

Signing the Declaration of Independence

Independence Hall

Educators Guide and Lesson Plan created by Kay Shields,
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Grade Level

3rd Grade

Time Required

45 - 60 minutes

Supplies/Materials Needed

- Quill pen
- Image of the signing of the Declaration
- A piece of paper, approximately 29 ¾ in. x 24 ½ in.
- Quill pen picture
- Blank paper
- Pencils
- Colors, markers, or colored pencils

Standards

3rd Grade SS TEKS

3.7, 3.8

3rd Grade RLA TEKS

3.10

Key Vocabulary

Government – people who make rules and laws

Local government – government for your city or town

Essential Question(s)

- What is the Declaration of Independence?
- Why was the signing of the Declaration of Independence so important?

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand what the Declaration of Independence is.
- Explain why the Declaration of Independence was signed.
- Identify who signed the Declaration of Independence and what signing it meant.
- Describe why the signing of the Declaration of Independence was important.

Pre-Museum Visit

Direct Instruction

Introduce the three levels of government: local government, state government, and federal government.

- Local Government – takes care of your community (city/town)
 - Examples: police and firefighters, garbage collection, and parks and libraries
 - Leader example: **mayor**
- State Government – takes care of the whole state (e.g., Texas)
 - Examples: state roads and highways, state laws (like school rules)
 - Leader example: **governor**
- Federal Government – takes care of the entire country (United States)
 - Examples: national laws, military, printing money
 - Leader example: **President**

Guided Practice Activity: “Who Does What?”

State government –
government for your
state

Federal government –
government for the
whole country

Constitution – a set of
rules for a country

Rights – freedoms
people have

Read a job or responsibility and have students decide which level it belongs to:

Examples:

- Fixing a broken traffic light →  Local
- Making laws for Texas schools →  State
- Running the army →  Federal

Students can respond by holding up: 1 finger (local), 2 fingers (state), 3 fingers (federal).

Game: “Government Go!”

Objective: Students will correctly match responsibilities to the correct level of government: local, state, or federal.

Materials: 3 labeled areas or signs: local, state, federal, and scenarios (some are listed below, or you can add your own).

How to Play:

1. Step 1: Set Up

Place the three signs in different areas of the room.

2. Step 2: Explain the Game

Say: “I will read a situation, and you must decide which level of government is responsible!”

3. Step 3: Play!

Read one scenario at a time. Students will then move to the correct area (local, state, or federal). After each round, discuss the answer together.

Example Scenarios:

- “A police officer helps keep your neighborhood safe.” →  Local
- “New rules for schools in Texas are created.” →  State
- “The army protects the country.” →  Federal
- “Fixing a pothole on your street.” →  Local
- “Making driver’s license rules.” →  State
- “Printing money for the country.” →  Federal
- “Building a new park in your town.” →  Local
- “Creating state highways.” →  State
- “Making laws for all Americans.” →  Federal

Museum Visit

Independence Hall

Activity: Signing the Declaration of Independence

Say: Have you ever signed your name on something important, like a card or paper? (let students answer)

Say: When you sign your name, it shows you agree with something. Today we will learn about a very important paper people signed a long time ago!

Direct Instruction: Signing the Declaration of Independence

Say: At the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the American colonies were ruled by England. The colonists felt the rules were unfair and they wanted to be free.

Say: A document saying the colonies wanted to be their own country was written in 1776, mostly by Thomas Jefferson.

Say: The signing of the Declaration of Independence started when the leaders met to agree on the document. 56 men from the 13 different colonies signed their names. When they signed the document, they were saying, “we agree,” “we want freedom,” “we are starting a new country.” One of the most famous signatures was John Hancock who wrote his name so large, many historians joke it is so that King George III did not have to put on his glasses to read it.

Say: Signing the Declaration was extremely risky. England did not want them to leave. If they lost the war, the signers could be punished. Signing the document took courage! And a lot of it!

*Show a painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and **ask:** What do you see? How do the people look? Serious? Proud? Nervous?*

Guided Practice: Would You Sign It

Read situations and **say:** Thumbs up or thumbs down: Would you sign your name?

Discussion Examples: “You want freedom from unfair rules,” “You are scared by believe it is the right thing to Declare Independence,” “You don’t want to take risks.”

Fun Activity: Sign the Declaration!

On the large piece of paper, write “Our Class Declaration.” Create a simple class statement together, i.e.: “I believe,” “Everyone should...,” “It is important to...” Students will then decide if they want to sign their name or choose not to sign.

Ask: How did it feel to sign? Why did you or didn’t you sign?

Independent Practice: Draw and Write

Students draw people signing the Declaration then write 1-2 sentences about the Declaration of Independence, i.e. “The colonists signed the Declaration to be free.”

Assessment: Check drawings and sentences.

Ask: Why did people sign the Declaration? What did signing show?

Post-Visit Activity

Lesson Introductions: The US Constitution

Say: What would you do if someone made rules for you, but you didn’t think they were fair?

Say: Long ago, the American colonists felt this way about England. They wanted to make their own choices.

Review: The Declaration of Independence (1776)

Explain in the kid-friendly language:

- The colonists wanted freedom from England
- They wrote a letter (Declaration of Independence) saying, “We want to be our own country!”
- The main author was Thomas Jefferson
- It says people have rights like: life, liberty (freedom), and the pursuit of happiness
- Key Idea: It declared our freedom.

