

Unalienable Rights – Who Says?

Title: Unalienable Rights – Who Says?

Subtitle or Challenge question: How would different people (from different times) interpret an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence?

Grade level: 8-12*

*although this can be used by any teacher from any state this lesson is specifically designed to satisfy the Texas education code.

Topic/subject: Excerpt from the 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”

Declaration of Independence, 1776

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Lesson Type: teacher choice, can be mixed, individual or group

Duration: 1 class period

Lesson plan overview: This lesson is designed to satisfy the Texas education code requirement for students to study and recite an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. The students will help each other understand different viewpoints about the excerpt and what the vocabulary means to different people.

Prior knowledge: Vocabulary from the excerpt including: self-evident, unalienable, consent of the governed.

State or National Standards:

TEXAS

8th Grade: Click [here](#) for a copy of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

11th Grade: Click [here](#) for a copy of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

Objectives/Rationale: The state of Texas requires all students from grades 3-12 to study and recite an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. This activity will allow for this requirement to be met as well as some novel exploration of the material.

Outcomes: The students will be able to define various aspects of the excerpt including ideas about equality, unalienable rights and consent of the governed through multiple points of views and perspectives.

Steps: Depending on the size of the class this classroom activity can take up to the whole period.

- Put students in groups, 3-6 size. Have at least one [copy](#) of the excerpt for each group. If the students have an electronic device you can post this [site](#) for the excerpt.
- Have students read aloud the excerpt to satisfy the Texas code. I recommend a choral type recitation, project the excerpt or have individual copies ready, you can use this [presentation](#) to accomplish this and lead the class in a recitation.
- Each student will be assigned an archetype or historical figure. I recommend choosing before and either handing everyone a different archetype/figure card or slip of paper with the archetype/figure name on it. [Optional] It can be a secret which archetype the student is assigned so the other members of the group can guess who they are. You can project the archetype or historical figures on the board before they are assigned.
- [Optional] Depending on how much time you would like to give for the activity you may let students research their historical figure before they begin to reinterpret the excerpt. I have included brief biographical information on the character cards that can be printed out or you can include the link in a digital assignment (i.e. Google Classroom).
- The student then will have to reinterpret the excerpt as the archetype or historical figure by answering the guiding questions:
 - What does self-evident mean to you?
 - Do you believe all men are created equal, why or why not?
 - Are the three unalienable rights secured for you?
 - What does consent of the governed mean for you?
- You can print out papers for each group with the guiding questions from this [presentation](#) or you can project it on the board with this slideshow [here](#).
- Have students come up with their own answers and then have each student share with their group. [Optional] The group can then guess which archetype or historical figure the students are presenting on.
- [Optional] have the students write a reflection based on the guiding questions to have an assessment to be turned in you may. The two options are below under Materials.
- [Optional] Lead the classroom in a debrief about the different viewpoints about what each element

means from the excerpts. You can ask the following questions:

- What are some self-evident truths for your character?
- How does your background change your opinions about:
 - all men are created equal
 - the meaning of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
 - consent of the governed (who is involved with this?)

Materials:

Copies of the excerpt of the Declaration of Independence or textbook copy of the Declaration of Independence or electronic access to the Declaration of Independence. Or you can simply click [here](#). Printable one page [here](#).

Unalienable Guiding Questions

These are the guiding questions that can be printed out or projected.

[Published Slideshow](#)

[Guiding Question Original Google Slide Source Material](#)

Archetype Presentation

This can be printed out six slides per page for ease of use or you can link to the presentation and/or project it for the students. This group is made up of individuals from 1776 Colonial America.

[Archetype Presentation Published Slideshow](#)

[Archetype Original Google Slides Source Materials](#)

Historical Figures Presentation (American History)

This can be printed out six slides per page for ease of use or you can link to the presentation and/or project it for the students. This group only includes historical figures from throughout American history.

[Historical Figures Published Slideshow \(American\)](#)

[Historical Figure Original Google Slides Source Materials](#)

Historical Figures Presentation (Texas History)

This can be printed out six slides per page for ease of use or you can link to the presentation and/or project it for the students. This group only includes historical figures from throughout Texas history.

[Historical Figures Published Slideshow \(Texas\)](#)

[Historical Figures Texas Original Google Slides Source Materials](#)

Historical Figures Presentation (World History)

This can be printed out six slides per page for ease of use or you can link to the presentation and/or project it for students. This group can be used for world history/geography teachers and does not include any American history examples.

Historical Figures Published Slideshow (World History)

Historical Figures World History Original Google Slides Source Materials

Assessment criteria: The main point of this activity to engage the students in taking up different viewpoints about an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. There are two options included to assess this but the interaction between students can be just as important.

Option A: reflection written by the student analyzing the viewpoints of the archetype or historical figure as he or she reinterprets the excerpt. Can be assessed by this [rubric](#).

Option B: student answers guiding questions about the excerpt in a worksheet style form seen [here](#).

Accommodations:

- Can be adjusted by assigning archetypes or historical figures the day before so students can do research on their own.
- It is not necessary for students to write a reflection or create written answers to the questions. Putting the students into groups allows for interaction about the materials, especially when the teacher leads a debrief at the end of the activity.
- Add additional archetypes or historical figures to adjust for your needs.