the Delaware civics standards anticipate that they will understand the principles and ideals underlying the American political system. Today’s lesson is designed to help them uncover the principles and ideals underlying the American political system.
3. Project (or write on the board) the standard definitions of “principle” and “ideal.”
 - a. **Principle** – A basic truth, law, or assumption.
 - b. **Ideal** – One that is regarded as a standard or model of perfection or excellence.

Offer one example of a principle and one example of an ideal. For example:

- *Principle* – all power rests with the people.
- *Ideal* – the government treats everyone fairly.

Extend the Think-Pair-Share: Ask students to think of 2–3 additional examples of principles and ideals.

4. Project or distribute copies of the excerpt from Federalist Papers #10 that appears on Overhead #1.

- a. Draw the students' attentions to the excerpt. Ask them to read it and do their best to interpret its meaning. (5 minutes)
 - i. Ask for explanations – (*Definition of a faction*), do not be surprised if no one can explain the excerpt. That is one of the goals of this part of the exercise. If one or two of the student do understand the excerpt, ask them how they understood it (e.g., *broke it down into understandable pieces, understood the vocabulary*).
 - ii. Ask: “Why is this passage so hard to understand?” (e.g., *sentences too long, too many unfamiliar words, hard to read*).
 - iii. Ask: “How many of you didn't try to answer the question and why?” (e.g., *hard to read, didn't understand, didn't feel like it*).
 - b. Reveal the rewritten, annotated version of the excerpt and ask the students to tell you what it means.
 - i. Now they should be able to tell you that it is a definition or an explanation of a faction.
 - ii. Ask: “Why is it easier to understand?” Write the answers on the board, chart paper, or overhead. (e.g., *shorter sentences, easier vocabulary, not so many useless words, restructured sentences, more modern language*).
5. Divide the students into groups of two or three people. Write the following question on the board, and have the students brainstorm and record answers. “**What steps would you recommend to a person who has been asked to interpret the meaning of a difficult text?**” (5 minutes)
- a. Ask each group to give you one strategy that they feel would help transform a difficult excerpt into something they can read and understand more easily. Write their responses on the board, chart paper, or overhead.
 - b. Distribute copies of Handout 2 – *Steps for Analyzing Text*. Ask each group to organize the list of strategies into a sequential order – identifying the strategy that one should use start with, end with, etc. Examples provided below:
 - i. Identify the unknown words and phrases with a highlighter or underline them.
 - ii. Find synonyms for the words and phrases using a dictionary, thesaurus, context clues, or ask a knowledgeable person.
 - iii. Shorten sentences and delete unnecessary statements.
 - iv. Rewrite the passage for better understanding.
 - v. Once you fully understand the passage rewrite or summarize it in your own words and write down the major principles of the excerpt.

Day 2

6. Guided Practice: Review the “Steps for Analyzing Text” that the class developed and listed on Handout 2. Distribute dictionaries and thesauri. Project or distribute copies of Overhead 3 – *Guided Practice Activity*. Ask students to go through the reading, use the steps that they developed, and rewrite the passage in a more understandable way.
7. Project the original passage on an overhead so that you draw attention to how the passage looked originally. Ask volunteers to read and then paraphrase their annotated versions of Handout 3. Share the annotated document on Handout 3 with the class and let the students contrast it with their own interpretations.
8. Next, give each group 5–10 minutes to identify and explain any *ideals* or *principles* that they uncovered in the excerpt found on Handout 3.

9. Have each group share and explain the ideas or principles that they uncovered.

Day 3 [students should be seated with their groups]

10. Project a copy of Handout 4, **but cover up the title “Declaration of Independence.”** Ask students if they recognize the passage. From which document is it drawn? Highlight that it is an excerpt from the Declaration and that it is considered to be a document that explains the principles on which this nation was founded.
11. Distribute copies of Handout 4 to the class. Tell the students that they are to spend the next 20–30 minutes working in their groups to:
 - a. Rewrite (annotate) the passage so any American in the 21st century might understand it.
 - b. Uncover, list, and explain any principles found in the passage.
12. **When the groups complete their work**, pose the following questions to the whole class:
 - “*What are the basic principles of the American political system that you uncovered in the excerpt from the Declaration of Independence?*” (Responses should include equality, individual rights, consent of the governed, and right to revolution.)
 - To what extent do you think the American people have honored these principles? Support your answers with evidence or examples.
 - *What evidence can you provide to show that American people have **attempted** to honor these principles?* Offer an example drawn from the Constitution (e.g., Principle = consent of the governed; Attempt = holding elections for member of the House) then prompt students to think about other constitutional examples.
13. Culminating Project (Group Assignment): Distribute the following materials to each group:
 - Copy of the entire Declaration of Independence
 - Copy of the Constitution
 - Copies of the Principles Cards (“PCs”) found on Handout 5
 - Pair of scissors
 - Small ball of yarn
 - Roll of tape
 - a. Tell each group to cut out the Principle Cards (PCs) and place them to the left, the Declaration in the center, and the Constitution to the right (see Figure 1 below). You may have them at tables, on the floor, or taping them to the wall or bulletin board.
 - b. Then, select one principle, explain that principle on the appropriate card, locate where in Declaration that principle is identified, and locate where in the Constitution the American people have attempted to achieve each goal.
 - c. Repeat these steps for each of the four cards.

