



“All Men and Women Are Created Equal”: The Declaration of Sentiments from the Seneca Falls Convention (1848)

Note: This lesson should be used after “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: A Lesson on the Declaration of Independence.”

Course | US History, US Government (AP or non-AP), Civics, Women’s History, Grades 11–12

Length | This lesson is designed for a 45-minute class period. Extension activities are included at the end of the lesson.

Objective | Students will be able to: understand the meaning and central ideas of the Declaration of Sentiments; cite textual evidence to analyze these primary sources; and compare and contrast the meaning and structure of the documents.

Common Core State Standards Addressed | Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 11–12:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5 Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

Materials Included | Each student should have a copy of the Declaration of Sentiments to read for homework. Students will also need their copy of the Declaration of Independence for use in class.

Teacher Background Information | Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) and Lucretia Mott (1793–1880), American activists for abolition of slavery and early activists for women’s rights, convened the first major conference on women’s issues in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The “Declaration of Sentiments” (also known as “The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments”), written by Stanton and Mott, was presented at the Seneca Falls convention, where it was signed by 68 women and 32 men. Modeled

on the structure and language of the Declaration of Independence, it seeks to prove, from the “history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman,” that man has “in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” Addressed, like the Declaration of Independence, to a “candid world,” it submits 15 facts to support this conclusion.

Class Activity

Student Preparation | Instruct students to read the Declaration of Sentiments, underlining meaningful word choices and defining words they do not know. Students should summarize in the margins the meaning, central ideas, and key themes of each section of the document. Students should also bring to class their copy of the Declaration of Independence that they studied earlier in the year. (See “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: A Lesson on the Declaration of Independence.”)

Warm-Up (10 minutes) | Instruct students to answer the following question in a paragraph:

- What sort of equality between women and men do you regard as crucial for the perfecting of our union?
- Have students share their answers with a partner.

Textual Analysis/Compare & Contrast (30 minutes) | Make sure students have both the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of Sentiments. Then, discuss the following questions:

- Thinking about the title of these documents, what is the difference between a Declaration of Independence and a Declaration of Sentiments? What difference—if any—should such a difference make?
- Comparing the original Declaration with this one, do you think Stanton and Mott were wise to use the first as their model? Why or why not?
- The Declaration of Independence opens by speaking about the political right of a people to “assume among the powers of the earth, the Separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them.”
 - What is the comparable opening claim in The Declaration of Sentiments?
 - To what exactly are women (as women, specifically) entitled by “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”?
- The paragraph about self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence issues in a defense of the right (and duty) of political revolution.
 - What is the conclusion of the comparable paragraph of the Declaration of Sentiments?
- The first of the 15 grievances listed against man is the denial of woman’s “inalienable right to the elective franchise.”
 - Why is this mentioned first? How does it inform or ground the other grievances?

- Is the right to vote an “inalienable right,” to be regarded on a par with the Creator-endowed rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Why or why not?
- Instruct students to highlight the personal, social, cultural, and religious grievances using different colored pens or different symbols.
 - How are the personal, social, and cultural grievances listed related to the religious grievances?
 - Are all of these things necessarily connected?

Wrap-Up (5 minutes) | Instruct students to spend five minutes answering the following question with a partner: The right to vote is emphasized in Declaration of Sentiments. How important is the right to vote to you, and why?

Extension Activities | 1. Write an op-ed from the point of view of Elizabeth Cady Stanton as if she were alive today. What would Stanton think about the status of women’s rights today? Would she be pleased with the progress that has been made? Why or why not?

2. Choose a topic in the news today pertaining to women’s rights, such as the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act or women in combat in the military, and write an essay using the following prompt: How do these issues compare or contrast to the ones listed in the Declaration of Sentiments?



Declaration of Independence

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing Importance, unless suspended in their Operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the Accommodation of large Districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to Tyrants only.

He has called together Legislative Bodies at Places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Depository of their Public Records, for the sole Purpose of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly Firmness his Invasions on the Rights of the People.

He has refused for a long Time, after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries.

He has erected a Multitude of new Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People and eat out their Substance.

He has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies without the consent of our Legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the World:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us, in many Cases, of the Benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended Offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary Government, and enlarging its Boundaries, so as to render it at once an Example and fit Instrument for introducing the same absolute Rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all Cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our People.

He is, at this Time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the Executioners of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.

Nor have we been wanting in Attentions to our British Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the Necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.—And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

John Hancock

Samuel Chase

Wm. Paca

Thos. Stone

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

George Wythe

Richard Henry Lee

Th. Jefferson

Benj. Harrison

Thos. Nelson Jr.

Francis Lightfoot Lee

Carter Braxton

Robt. Morris

Benjamin Rush

Benj. Franklin

John Morton

Geo. Clymer

Jas. Smith

Geo. Taylor

James Wilson

Geo. Ross

Caesar Rodney

Geo. Read

Thom. Kean

Wm. Floyd

Phil. Livingston

Arthur Middleton

Button Gwinnett

Fran. Lewis

Lewis Morris

Rich. Stockton

Jn. Witherspoon

Fra. Hopkinson

John Hart

Abra. Clark

Josiah Bartlett

Wm. Whipple

Saml. Adams

John Adams

Robt. Treat Paine

Elbridge Gerry

Step. Hopkins

William Ellery

Roger Sherman

Saml. Huntington

Wm. Williams

Oliver Wolcott

Matthew Thornton

Wm. Hooper

Joseph Hewes

John Penn

Edward Rutledge

Thos. Heyward Jun.

Thomas Lynch Jun.

Lyman Hall

Geo. Walton



The Declaration of Sentiments (1848)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled. The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in church, as well as state, but a subordinate position, claiming apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.