See the Documents That Forged a Nation

# Educator's Guide

HOUSTON MUSEUM *of* NATURAL SCIENCE

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a flexible toolkit to support visits to the ***Freedom Plane National Tour: Documents That Forged a Nation*** at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. It can be used in whole, or in part, depending on your schedule, standards, and students' needs.

### Intended Audience & Grade Bands

The activities are written with upper elementary and middle school students in mind (approximately grades 4–8), but most can be adapted for younger or older learners by adjusting the complexity of texts, questions, and products.

### Structure of the Guide

The guide is organized to follow a logical learning arc: big ideas and essential questions; background on the Freedom Plane and the featured documents; content strands (Revolutionary Scientists, Daily Life, Games and Toys, Law and Citizenship); and, finally, reflection and extension.

Within each strand you will find short background text for the teacher, student friendly explanations, and at least one ready to use activity or prompt.

### Pre Visit, During Visit, and Post Visit Use

Use the Big Ideas & Essential Questions and the Revolutionary Scientists/Revolutionary Science sections before your visit to activate prior knowledge and introduce key vocabulary and concepts.

Bring selected activity pages and graphic organizers to the museum (or assign them on tablets) so students can observe specific documents and record evidence, questions, and connections.

After the visit, use the Documents as Turning Points, Citizenship & Voice, and Museums & Memory sections to help students synthesize what they saw and apply it toward broader questions about rights, responsibilities, and how history is remembered.

### Adapting for Different Contexts

Each activity includes suggestions for shortening (quick bell ringer or exit ticket) or extending (multi day project, performance task) to fit periods ranging from a single class to a multi week unit.

Many tasks can be shifted between whole class, small group, or independent work; consider using jigsaw structures so groups specialize in different documents or perspectives and then teach one another.

### Standards and Skills Alignment

The guide is designed to support commonly taught content on the American Revolution, the founding documents, and civic ideals, as well as cross curricular connections to science and literacy.

Skill targets include analyzing primary sources, summarizing and explaining complex ideas in student friendly language, using evidence to support claims, and engaging respectfully in discussion and debate.

### Materials and Preparation

Most activities require only basic classroom supplies (paper, pencils, simple art materials), plus access to images of documents supplied by the museum or the National Archives.

Before your visit, preview which pages you will use, make necessary copies or digital assignments, and identify any adaptations or extensions needed for your learners.

Use this guide as a menu rather than a script: select the pieces that best support your goals, and feel free to remix activities, pair them with your existing Revolution resources, or adapt them to local and contemporary issues that matter to your students.

## BIG IDEAS

1. **Documents are tools of power.**
   The founding era documents did not just describe the new nation; they helped create and distribute political power, decide who had authority, and set rules for everyday life.

2. **Revolutionary ideas traveled through science, print, and people.**
   Scientific thinking, printed media, and networks of ordinary people helped spread new ideas about rights, government, and independence across colonies and oceans.

3. **Who is included in "We the People" changes over time.**
   The phrase "We the People" originally referred to a limited group, and struggles over citizenship, voting, and rights have continually reshaped who belongs and who is heard.

4. **Revolutionary change involves both conflict and compromise.**
   The road from protest to peace treaty involved debates, disagreements, and difficult compromises, as reflected in drafts, votes, and revisions of the founding documents.

5. **How we preserve and display documents shapes how we remember the past.**
   The decisions museums and archives make about which documents to collect, conserve, and exhibit influence which stories become central to our collective history.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. **What does it mean to "forge a nation," and why were written documents so important to that process?**
2. **How did science, technology, and new ways of thinking influence the American Revolution and the government that followed?**
3. **Who had a voice in creating these founding documents, and who was left out of the decisions they recorded?**
4. **How have ideas about citizenship and "We the People" changed from the 1770s to today?**
5. **In what ways do protests, petitions, and oaths of allegiance show different paths people took during the Revolution?**
6. **How do treaties, constitutions, and bills of rights try to balance freedom, order, and equity?**
7. **What choices do museums and archives make when they decide which documents to preserve, display, and send on tours like the *Freedom Plane*?**
8. **How can studying original documents help students today participate more thoughtfully in civic life?**

## THE FREEDOM PLANE STORY

The ***Freedom Plane National Tour: Documents That Forged a Nation*** brings a selection of founding era documents out of the National Archives in Washington, D.C., so that communities across the country can encounter them up close. These are original records that helped shape the United States—items like early declarations, oaths, treaties, and constitutional materials that are normally preserved in tightly controlled vaults. Together, they show how ideas about independence, power, and citizenship were argued, written down, and revised over time.

To safeguard these delicate materials, they are transported in a specially equipped Boeing 737, known as the "Freedom Plane." This aircraft serves as a mobile collections-care facility, where temperature, humidity, vibration, and light are meticulously controlled to meet museum standards as it travels from city to city. Custom-designed crates, shock-absorbing supports, and secure loading methods ensure that brief public exhibitions do not jeopardize inks, paper fibers, or wax seals dating back over two centuries.

The National Archives is central to this work. As the country's record-keeper, it protects and shares millions of federal documents—everything from handwritten founding papers to digital records from today. Archivists, conservators, and exhibition teams weigh which items can safely travel, how long they can be shown, and how to make 18th-century documents feel relevant now. The Freedom Plane tour is one way the Archives brings these treasures to more people while staying true to its preservation mission.

When the Freedom Plane stops at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, students get to see history up close. Suddenly, textbook names become real—there are actual signatures, scribbled corrections, and the handwriting of people from centuries ago. The exhibit is a reminder that history isn't just a list of old events. It's also about how we choose to care for, move, and understand the records left behind.

## THEN / NOW: FREEDOM TRAIN 1976 VS. FREEDOM PLANE 2026

### THEN: Bicentennial Freedom Train (1976)

- Traveled by rail across the United States to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.
- Carried a rotating selection of historical objects and documents, including some founding era materials, in specially outfitted railcars.
- Emphasized patriotic commemoration during the Bicentennial year, with large crowds, ceremonies, and a focus on national unity and celebration.
- Reflected the exhibition practices and conservation knowledge of the 1970s, with more limited environmental controls than are standard today.

### NOW: Freedom Plane National Tour (2026)

- Travels by air on a dedicated Boeing 737 to mark the lead up to the 250th anniversary of American independence.
- Focuses on a smaller, carefully chosen group of founding era documents, with environmental conditions monitored continuously in flight and on the ground.
- Emphasizes both celebration and critical inquiry, encouraging visitors to ask whose voices are represented in these documents and how ideas about "We the People" have changed.
- Reflects contemporary museum standards, with advanced climate control, security, and conservation planning designed to protect fragile originals while allowing short term public display.

You can invite students to compare these two traveling exhibitions as evidence that public memory changes over time: what we choose to put on the move, how we protect it, and what stories we tell around it all reveal shifting ideas about what it means to be an American and how a nation should remember its beginnings.

## DOCUMENTS OVERVIEW

**Declaration of Independence** (Stone Engraving, 1823)
A detailed 19th-century engraving by William J. Stone that recreates the original 1776 Declaration, featuring its well-known statements about equality and rights, along with the signatures of the delegates.

**Articles of Association** (1774)
An early agreement where colonial leaders promised to stop bringing in and using many British goods, as a way to protest new taxes and laws.

**Oaths of Allegiance** (Washington, Hamilton, Burr, and others, 1778)
Signed promises from officers and officials—including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Aaron Burr—to support the new United States rather than the British king, showing how loyalties changed during the Revolution.

**Treaty of Paris** (1783)
The peace agreement where Great Britain officially recognized American independence and set new borders for the United States after the Revolutionary War.

**Draft Pages of the U.S. Constitution** (Secret Printing, 1787)
Draft pages from a private printing of the Constitution, showing edits, crossed-out words, and handwritten notes as delegates debated how to set up a government with divided powers and shared authority.

**State Delegation Votes on the Constitution** (1787)
Records showing how each state delegation voted for or against the new Constitution, revealing both disagreement and support, and helping historians trace the path to ratification.

**U.S. Senate Markup of the Bill of Rights** (1789)
A draft of the proposed Bill of Rights that shows how senators edited, combined, and changed the first ten amendments before sending them to the states, highlighting that these protections were debated and revised—not automatic.

## ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENCE & GOVERNMENT

During the 1700s, many thinkers in Europe and the American colonies were part of the Enlightenment movement. Enlightenment thinkers believed that the world was governed by natural laws—regular patterns that could be discovered through observation, experiment, and reason. Scientists used these ideas to study plants, stars, electricity, and the human body. Philosophers and political leaders began to ask: if nature has laws, could human societies be governed by natural laws too? Could governments be designed using reason, evidence, and debate instead of tradition or the will of a king?

