

## Lesson 1.2: Replacing the Sovereign Monarch with the Sovereign People

Approximate Time: 50 minutes

Learning Goal: Conduct a close reading of an important primary source document (Declaration of Independence) and recognize how it lays the conceptual groundwork for a system rooted in self-government, where citizens are empowered to create their own laws, as they will do at KYA.

Materials: Unit 1 Power Point; Declaration of Independence (annotated)

**BELLRINGER/INTRO (5-10 minutes):** Students enter to a displayed slide/projected image that should contain the following instructions/info:

“Please have out your Declaration of Independence and your “translation” of your assigned section”

(Displayed in different fonts, sizes, and colors for a fun and humorous effect):

“OH NO HE DIDN’T!”

“SHADE”

“CALLED HIM OUT!”

“BURN NOTICE”

“CA\$H ME OUTSIDE”

“LET HIM HAVE IT”

“GAVE HIM THE WHAT FOR!”

“Am I missing any other good slang associated with harshly criticizing someone’s flaws?” 😊

This intro is intended to inject some light-hearted humor to begin the lesson and also to bridge the language gap between Jefferson’s formal style and the student’s understanding of what it means to really “call someone out”, etc. Once students are settled, ask if they can add any more (non-vulgar) slang to the list of ways to harshly criticize someone. Allow a few to be shared and then say:

*So you probably noticed from reading the Declaration of Independence that it’s author, Thomas Jefferson, had a very complicated and formal style of written communication. Our goal today is to sort of unpack all that to really get at what the document was saying, but understand this: EVERYONE in 1776 understood that TJ was UNLOADING on King George III. People just didn’t talk about or at monarchs this way; it was considered treasonous and punishable by death. In addition to reading the entire document, your homework was to sort of put into your own words the gist of one assigned section of it. Here again is the thumbnail sketch of the Declaration’s different parts:*

(display this in a slide and perhaps poll as you go who had each assigned portion)

\*Preamble: basically lays out why the 13 Colonies felt the need to issue a declaration...here’s why we’re doing this!

\*Rights: basic statement of the rights of the “People”, including their right to self-government. Probably the single most well-known portion of the thing.

\*Grievances (G1-G7): The bulk of the document is a laundry list of the failings of King George as a monarch...basically, “here’s why you stink and wont’ be our king anymore!”

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\*Declaration: this end part is where the actual “declaring” of independence takes place. In law-writing it is known as the “operative clause”, the language that directly says what action is officially being taken.

### Partner/Trio Work Time: (10-15 minutes)

*Please now get with the other person or persons who had the same section as you. Get together with your Declarations, compare what you each had as your “translation” and work together to create one written segment that you will offer up to the class as your understanding of your given section. You will have about 10 minutes to agree on your “translation.” I will come around to check on your progress and answer any questions. Get started!*

Teacher should move around the room helping students engage TJs language and style and put it into more direct/familiar form. Encourage non-vulgar slang or simplified language that gets to the same point that TJ makes in each section.

It is not necessary that teams get a full, point-by-point or word-for-word rephrasing of the original here; help students reach the point where they feel comfortable that they have captured the main thrust of the section and are ready to share it aloud in class.

After about 10 minutes, say:

*Ok, so keep in mind that in 1776 there was no internet, no phones, not even telegraph yet. Word of this Declaration got around as fast as a horse could gallop or as fast as a ship could sail. From the time the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration and put it out publicly, it was likely four or five WEEKS until King George sat down to read it!*

*Most people in the 13 colonies read it when it was republished in a local newspaper; it was customary back then for groups to gather in pubs or taverns or town squares and listen to the news of the day as someone read aloud from newspapers. So, many colonists first learned that their colony had broken away from England officially when they heard the Declaration read aloud in their home town. We’ll now recapture a bit of what that was like by having each group read aloud their own version of their assigned section...we’ll just go right down the list (indicate the “thumbnail sketch” slide of the document’s ten parts)...ready?...let’s go!*

Complete the round robin reading on the class’ combined Declaration using the list of parts on the displayed image to indicate the flow of the reading. Encourage a hearty round of applause for the effort when it is completed.

*Ok, great job. So let’s drill down to look at a few of the passages of the original to discuss them more fully. First, let’s consider all the grievances. Most of the document, over half, is this list of things that the King of England had done to harm the colonies and that made him “unfit” to rule. Each one of these things Jefferson mentions corresponds to some actual occurrence although he doesn’t really go into a detailed description. Can anyone recognize and explain any of the grievances?*

Students more familiar with American history may recognize a few, but otherwise offer these up:

*So in Grievance Section 7 it says “He...has destroyed the lives of our People.” Anyone remember or know about what that might be referring to? (Boston Massacre, among other events)*

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*And Grievance Section 6 refers to “cutting off our Trade with the world”, what was that? (Closing of Boston Harbor)*

*We can’t go through all these here, of course, but anyone hearing this in 1776 would have known exactly what Jefferson was referring to.*

*Now let’s look at the Rights section. Jefferson’s declaration that “all men are created equal” and that they have the right to “life, liberty, and happiness” are perhaps the most well-known parts of the Declaration. Why was this so earth-shattering at the time?*

(allow some discussion)

*In Europe and in most of the world at the time, the idea of an all-powerful Monarch ruling his/her people was the standard sort of “social contract” What did they think gave Kings and Queens the right to rule over others? (take responses, looking for “Divine Right of Kings”) Yes, Divine Right. Monarchs ruled because God intended that they rule. What does Jefferson say in the Rights section about who should have the power to rule? (The right and duty of the People to establish governments which get their power from the “consent of the governed.”) So this was truly Revolutionary...the People must give their consent to be governed under a system that they have the power to create and change as they see fit. In addition, the whole purpose of the system of government is to protect the “unalienable” rights that “their Creator” has “endowed” them with.*

*Jefferson replaces the “Divine Right of Kings” with a set of Divinely endowed Rights that the People have a right and duty to protect through self-government.*

*Before we conclude let’s also look at the “operative clause”, this actual last part where the official declaring of independence is happening. Take a pencil or highlighter or something and mark these words in there: “We...do...Declare...That these United Colonies are...Free and Independent States.” There’s lots of other wording in and around all that, but those twelve or so words are “it,” The Declaration of Independence. And it says that since they are Free and Independent they can do all the things that Free and Independent States can do. What are those things?*

*\*levy War*

*\*conclude Peace*

*\*contract Alliances*

*\*establish Commerce*

*Why do you think Jefferson includes these things specifically? (allow discussion but get to the following:*

*\*levy War (ready to fight if you want to go there)*

*\*conclude Peace (can also do it peacefully...kinda saying we can do this the easy way or the hard way...)*

*\*contract Alliances (HELLO FRANCE! Want to hurt your old enemy England? How ‘bout helping us!)*

*\*establish Commerce (OPEN FOR BUSINESS!...no more British rules about who we can/can’t trade with)*