Direct Instruction: The Constitution (1787)

Say: After becoming independence, the US needed rules. The Constitution is a plan for how our government works. The main author was a man named James Madison. It explains: who makes the laws, how leaders are chosen and what rights people have. The key idea for the Constitution is that it created our government rules.

Visual Comparison Chart

Document	What It Did
Declaration of Independence	Told England we were free
Constitution	Created rules for our country

Guided Practice Activity: “Which Is It?”

Read statements and students decide if it relates to the Declaration or Constitution:

- “We want freedom!” → ☒ Declaration
- “Here are the rules for our country.” → ☒ Constitution
- “We are no longer under England.” → ☒ Declaration
- “This explains how laws are made.” → ☒ Constitution
- Main author was James Madison → ☒ Constitution
- Main author was Thomas Jefferson → ☒ Declaration
- Adopted on July 4, 1776 → ☒ Declaration

Museum Visit Variations/Extensions

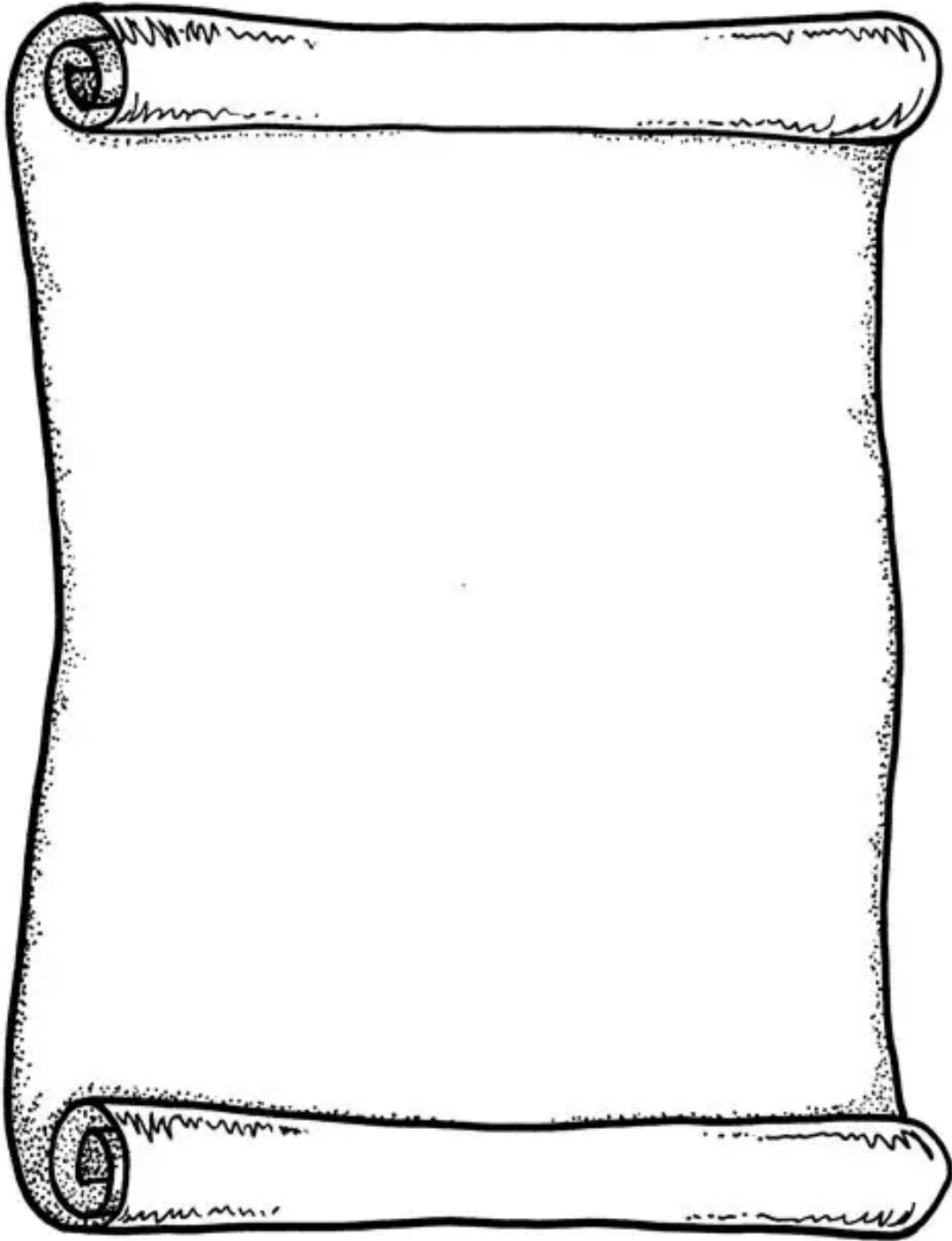
- Make "blackout poetry" with a copy of the Declaration of Independence or the first page of the Constitution
[blackout poem instructions with declaration.pdf](#)

Local Government

State Government

Federal Government

Direction: Draw people signing the *Declaration of Independence* and then write 1 – 2 sentences about the *Declaration of Independence*.



[illegible]