Then, they should (see Figure 1 below):

1. Cut out a piece of yarn (approximately 3–4 feet).
2. Tape it to one Principle Card.
3. Stretch the yarn to the point in the Declaration where that principle is identified and tape the yarn to that spot.
4. Stretch the yarn across to the Constitution to a specific provision where the students believe the American people have tried to achieve that principle.
5. Repeat these steps for each of the four principles on Handout 5.

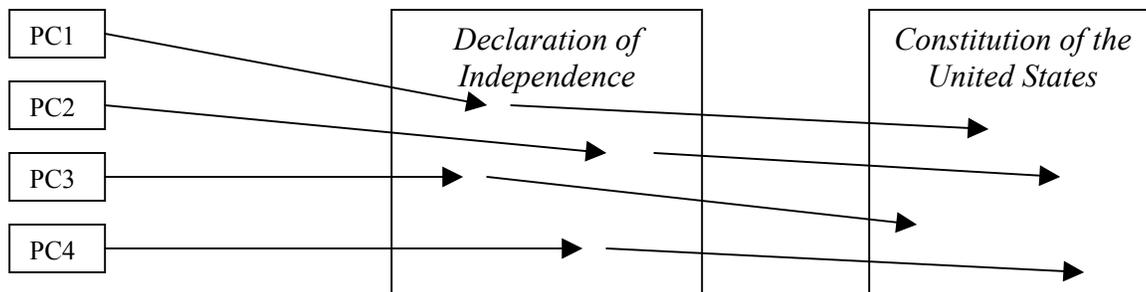


Figure 1

Closure: Draw students' attentions back to the essential question for the lesson. Ask them...

- What are some main principles enunciated in major American state papers and how have they been applied in the American political system?

Extensions:

- Can you think of other types of evidence (i.e., not in the Constitution) that show how the American people have tried to uphold the principles stated in the Declaration of Independence?
- What might be some examples of our failure to uphold the principles found in the Declaration of Independence?

Assessment: Administer the assessment (see Handouts 6 and 7 on pp. 12 and 13).

Overhead 1

Warm-up Activity

By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.

Excerpt from Federalist Paper No. 10

Annotated Version

A faction is a group of citizens. It can either be a majority or a minority. This group is encouraged and united by a common cause or interest. Their cause or interest can violate the rights of others and the community.

Handout 2

Steps for Analyzing Text

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Overhead 2

Steps for Analyzing the Readings

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Answers

1. Identify the unknown words and phrases with a highlighter or underline them.
2. Find synonyms for the words and phrases using a dictionary, thesaurus, context clues, or ask a knowing person.
3. Shorten sentences and delete unnecessary statements.
4. Rewrite the passage for better understanding.
5. Once you fully understand the passage rewrite or summarize it in your own words.

Overhead 3

Guided Practice Activity

AMONG the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction. The friend of popular governments never finds himself so much alarmed for their character and fate, as when he contemplates their propensity to this dangerous vice. He will not fail, therefore, to set a due value on any plan which, without violating the principles to which he is attached, provides a proper cure for it. The instability, injustice, and confusion introduced into the public councils, have, in truth, been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have everywhere perished; as they continue to be the favorite and fruitful topics from which the adversaries to liberty derive their most specious declamations.

Federalist Papers No. 10

Annotated Version

There are many advantages to a well created society. The one advantage that needs to be developed the most is the ability to control the harm caused by political parties. People who support governments run by the people find it alarming that there is a trend to have political parties and will be willing to go along with any lawful plan that provides a proper protection from the harm that they do. The instability, injustice, and confusion caused by political parties have been the downfall of popular governments. Parties are the sources of many inaccurate statements and the main threat to liberty.

Federalist Papers No. 10

Handout 4

Declaration of Independence

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. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Handout 5

Principle Cards

Individual Rights

Explain this principle:

Equality

Explain this principle:

Consent of the Government

Explain this principle:

Right to Alter Government

Explain this principle:

Handout 6**Assessment: Extended Response****Benchmark Statement:**

This assessment should give evidence of the student's ability to understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the *Declaration of Independence*, *United States Constitution* (including the *Bill of Rights*), and the *Federalist Papers*.

Declaration of Independence

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.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed....

Prompt: Describe one principle stated in the Declaration of Independence and explain how the American people have tried to uphold that principle in the Constitution of the United States.

Model Response:

Student describes a principle from the Declaration, cites a provision of the Constitution, and explains the relationship between the two.

Sample Response(s):

One principle stated in the Declaration of Independence is that people have fundamental rights – to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Constitution permits the government to raise an army to help protect our lives and liberty.

Rubric

2 = This response gives a valid response with accurate and relevant evidence.

1 = This response gives a valid response with an inaccurate, irrelevant, or no evidence.

0 = inaccurate or no response

Handout 7

Assessment: Selected Response

Benchmark Statement:

This assessment should give evidence of the student's ability to understand the principles and content of major American state papers such as the Declaration of Independence; United States Constitution (including the Bill of Rights); and the Federalist Papers.

"Fellow Citizens... The signers of the Declaration of Independence were... statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory....

... pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles... embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?"

Frederick Douglass
Independence Day Speech
Rochester, New York
July 5, 1852

Which of the following actions is not in agreement with the principles found in the Declaration of Independence?

- A. Holding frequent elections.
- B. Protesting government actions.
- C. Granting 18 year olds the right to vote.
- D. Making property ownership a qualification for voting.

Correct Response: D