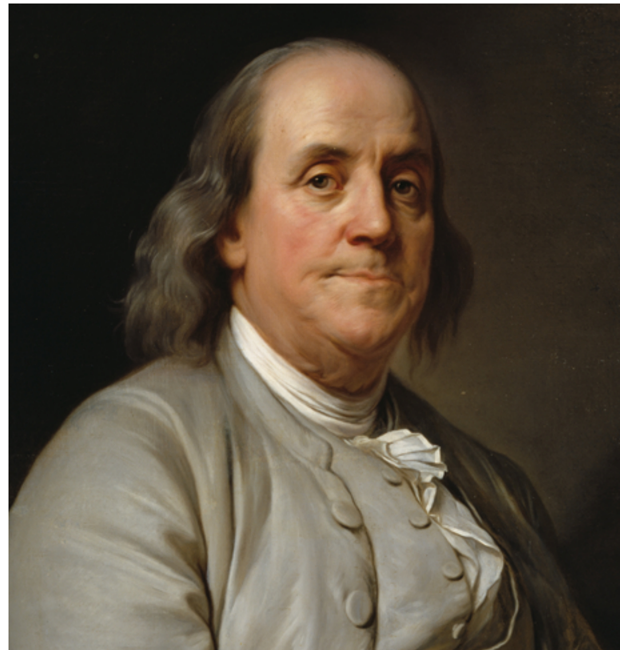
What if building a country was like running a science experiment—making plans, testing ideas, and revising when things didn't go as expected? This way of thinking influenced the American Revolution and the founding documents in several ways. Leaders like Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison argued, drafted, and redrafted plans for new governments, much like scientists testing hypotheses. They discussed "natural rights" that everyone is born with, such as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They also believed that dividing and balancing power would stop any single person or group from taking control. These ideas led to written constitutions, systems of checks and balances, and ways for laws to change when problems arose—just as experiments are adjusted in light of new evidence.

In the founding era, using science style thinking did not guarantee perfect fairness or equality. Many people were excluded from decision making, and the reality of slavery, the displacement of Native nations, and limited rights for women contradicted some Enlightenment ideals. Still, the habit of reasoning from evidence, debating in writing, and revising ideas helped create documents that could be challenged and improved over time.

ACTIVITY

## REVOLUTIONARY SCIENTISTS PROFILES

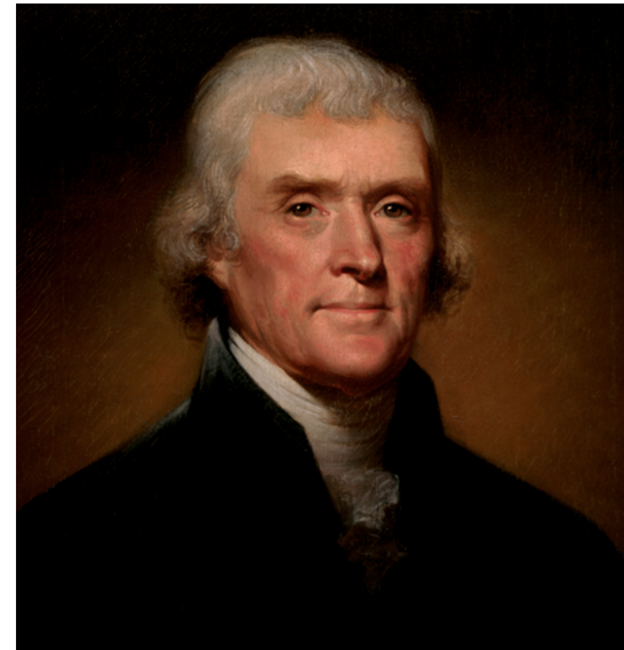
Use these short profiles as reading passages or station cards. Leave room beside each for a portrait or illustration and the reflection prompt.



### Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was a printer, inventor, and scientist whose experiments with electricity made him famous on both sides of the Atlantic. He used careful observation and simple equipment—such as kites, keys, Leyden jars, and metal rods—to test how lightning worked and how it could be safely guided away from buildings. His inventions, such as the lightning rod, bifocal glasses, and efficient stoves, were meant to solve everyday problems, not just impress other scientists. During the Revolution, Franklin also applied his scientific mindset to diplomacy, communication, and the postal system, helping ideas and information travel more quickly.

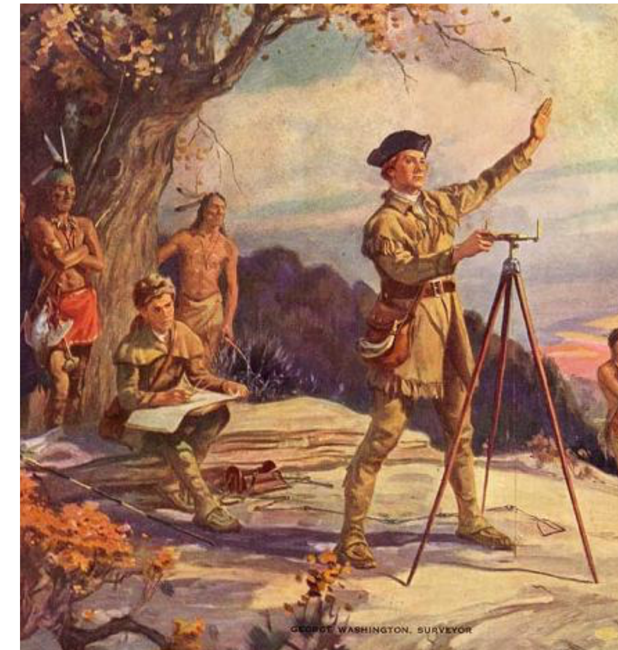
***What problem was he trying to solve?***
How can we understand and control natural forces like electricity and use knowledge to improve people's safety, comfort, and communication?



### Thomas Jefferson as a Scientist

Thomas Jefferson is best known as the main writer of the Declaration of Independence, but he was also deeply interested in science and technology. He collected fossils and plant specimens, studied architecture and agriculture, and used scientific tools like telescopes and surveying instruments at his home, Monticello. Jefferson believed that detailed measurements and observation could help improve farming, city planning, and even education in the new nation. His curiosity about the natural world also influenced his support for exploring and mapping western lands.

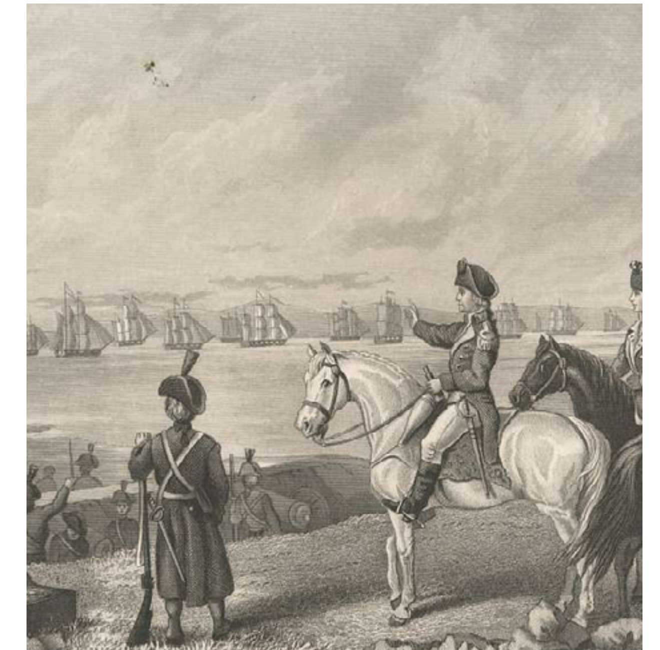
***What problem was he trying to solve?***
How can scientific observation and measurement help a new nation understand its land, resources, and possibilities for the future?



### Surveyors and Cartographers

Surveyors and cartographers measured land and turned those measurements into maps. Using chains, compasses, quadrants, and simple math, they marked boundaries of farms, towns, colonies, and, eventually, states. Their work was fundamental for deciding who owned which land, planning roads and forts, and arguing over borders in treaties and negotiations. During the Revolutionary era, accurate maps helped leaders plan campaigns, understand terrain, and make convincing cases in diplomatic talks.

***What problem were they trying to solve?***
How can we measure and draw the land accurately enough for people to agree on borders, property, and military plans?



