

Dunlap's Declaration Dilemma

General

Grade Level

Middle School, High School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Challenge

Type of Project (Individual/Group/Both)

Both

Duration

30-60 minutes

Challenge Question

John Dunlap received notice that his printing press can no longer make full-size broadside copies of the Declaration of Independence!

The space allotment has been cut in half! How can you help him reduce, revise or summarize the key points of the document in order to successfully inform the public of the Continental Congress' important decision?

Rationale

Students will collaborate with 1-2 other students to review the original text of the Declaration of Independence in order to identify the most important aspects of the primary document.

Students will be forced to identify & choose elements of the text that they feel are MOST important for summarization & utilization in a "reduced size" Dunlap broadside.

Students will address motivations for choosing independence & union from multiple viewpoints

(geographic location, frequencies of incidents that involved British atrocities, etc.)

Students will submit their final summarizations & reductions for the smaller copy of the Dunlap broadside.

Notes to Teacher

This activity could also be performed offline by students by first showing initial measurements and images of July 1776 Dunlap Broadside, and then distributing paper “strips” of text from the Declaration of Independence to students in order to allow them to prioritize the most important elements of the text for the reduced version. This “pieces of the puzzle” supplemental might be a time-saver for instruction time and still allow the student teams to make tough choice about what “stays and goes” in the revision/reduction process. This adaptation might be more useful for 8th grade level students, and original activity more comprehensive for 9-12 students.

Steps

1. Take a moment to review the First Edition, Declaration of Independence, from the Resource Drawer. This Dunlap Broadside measured 50cm x 40cm (19.7 inches x 15.75 inches) and had available space for 1340 words given the size of the typed font. This did NOT include the names and signatures of the delegates that adopted the measure in the Second Continental Congress. If Mr. Dunlap has to reduce the available printing space to 25cm x 20cm (9.85 inches x 7.88 inches) and can only print 670 words of the original document, 50% of the text has to go to the chopping block before printing!
2. First use a ruler, pencil/pen, and a sheet of notebook paper to measure how much space you'll have available to help Mr. Dunlap with his dilemma. Make marks to note the length and width (25cm x 20cm) of your available “working space.” If you would like, you may use scissors to cut the notebook paper down to the “new” size of the reduced broadside space.
3. Now review the actual text of the Declaration of Independence (1340 words minus the signatures) in a Google Document:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/19dkczl5j7wfgrod-zFAsQPBBs84lJprv5T9yVJF9ZWE/edit?usp=sharing>. Work with 1-2 other students to begin brainstorming about which elements of the text of the document MUST stay in the reduced broadside version, as well as which elements might be able to be removed or summarized. REMEMBER that the process of “reduction” cannot include revisions that change the meaning or intent of the delegates who adopted the measure!
4. Work with your student partners to compromise regarding which elements “make the cut” for the newer, smaller broadside. Use a new Microsoft Word or Google document and the Word Count feature to keep track of your space allotment (670 words.) Focused Thinking: The delegates carefully included elements in the Declaration of Independence that appealed to various geographic & social cross sections of the colonies in order to promote independence and early union among the infant states. Is it possible to address these multiple concerns in your reduced broadside to gain the support of the wide landscape audience?
5. Once you and your partner(s) have finished your revisions for approval, copy & paste or type the “new” summarized text into the submission space so that Mr. Dunlap can begin the process of making the smaller broadside. Your task is a great one... Will the anxious public be able to read, understand and follow the most important aspects of the original document in order to support the movement for independence? Good luck!

