

Everyone's A Critic: Declaration opponents

General

Grade Level

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

SKILL: How do you write a review?

CONTENT: How was the Declaration of Independence perceived by those loyal to the British?

Students will read British philosopher Jeremy Bentham's "Short Review of the Declaration," which critiques the Declaration of Independence. Then, students will summarize Bentham's criticisms in partner groups, reflect on the traits of a good review, and write their own reviews of the Declaration, from the perspective of a Tory. Lastly, the class will vote on the review that is most convincing.

Rationale

In terms of content, students will gain a greater understanding of the Declaration of Independence and that it was not universally beloved. In terms of skills, students will practice persuasive writing and will take the perspective of a historical mindset.

Notes to Teacher

I would use this as a follow-up lesson to one on Jefferson and the Declaration. The goal of this lesson would be to go into more depth on how the Declaration was perceived.

This lesson is designed for Advanced Placement U.S. History students who read at an advanced level, since the Bentham work is dense. However, the lesson can be modified for other reading levels by using only selected excerpts from the Bentham text.

Steps

1. Present a brief biography on British philosopher and anti-Locke thinker Jeremy Bentham. Then, instruct students to read Bentham's critique of the Declaration of Independence, which is attached and linked. As students read, they must fill out the "Guided Reading" handout to organize their ideas about the critique. Then, instruct students to organize into pairs and share the ideas they wrote on their handout.
2. Show a movie review clip or pass out a written movie review. (I recommend this New York Times review of a book on Jefferson called "American Sphinx": http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/23/reviews/970323.23staplet.html/14adam.html?_r=0) Make a T-chart on your board that is organized into "Good Traits" and "Poor Traits." Ask students for their feedback on the good and poor elements of the review, and list their ideas on the board. To conclude the idea generation session, talk about how they would write a book or movie review.
3. FOR HOMEWORK:

Using Bentham's piece and the example you chose in Step #2, instruct students to write their own review of the Declaration of Independence, from the perspective of a Tory. This might require a brief review discussion of what a Tory believes.

4. FOR THE NEXT CLASS PERIOD:

Students will read their reviews in class, and, at the end of the readings, students will vote on who wrote the most convincing review. The "winning criteria" will be based on the "Good Traits" list that you compiled earlier in the lesson.

5. FORMAT FOR THE "GUIDED READING" HANDOUT:

DIRECTIONS: As you read, fill out the prompts below. You will then share your ideas with a partner and report them to the class.

What words or phrases STICK OUT to you? (Write at least 4)

Is this a positive or negative review of the Declaration? _____

If you were to rate this review on a scale of 1 to 10 (10=perfect), what number would you give it?

Why?

Thomas Jefferson
MONTICELLO