### Military Engineers

Military engineers combined scientific knowledge with practical building skills to support armies in the field. They designed and constructed forts, trenches, defensive walls, bridges, and gun emplacements using geometry, physics, and knowledge of materials. They calculated artillery angles, studied the strengths and weaknesses of different fortifications, and planned how to move supplies across rivers, swamps, and mountains. Their work helped determine whether an army could hold a position, break a siege, or safely retreat.

***What problem were they trying to solve?***
How can we use math, physics, and design to protect soldiers, move armies, and increase the chances of victory in battle?

## SCIENCE WORD / GOVERNMENT WORD MATCHING

Try this matching activity as a warm-up or exit ticket. Students can draw arrows, cut and sort cards, or even come up with their own examples.

### Hypothesis → Proposal

A hypothesis is an educated guess that you test through experiments. In government, a proposal is a suggested plan or idea for how things could work.

### Experiment → Amendment

An experiment is a way to test a hypothesis, and it might need to be repeated. An amendment, on the other hand, is a change or addition to a constitution that gets tested by how it works over time.

### Evidence → Public Debate

Scientists use evidence to support or challenge ideas. In public debate, citizens and leaders share their own evidence and arguments through speeches, pamphlets, or documents.

### Model → Constitution

A scientific model is a simple version of something complex to help us understand it better. In the same way, a constitution is a written model that explains how a government is set up.

### Peer Review → Ratification

In peer review, other experts look over a scientist's work to make sure it's solid. Ratification is similar—states or voters review and officially approve a proposed constitution or amendment.

Encourage students to come up with their own pairs—like "data → votes," "variables → branches of government," or "prediction → preamble"—and explain why they made those connections.





## SCIENCE & THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### Weapons Technology

Revolutionary era soldiers used weapons such as smoothbore muskets, rifles, bayonets, cannons, and mortars. Understanding the physics of motion, force, and trajectory helped gunners aim artillery and decide where to place it on hills, behind walls, or in forts. Rifled barrels could be more accurate at long distances, but they were slower to load than muskets. Commanders had to weigh these trade offs when planning battles and training troops.

### Naval Science

At sea, knowledge of ship design, sails, and ocean currents was critical. Shipbuilders experimented with hull shapes and sail arrangements to make vessels faster or better at carrying heavy loads. Naval officers studied tides, winds, and currents to plan when to leave port, how to block enemy ships, and where to try to slip through a blockade. Understanding how a ship behaves in different conditions could be the difference between capture and escape.

### Weather and the Gulf Stream

The weather could ruin or rescue a military plan. Leaders observed the sky, wind, and temperature to estimate when storms might arrive or when fog might hide troop movements. Observers like Benjamin Franklin studied the Gulf Stream, a powerful ocean current, to explain why some ships made quicker Atlantic crossings than others. Using this knowledge, captains could choose routes that were faster, more efficient, or safer from enemy patrols.

### Mapping and Reconnaissance

Accurate maps were vital for planning marches, choosing battlefields, and deciding where to build forts. Scouts and engineers gathered information about roads, rivers, hills, and swamps, then turned their notes into maps for commanders. Good reconnaissance—learning where the enemy was, how many troops they had, and what the land looked like—called for careful observation, measurement, and sometimes secret signals or codes.

### Smallpox Inoculation

Disease killed far more soldiers than bullets in many 18th century wars. Smallpox was especially deadly and could spread quickly through crowded camps. Some doctors used inoculation, a risky but often effective method of giving a controlled exposure to the disease to build immunity. George Washington's decision to support inoculation for many Continental Army soldiers was controversial at the time, but it helped reduce outbreaks and keep the army strong enough to continue fighting.

### Exit Ticket

Have students respond in writing, in pairs, or as a quick class discussion:

### Exit Ticket Prompt:

Which scientific idea or practice do you think most changed the outcome of the Revolutionary War—weapon design, naval science, weather and the Gulf Stream, mapping and reconnaissance, or smallpox inoculation? Explain your choice using at least two specific reasons.

# ELECTRICITY & WEATHER
# STATIC ELECTRICITY & LIGHTNING ROD DEMO

Franklin used careful observation of electricity and storms to invent tools—like the lightning rod—that protected people and buildings. In this activity, students will dive into the world of static electricity. They'll get to see how charged objects can attract lightweight materials and use a simple model to understand how a lightning rod functions to safely direct electrical energy.

**Materials (per group or demo):**
Plastic comb or balloon
Wool cloth or dry hair
Small bits of paper or tissue
Aluminum foil strip or pie pan
Cardboard
Metal paper clip
Tape
Optional pencil for support

**Setup:**
Before the lesson, cut some paper or tissue into small pieces. If you're using the lightning rod model with small groups, it's helpful to prepare cardboard bases and foil pieces ahead of time. This way, students can concentrate on observing and discussing the results. Also, keep in mind that this activity works best in a dry environment, as static electricity tends to build up more easily when the air isn't humid.

**Activity Steps (Static Electricity):**

1. Have students rub a plastic comb or balloon on wool or hair for 10–15 seconds to build up a static charge.
2. Ask students to hold the charged object just above the small bits of paper on the desk without touching them. The pieces may jump, lift, or cling to the comb or balloon.
3. Repeat the test a second time and encourage students to compare what happens when the object is freshly charged versus when it has not been rubbed again.
4. Invite students to describe what they notice using observation words such as jumped, moved, attracted, or stuck.
5. Explain that static electricity is a buildup of electric charge and that the charged comb or balloon can attract lightweight objects nearby.

**Activity Steps (Simple "Lightning Rod" Model—teacher demo or small groups):**

1. Tape a metal paper clip upright to the center of a cardboard square to represent a lightning rod.
2. Place a small foil "roof" nearby, but not touching the paper clip. Tape it lightly in place if needed.
3. Charge the comb or balloon again and bring it near the foil roof. Observe what happens.
4. Now repeat with the upright paper clip in place and compare the foil roof's behavior with and without the "rod."
5. Ask students how the metal paper clip changes the setup and why a tall metal rod on a building might help guide electricity.

NOTE: Just to clarify, this model is really just a simple demonstration. It doesn't create real lightning, but it does a great job of showing how different materials and pathways can influence electricity.

## Discussion Prompts:

- What happened when the charged comb or balloon came near the paper pieces?
- What evidence did you see that an invisible force was acting on the materials?
- How did the foil roof behave when the paper clip "lightning rod" was present?
- Why might a pointed metal rod on top of a building be useful during a storm?
- How did Franklin's experiments and observations help people better understand lightning?
- Why might some people in Franklin's time have felt unsure about attaching metal rods to buildings?

## Teacher Notes:

This activity serves as a thinking model rather than an exact replication of how lightning behaves. It's important to highlight that lightning is a massive electrical discharge that occurs during storms, while our classroom demonstration deals with much smaller static charges. Remember, real lightning safety involves going indoors during a storm and never attempting to handle electricity outdoors.

**Extensions:**

- Have students test different materials, such as tissue, confetti, or cereal crumbs, to see which attracts the most.
- Ask students to sketch the setup and label where they think the electric charge is acting.
- Connect the activity to weather by discussing clouds, storms, and why tall buildings often have lightning protection systems.

# WARM/COLD WATER CURRENT ACTIVITY (GULF STREAM MODEL)

Differences in water temperature can help create ocean currents. In this activity, students model how warmer and colder water move differently and connect those observations to the Gulf Stream, an important Atlantic Ocean current that helped sailors plan safer and faster routes.

**Materials (per group):**
A clear tub or large glass baking dish
Cold water
A cup of warm (not hot) wate
Food coloring
Ice cubes
A spoon or droppe
Paper and pencil for observations.

**Set-Up:**
Fill the tub or dish with cold water before students begin and allow it to sit still for a minute so the water settles. Mix a few drops of food coloring into the warm water so students can easily track its movement. Place the ice cubes in a cup nearby so they are ready to add at the right time.

**Activity Steps (Static Electricity):**

1. Fill the clear tub or baking dish with cold water and allow the water to settle so students begin with a calm system.
2. Ask students to predict what will happen when warm colored water is added to one side of the tub. Encourage them to explain their thinking before the demonstration begins.
3. Slowly pour or use a dropper to add a line of warm, colored water to one side of the tub. Remind students to watch closely and avoid shaking the container.
4. Place a few ice cubes on the opposite side of the tub and observe how the colored water begins to move through the container.
5. Ask students to sketch the movement of the colored water and use arrows to show the direction of the current they observe.
6. If time allows, repeat the demonstration and vary one condition, such as the amount of warm water or the number of ice cubes, so students can compare results.
7. Discuss what students noticed about how temperature differences affected the movement of water.

**What Students Should Notice:**

- The warm colored water may spread and move across the tub rather than staying in one place.
- The colder area created by the ice can help show that water with different temperatures does not always behave the same way.
- The movement in the tub acts as a simple model of a current, or a stream of moving water.

**Connect to the Gulf Stream:**

Explain that Benjamin Franklin and other observers studied a warm Atlantic Ocean current called the Gulf Stream. This current flows along the Atlantic coast and across the ocean, and sailors who understood it could travel more efficiently than those who fought against it. Studying patterns in water and weather helped people make better decisions about navigation, trade, and travel.

## Discussion Prompts:

- What did you notice about the path of the warm colored water?
- How did the ice affect what happened in the tub?
- Why do you think temperature differences can cause water to move?
- How is this classroom model similar to an ocean current, and how is it different?
- Why would sailors want to understand the Gulf Stream before a long ocean voyage?

## Teacher Notes:

This is a simplified model, so the water movement in the tub is not exactly the same as a real ocean current. However, it helps students see that differences in temperature can influence how water moves. Encourage careful observation rather than expecting every group to see exactly the same pattern, since small changes in pouring speed or room conditions may affect the results.

**Extensions:**

- Have students compare this model to a weather map or ocean map showing large-scale currents.
- Ask students to write a short explanation of how understanding currents could help with travel, trade, or military planning.
- Let students test whether adding the warm water more slowly or more quickly changes the current pattern.
- Connect the lesson to modern science by discussing how scientists still study ocean currents because they affect climate and transportation.

## Reflection Question (for journals or exit ticket):

How might a better understanding of weather or ocean currents have helped a general or ship captain during the American Revolution? Give at least two examples.

# OPTICS, LENSES, AND READING THE DOCUMENTS

## Simple Lens Exploration

**Big Idea:** Lenses bend light to help our eyes focus. In this activity, students explore how a lens can make printed words appear larger and clearer, then connect that experience to how tools such as bifocals could help people read detailed documents more comfortably.

**Materials (per group):**
Hand lenses or plastic lenses
Printed text in various font sizes
Scrap paper
Pencils
Optional additional lenses for comparison

**Set-Up:**
Prepare several short text samples in different font sizes, including at least one version that is difficult to read without help. If possible, include more than one type of lens so students can compare how different lenses affect the appearance of text. Place materials at each table before students begin.

**Activity Steps:**

1. Give each group a small piece of text printed in a very small font and a larger version of the same text.
2. Ask students to try reading the tiny text first without any tools and describe whether the words are easy or difficult to read.
3. Have students use a hand lens or plastic lens to look at the same small text again and compare what they see.
4. Encourage students to move the lens closer to and farther from the page to notice how the image changes.
5. Ask students to record observations about how the letters look through the lens, such as whether they appear larger, clearer, blurrier, or more sharply focused.
6. If different kinds of lenses are available, invite students to compare a more curved lens with a flatter one and discuss any differences they observe.
7. Have students use scrap paper to sketch what the text looked like with and without the lens, or to write a few sentences explaining what changed.

**What Students Should Notice:**

- The letters often appear larger when viewed through a lens.
- The clearest view may happen only when the lens is held at a certain distance from the text.
- Different lenses may change the size or clarity of the text in different ways.
- A lens can make close-up reading easier by helping the eye focus on small details.

**Connect to Franklin and Bifocals:**

Explain that Benjamin Franklin is often associated with bifocals, which combine more than one lens power in a single pair of glasses. For people reading long, detailed documents—especially in dim light or at an older age—lenses could make the task much easier and less tiring. This helps students connect a simple classroom observation to a practical tool used for everyday life and work.

### Discussion Prompts:

- How did the small print look before you used the lens?
- What changed when you viewed the text through the lens?
- Why did the lens work better at some distances than at others?
- How might reading long, handwritten documents by candlelight have felt for delegates in their 40s, 50s, or 60s?
- Why would a person like Benjamin Franklin care about making reading easier?
- How can a simple scientific idea become a useful invention?

### Teacher Notes:

This activity introduces the idea that lenses bend light and can change how objects appear. Keep the explanation simple and observational unless students are ready for more detailed discussion about refraction and focal distance. Remind students that they should never use lenses to look directly at the sun or at very bright lights.

**Extensions:**

- Provide multiple font sizes and ask students to identify which size becomes easiest to read with and without a lens.
- Let students compare different lenses and sort them by which makes the text appear largest.
- Connect the lesson to document study by having students examine a short facsimile or “historical-style” handwritten text.
- Ask students to design an “improved reading tool” for someone who needs help seeing close-up print.

ACTIVITY

## CAMERA OBSCURA DEMONSTRATION

**Big Idea:** Long before cameras, people used simple optical tools to explore how light and images work.

**Materials:**
A shoebox or large cardboard box
Aluminum foil
White paper
Tape
A pin or sharp pencil

**Basic Steps:**

1. Cut a small square hole in one end of the box. Cover the hole with aluminum foil, then use a pin to poke a tiny hole in the center of the foil.
2. Tape a sheet of white paper to the inside of the box, directly across from the pinhole.
3. Dim the lights in the room, then point the pinhole toward a bright object, like a window or lamp.
4. Carefully peek inside from the side (or cut a small flap to look through) and you'll see a faint, upside-down image appears on the paper.

**Connect to the Founding Era:**

While delegates at the convention probably didn't use camera obscuras, scientists and artists of the time relied on similar tools to learn how light travels and how our eyes see. This knowledge later helped invent things like eyeglasses and bifocals.

**Mini Task: Design a Reading Tool for the Delegates**

Invite students to imagine that they have been hired to help delegates at the Constitutional Convention read clearly.

### Prompt:

"Design a tool that would help tired delegates read tiny handwriting on crucial documents late at night."

Student Task Options:

- Draw a labeled diagram of the tool (for example, a combined candle stand and magnifier, adjustable bifocals, or a slanted reading desk with built in lens).
- Write 3–4 sentences describing how the tool works and why it would be helpful in 1787.
- Optional extension: Compare their design to that of a modern reading aid (e-readers, reading lamps, screen magnifiers).



ACTIVITY

## FOOD, CLOTHING, MEDICINE

**Food: Rations, Boycotts, and Substitutions**

Soldiers and civilians did not always eat what they preferred; they ate what was available. Army ration lists often promised bread or flour, meat (like salted beef or pork), peas or beans, and sometimes rice, vinegar, or rum. In reality, supplies were uneven, and troops sometimes went hungry or relied on foraging and help from local communities. At the same time, patriot boycotts of British goods led families to substitute local products—using coffee instead of tea, homespun cloth instead of imported textiles, and locally grown foods instead of imported luxury items.

**Primary Source Snippet (Ration List—simplified):**

"Each soldier shall receive daily: 1 pound of bread or flour, ¾ pound of beef or ½ pound of pork, and, weekly, 1 pint of peas or beans, 1 pint of vinegar, and ¼ pint of salt."

**Sourcing Questions:**

- Who might have created this list, and for what audience or purpose?
- What does this list suggest about how leaders thought about soldiers' needs?

**Clothing: Uniforms and Homespun**

Clothing in the Revolutionary era carried powerful messages. Continental soldiers often wore blue coats with different colored facings, but many had mismatched or worn out clothing, especially early in the war. Uniforms helped officers recognize units and helped soldiers feel part of something larger than themselves. At home, many patriots joined "homespun" movements, spinning and weaving cloth to avoid buying British textiles. Wearing homespun jackets, dresses, and shirts showed support for independence and economic self reliance.

**Primary Source Snippet (Clothing Order—simplified):**

"You are hereby directed to deliver to the regiment: 500 pairs of stockings, 300 woolen coats, and 400 linen shirts, as the men are greatly in want of proper clothing for the winter campaign."

**Sourcing Questions:**

- What does this order tell us about conditions for soldiers at this time of year?
- How might shortages of clothing affect the army's ability to fight?

# DATA, EVIDENCE, AND DECISION MAKING

## Classroom Data Collection Mini Lab

**Big Idea:** Just as Enlightenment scientists did, the delegates gathered information, considered evidence, and adjusted their thinking as they learned more—and we can do the same.

### Step 1: Pose a Question

Choose a simple, school appropriate question that allows different opinions, such as:

- Should school start later in the morning?
- Should homework be limited on weekends?
- Which is more important in a leader: honesty, intelligence, or bravery?

### Step 2: Collect Data

1. Have each student vote or rank options on a small slip of paper or a quick digital poll.
2. Tally the responses on the board or chart paper.
3. Ask students to help you create a table or simple bar graph showing the results.

### Step 3: Analyze the Data

Use prompts such as:

- Which option received the most support? The least?
- Are there any surprising patterns?
- What questions do this data not answer yet?

### Connecting to Enlightenment Style Reasoning

Enlightenment thinkers believed decisions about government should be based on evidence—such as data, maps, letters from citizens, and first-hand experiences. Delegates at the Constitutional Convention and in the state ratifying conventions followed this approach:

- Brought information from their home communities about what people wanted or feared.
- Read and wrote pamphlets, essays, and letters arguing for or against different plans.
- Revised drafts of the Constitution and later added the Bill of Rights after criticism and debate.

You can show that the class's graph is a small example of this process: it gives evidence about what students prefer, but it might not settle every question or guarantee a perfect solution.



### Reflection and Extension

**Discussion or Writing Prompts:**

- How did collecting and graphing data change the way you thought about the class question?
- If you had to write a "mini law" or rule for your classroom based on this data, what would it say?
- What other information would you want before making a final decision?

### Tie In to the Founding Documents:

Ask students to imagine they are delegates using evidence to decide about a new law or amendment. They can:

- Write a short "speech" supporting one side, using data or examples as evidence.
- Suggest one "amendment" to their classroom rule and explain why it improves the original idea.

This helps students see that using data, listening to different views, and revising rules are not just math or writing skills—they are key parts of how constitutions, bills of rights, and other important documents were created and changed.

## MEDICINE: CAMP DISEASE AND INOCULATION

Disease posed one of the biggest threats during the war. Because camps were crowded, sanitation was poor, and doctors knew less about how diseases spread, illnesses like dysentery, typhus, and especially smallpox moved quickly through the ranks. Many of the treatments at the time—like bloodletting or strong purges—were not just ineffective, but sometimes even harmful. Still, some doctors tried smallpox inoculation, exposing people to a mild case of the disease so they could recover and become immune. Commanders had to decide whether the risk of making soldiers sick in the short term was worth the long-term goal of protecting the whole army from a major outbreak.

**Primary Source Snippet (Inoculation Notice – simplified):**

"Notice is hereby given that such soldiers as have not yet had the smallpox may present themselves for inoculation, that they may be rendered fit for service without fear of the distemper."

**Sourcing Questions:**

- Why might some soldiers or officers have been afraid of inoculation?
- What does this notice suggest about how leaders balanced health risks with military needs?

## REVOLUTIONARY GAMES AND TOYS

**Marbles or Quoits (Rings)**

Children and adults in the 1700s played simple games that required only a few small objects and a flat space. Marbles and quoits (ring toss style games) helped players practice aim, strategy, and friendly competition—skills that also mattered in hunting and military life.

**Game: "Circle Marbles"**

**What you need:**

Draw a circle using chalk or tape. Place a few "target" tokens inside—these can be marbles, beads, or paper balls. Each player also needs one "shooter" marble or token.

**Rules:**

- Players take turns flicking or gently tossing their shooter from outside the circle, aiming for the targets inside.
- If you knock a target all the way out of the circle, you get to keep it for that round.
- At the end of each round, put all the tokens back and change the order of who goes first.
- Optional: Give points for each token won. After a few rounds, the player with the most points wins.





## RACE TRACK BOARD GAME: FROM PROTEST TO PEACE

Design a board game that traces the journey from the first protests to the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Use it as a collaborative class activity or as a ready-to-play template.

### Game Title: From Protest to Peace

**Materials:**
A long strip of paper or poster for a winding track
player tokens, markers, and a single die.

**Key Spaces:**

- Start: "New Taxes Announced"
- "Articles of Association Signed"
- "Battles Begin"
- "Declaration of Independence Adopted"
- "Winter at Valley Forge"
- "French Alliance"
- "Yorktown Victory"
- Finish: "Treaty of Paris Signed"

**Simple Rules:**

1. Each player puts their token on the starting space.
2. Players take turns rolling the die and move their tokens forward by the number rolled.
3. Certain spaces instruct players to move ahead (for example: "Allies send supplies—move forward 2 spaces") or move back (such as: "Supplies delayed—move back 1 space").
4. The first player to land on "Treaty of Paris Signed" wins the game.
5. Students can create chance cards connected to key people, battles, and documents to make the historical connections even stronger.

## SIGNAL GAME: MESSAGES ACROSS THE FIELD

During the Revolutionary era, armies relied on drums, fifes, flags, and messengers to share important information. This activity helps students experience how difficult it can be to send messages quickly, clearly, and accurately across a distance when people cannot simply speak to one another directly.

### Game Idea: “Signal Relay”

Big Idea: Clear communication is essential during any group effort, especially in battle. Signal systems can help send messages across a distance, but they only work well when everyone understands the code and responds quickly and correctly.

**Materials:**

A simple code key, such as red card for “advance,” blue card for “retreat,” yellow card for “hold,” or a list of flag positions

a few colored cards or flags

open space for students to move safely

optional stopwatch or timer.

**Set-Up:**

Before beginning, review the signal code with the whole class. Practice each signal once so students know what each color, flag, or position means. Choose an open area where groups can spread out enough to make the message relay feel more realistic.

**Rules / Activity Steps:**

1. Split the class into three groups: “Commanders” (1–2 students), “Signalers” (2–4 students), and “Units” (the rest of the class, grouped together).
2. Give the Commanders the code key and explain that they must choose a message without calling it out to the rest of the class.
3. The Commander selects one message, such as advance, retreat, or hold, and shares it only with the Signalers.
4. The Signalers have about 30 seconds to show the correct color, card, or flag sequence to the Units.
5. The Units respond by acting out the message, such as stepping forward, stepping back, freezing in place, crouching, or turning.
6. Pause after each round to check whether the Units understood the signal correctly. If not, ask where the confusion began.
7. Repeat with new Commanders or new signals so several students experience each role.
8. If students are successful quickly, increase the challenge by adding more signals, increasing the distance, or allowing only a very short viewing time.



**What Students Should Notice:**

- Messages can be misunderstood even when the sender thinks the signal is clear.
- Distance, timing, and attention all affect whether communication works well.
- A code is only useful if everyone has learned it the same way.
- Quick decisions become much harder when information is incomplete or confusing.

### Discussion Prompts:

- Which signals were easiest to understand? Why?
- Which signals caused confusion, and what may have caused the mistake?
- How did it feel to rely on visual signals instead of spoken directions?
- What might happen in a real battle if soldiers misunderstood a command?
- Why would armies need more than one way to send messages?
- How do people today communicate quickly across long distances in ways tha were not possible during the Revolutionary era?

### Teacher Notes:

Keep the focus on communication challenges rather than competition alone. Students do not need to know military history in detail to understand the lesson; the main goal is to help them experience the importance of shared codes, attention, and accuracy. For younger students, use only three simple signals. For older students, add more complicated sequences or limit the amount of time each group has to respond.

**Extensions:**

- Add a “noise” challenge by having some students move or distract from a distance, then discuss how confusion can affect communication.
- Create a student-designed signal system and test whether another group can learn and use it accurately.
- Compare visual signaling with spoken whispers or written notes and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each method.
- Connect the activity to modern communication systems such as radio, text messaging, or emergency alerts.

### Reflection Question (for journals or exit ticket):

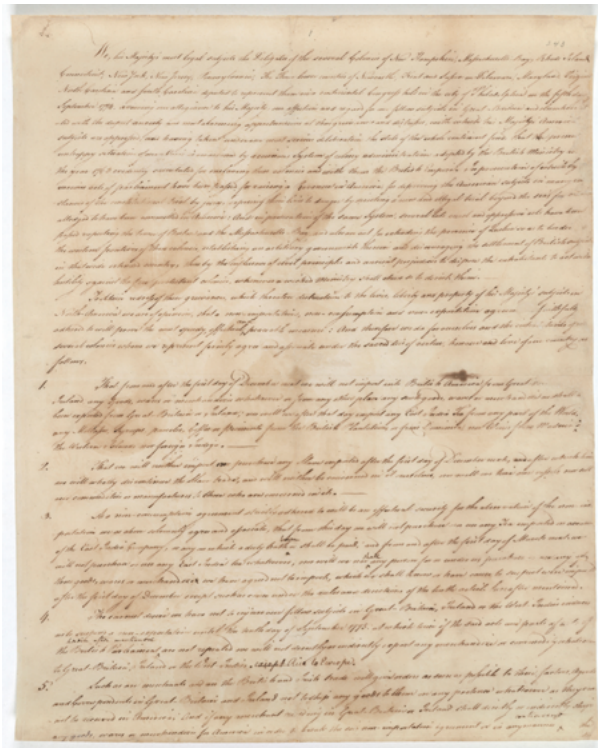
Why was it important for armies to have clear communication systems during the Revolutionary era? Describe one problem that might happen if a message was delayed or misunderstood.

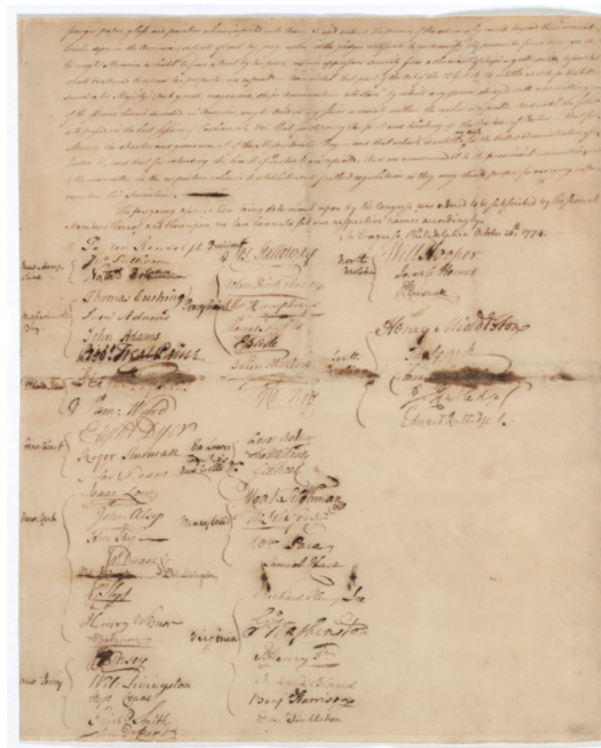
# ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION & PROTEST

**Background:** The 1774 Articles of Association

In 1774, delegates from twelve colonies met in the First Continental Congress to decide how to respond to new British taxes and laws. Instead of going straight to war, they agreed on a plan of **organized economic protest** called the Articles of Association. The document listed goods colonists would stop importing, buying, or using from Britain and its colonies, and it encouraged people to support local production instead.

By coordinating boycotts, colonial leaders hoped to pressure British merchants and lawmakers without firing a shot. If enough merchants, shopkeepers, and consumers agreed to follow the Articles, British businesses would lose money and push Parliament to change its policies. If too many people ignored the agreement, the protest would be weak, and the colonies would look divided.





**Articles of Association**
1774

**Activity:** Boycott or Not? Small Group Role Play

**Goal:** Help students understand how economic boycotts rely on everyday choices and shared commitment.

**Step 1—Roles**

Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of these roles (you can duplicate roles as needed):

- Colonial merchant who sells imported British goods
- Artisan or craftsperson who makes local products
- Farmer who sells food to both patriots and Loyalists
- Urban consumer who likes imported luxuries
- Member of a local committee enforcing the Articles of Association

**Step 2—Scenario Cards**

Give each group a brief scenario, such as:

- "You sell imported cloth and tea. If you join the boycott, you might lose money, but your neighbors say it's your patriotic duty."
- "You make homespun cloth. A boycott could bring you more customers, but you worry about angering powerful Loyalists."
- "You buy tea every day. You agree the new laws are unfair, but you also enjoy your habits and worry substitutes will be expensive."

**Step 3— Group Discussion (5–7 minutes)**

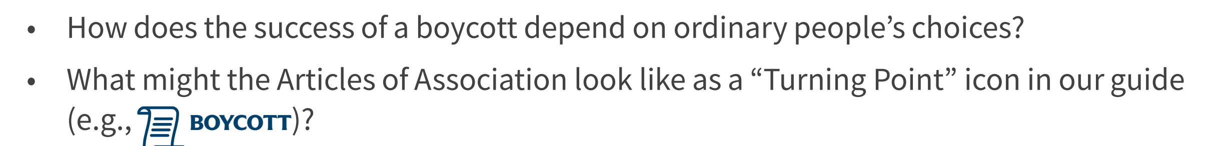
In groups, students discuss:

- Will your character follow the Articles of Association and join the boycott?
- What do you gain or lose if you do?
- What do you gain or lose if you don't?

**Step 4—Town Meeting Share Out**

Have each group briefly present their decision and reasoning in a "town meeting" format. You can track on the board how many choose to join the boycott versus ignore it.

**Reflection Prompt:**

- How does the success of a boycott depend on ordinary people's choices?
- What might the Articles of Association look like as a "Turning Point" icon in our guide (e.g.,  BOYCOTT)?

ACTIVITY

## DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (STONE ENGRAVING)

**Background:** Grievances and Audiences

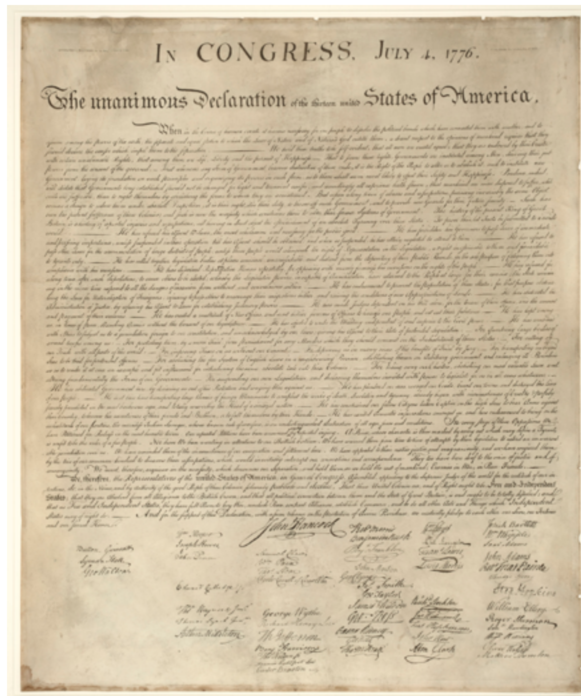
The Declaration of Independence, adopted in 1776, announced that the colonies were breaking away from British rule and explained why. The version traveling with the Freedom Plane is a later Stone engraving that carefully reproduces the original handwritten document, including signatures. The Declaration had several audiences: the king and Parliament, other nations (especially potential allies), and ordinary people in the colonies who needed to understand why such a risky step was being taken.

The document includes a powerful preamble that sets out ideas about rights and government, followed by a long list of grievances—complaints against the King and his officials. These grievances describe abuses of power, unfair laws, and violations of the colonists' rights.

**Short Excerpt (Teacher Selected Preamble Line, Simplified)**

Offer students a short, paraphrased excerpt to work with, such as:
"We believe that all people are created equal, that they have basic rights that cannot be taken away, and that governments are created to protect those rights."

You can note that this is a simplified version of the ideas in the preamble, not the full original wording.


IN CONGRESS. JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the ... States of America,

**Declaration of Indenpence**
Stone Engraving 1823

**Activity:** Big Idea Words & Kid Friendly Preamble

**Step 1—Highlight Big Idea Words**

Provide each student with the excerpt (or a slightly longer version). Ask them to:

- Circle or highlight 3–5 "big idea" words or phrases (examples: equal, rights, created, government, protect).
- Underline any words they think are especially important for kids today.

**Step 2—Word Bank**

On the board, create a class word bank of the most frequently chosen words. Discuss briefly:

- Which big ideas show up again and again?
- Do any words feel confusing or old fashioned? How could we say them differently today?

**Step 3—Kid Friendly Preamble (One Sentence)**

Ask students to write a one sentence "kid friendly preamble" using at least two words from the word bank. For example:

- "We think everyone is important and has rights, and our government should protect those rights fairly."

  They can draft individually, then share with a partner or small group.

**Optional Extension:**

Create a class "Declaration Wall" where you post a selection of student preambles along with a small image or icon for the Declaration.

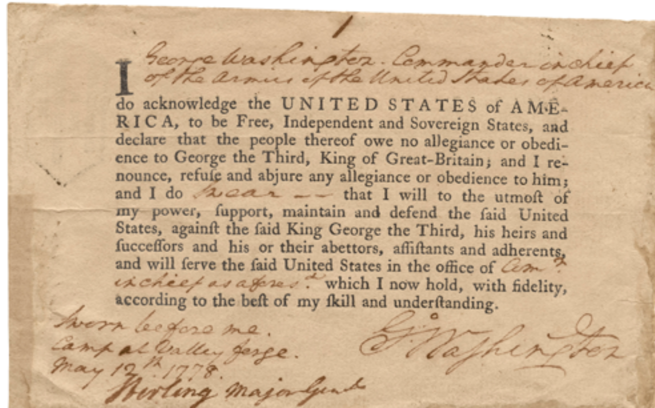
## ACTIVITY

# OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE (WASHINGTON, HAMILTON, BURR)

**Background:** Loyalty and Identity

During the Revolution, people had to decide where their loyalty lay: with the British Crown or with the new United States. **Oaths of allegiance** were written promises to support a particular side. The Freedom Plane exhibit includes oaths signed by figures like George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Aaron Burr, as well as other officers and officials. Signing an oath was not just paperwork; it was a public statement about identity and risk.

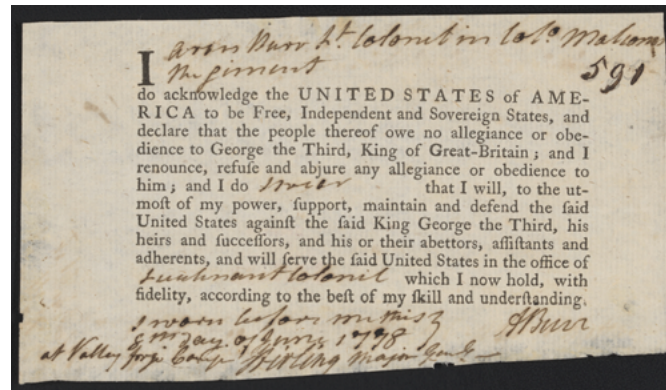
Swearing allegiance to the United States meant accepting that the new government was real and worth defending. It could also mean danger if the war went badly or if British forces regained control of certain areas. For some, refusing to sign could lead to lost positions, suspicion, or punishment.



I George Washington Commander in chief of the Armies of the United States of America do acknowledge the UNITED STATES of AMERICA, to be Free, Independent and Sovereign States, and declare that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience to George the Third, King of Great-Britain; and I renounce, refuſe and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him; and I do swear that I will to the utmoſt of my power, ſupport, maintain and defend the ſaid United States, againſt the ſaid King George the Third, his heirs and ſucceſſors and his or their abettors, aſſiſtants and adherents, and will ſerve the ſaid United States in the office of Com. in chief as afores.d which I now hold, with fidelity, according to the beſt of my ſkill and underſtanding.

Sworn before me. Camp at Valley Forge. May 12th 1778.
Stirling Major Genl.
G. Washington

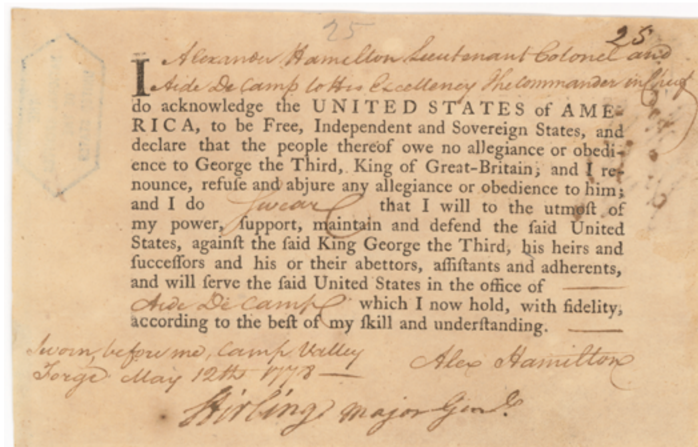
**Oath of Allegiance**
George Washington 1778



I Aaron Burr Lt. Colonel in Col. Malcom's Regiment do acknowledge the UNITED STATES of AMERICA to be Free, Independent and Sovereign States, and declare that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience to George the Third, King of Great-Britain; and I renounce, refuſe and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him; and I do swear that I will, to the utmoſt of my power, ſupport, maintain and defend the ſaid United States againſt the ſaid King George the Third, his heirs and ſucceſſors, and his or their abettors, aſſiſtants and adherents, and will ſerve the ſaid United States in the office of Lieutenant Colonel which I now hold, with fidelity, according to the beſt of my ſkill and underſtanding.

Sworn before me this [illegible] day of [illegible] 1778 at Valley Forge Camp
Stirling Major Genl.
A. Burr

**Oath of Allegiance**
Aaron Burr 1778



I Alexander Hamilton Lieutenant Colonel and Aide De Camp to His Excellency the Commander in Chief do acknowledge the UNITED STATES of AMERICA, to be Free, Independent and Sovereign States, and declare that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience to George the Third, King of Great-Britain; and I renounce, refuſe and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him; and I do swear that I will to the utmoſt of my power, ſupport, maintain and defend the ſaid United States, againſt the ſaid King George the Third, his heirs and ſucceſſors and his or their abettors, aſſiſtants and adherents, and will ſerve the ſaid United States in the office of Aide De Camp which I now hold, with fidelity, according to the beſt of my ſkill and underſtanding.

Sworn before me, Camp Valley Forge May 12th 1778
Alex Hamilton
Stirling Major Genl.

**Oath of Allegiance**
Alexander Hamilton 1778



**Activity:** Oaths and Pledges

**Step 1—Compare Texts (Teacher Selected Excerpts)**

Share a short, simplified excerpt from a historical oath of allegiance (for example, “I do solemnly swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the United States of America…”) alongside a school or classroom pledge your students know.

Ask students:

- How are these two texts similar?
- How are they different in tone, length, and consequences?

**Step 2—Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean to promise loyalty to a country, school, or community?
- What kinds of responsibilities come with that promise?
- Who might have felt nervous about signing a Revolutionary era oath, and why?

**Step 3—Draft a “Citizen’s Oath”**

Invite students to write a short “citizen’s oath” for their classroom, school, or community that focuses on positive responsibilities rather than obedience alone.

Guidelines:

- 2–4 short lines.
- At least one line about how they will treat other people (respect, fairness, listening).
- At least one line about how they will care for shared spaces or follow agreed upon rules.

Example frame they can adapt:

“I promise to do my best to support our community by .

I will treat others by .

When we disagree, I will .

I will take care of our shared spaces by .”

**Optional Extension:**

Students can illustrate their oath or sign it as a class, then discuss how their signatures are similar to and different from those on the historical oaths.

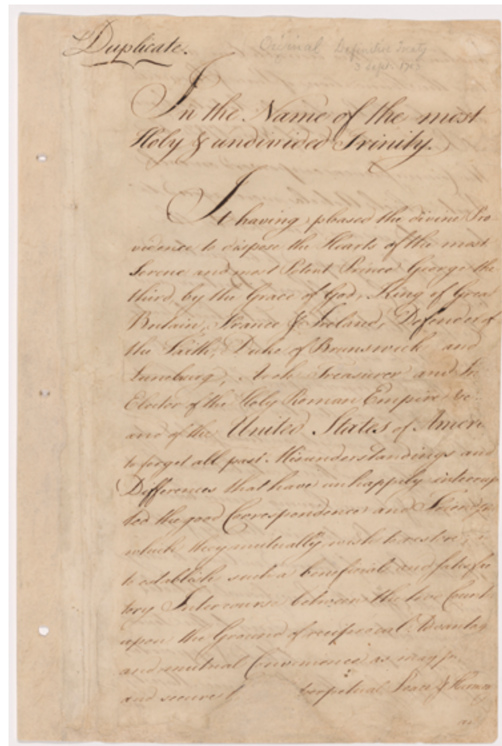
ACTIVITY

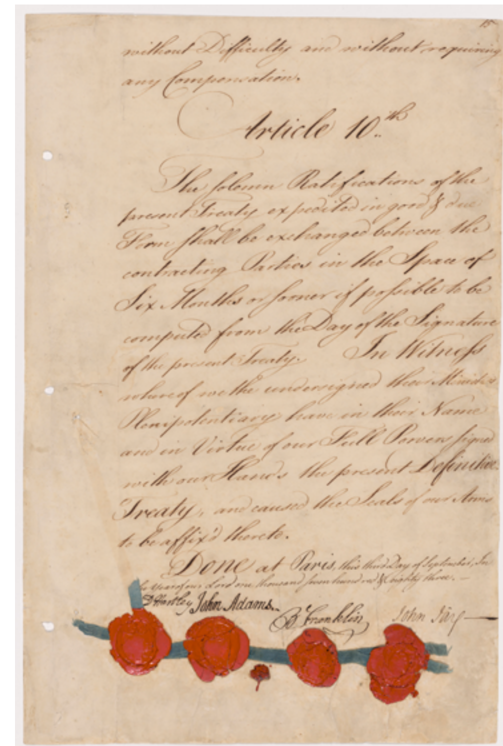
## TREATY OF PARIS & THE END OF WAR

**Background:** New Borders, New Nation

The **Treaty of Paris (1783)** formally ended the Revolutionary War. In this agreement, Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States and accepted new borders that stretched from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River, and from Canada in the north to Spanish Florida in the south. The treaty also addressed issues like fishing rights, the treatment of Loyalists, and the repayment of debts.

However, not everyone affected by the treaty was at the negotiating table. Many Native nations, enslaved people, and ordinary civilians had little or no say in decisions that dramatically reshaped their lives. The treaty is a turning point because it confirms American independence, but it also leaves unresolved questions about land, sovereignty, and freedom.





**Treaty of Paris**
1783

**Map Task:** Before and After

**Materials:**

Outline maps of eastern North America during the late 18th century (simplified)
Colored pencils or markers.

**Step 1—"Before" Map**

On the first map (labeled "Before the Treaty of Paris"):

- Have students outline and lightly shade the 13 colonies along the Atlantic coast.
- Color British controlled territory west of the Appalachian Mountains in a different color.
- Mark major neighboring powers (e.g., Spanish territories, French Canada) in additional colors as appropriate to your grade level.

**Step 2—"After" Map**

On the second map (labeled "After the Treaty of Paris, 1783"):

- Outline the new borders of the United States, extending to the Mississippi River and down to the northern border of Spanish Florida.
- Color remaining British holdings in Canada in one color and Spanish territories in another.
- Add a simple key/legend for colors.

**Step 3—Quick Discussion: Winners, Losers, and Missing Voices**

Use guiding questions such as:

- From the perspective of American leaders, why might the Treaty of Paris feel like a huge victory?
- How might British leaders feel about the new borders and lost territory?
- How might the treaty have affected Native nations living in the "new" U.S. lands who were not invited to the negotiations?
- What about enslaved people who had fought for either side, hoping for freedom?

You can record answers in three columns: "Gained Power/ Land," "Lost Power/ Land," and "Voices Not Heard."

### Reflection Prompt (Exit Ticket or Journal):

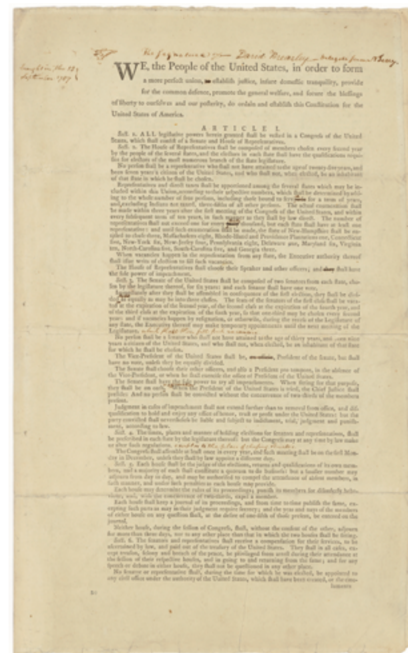
In what ways is the Treaty of Paris a turning point? Name one way it changed the map and one way it changed people's lives—even for those who were not at the signing table.

## DRAFT CONSTITUTION & STATE DELEGATION VOTES

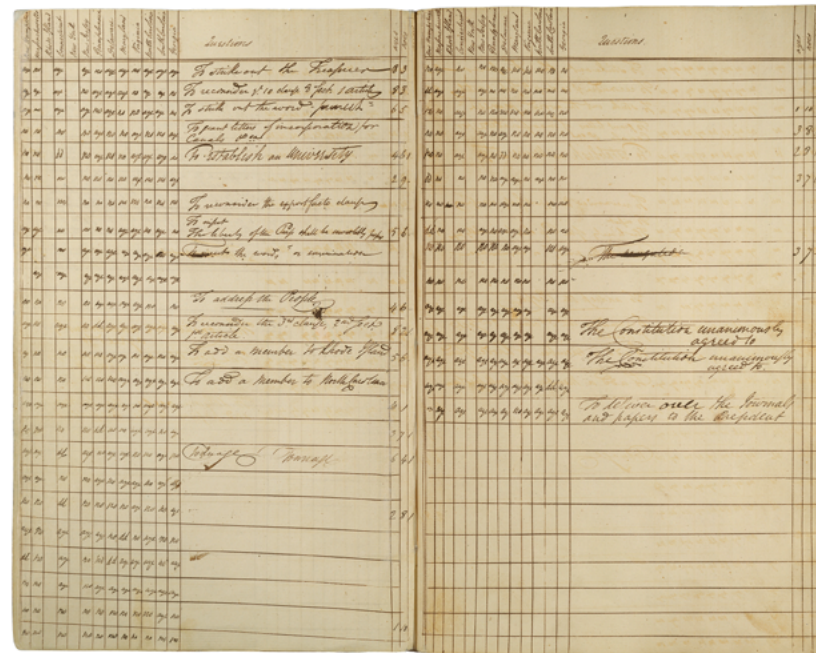
### Working Drafts and Final Decisions

The Constitution did not spring into the world fully formed. Delegates at the Constitutional Convention wrote, debated, and revised many **drafts** before they agreed on a final version. A draft is a "work in progress"—words can be added, crossed out, or rearranged as people change their minds or compromise. The traveling draft pages let students see evidence of this process: ink corrections, crossed out phrases, and new wording written above the line.

After the convention, the Constitution still was not official. Each state held a **ratifying convention** to debate and vote on whether to approve the new plan of government. Records of state delegation votes show that the Constitution was controversial. Some delegates worried it would give too much power to the central government or did not protect individual rights enough. Others believed a stronger national government was necessary for survival. The final vote counts remind us that "We the People" did not all agree, even on founding documents.



**Secret Printing of the Constitution**
David Bearley 1787



**State Delegation Final Vote on the Constitution**
1787

**Activity:** "Spot the Edits"

**Goal:** Help students see how small wording changes can make a big difference.

**Step 1—Provide Two Versions of a Short Clause (Teacher Adapted, Simplified)**

Create a short classroom safe example inspired by real changes (but simplified), such as:

- Draft Version: "The national government may make any laws it thinks are necessary and proper."
- Final Version: "The Congress may make laws that are necessary and proper to carry out the powers given to it by this Constitution."

**Step 2—Compare and Mark Up**

Have students:

1. Circle or highlight words that are different between the two versions.
2. Underline any words or phrases that seem to **limit** or **clarify** power (for example, "Congress," "powers given to it").

**Step 3—Discuss Why It Matters**

Prompt questions:

- Who has power in each version—"the national government" in general, or a specific branch ("Congress")?
- How does adding "powers given to it by this Constitution" change what laws can be made?
- Why might some delegates have pushed for the clearer wording?

**Optional Extension:**

Invite students to write their own "draft" and "revised" versions of a classroom rule, then explain how their edits make the rule clearer or fairer.

## STRUCTURE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

### Three Branches, Shared and Limited Power

The Constitution created a national government with three main branches so that no single person or group would control everything.

- **Legislative Branch (Congress):** Makes laws and controls taxes and spending.
- **Executive Branch (President):** Carries out laws, commands the military, and works with other nations.
- **Judicial Branch (Courts):** Interprets laws and the Constitution, decides if actions are constitutional.

This design reflects two big ideas:

- **Separation of Powers:** Each branch has its own main job.
- **Checks and Balances:** Each branch can limit or "check" the others, so power stays shared.

**Graphic Organizer**

Create a three column chart labeled:

- Column 1: "Branch"
- Column 2: "Main Jobs"
- Column 3: "Checks on Other Branches"

Students can fill in examples such as:

- Congress—passes laws; can override a veto; approves treaties and appointments.
- President—can veto laws; nominates judges; leads the military.
- Courts—can declare laws or actions unconstitutional.





## MINI CONVENTION ROLE CARDS

Use role cards to simulate some of the arguments delegates had about how strong the new national government should be and how states should be represented.

**Sample Role Types (copy/modify as needed):**

**1. Large State Delegate (Population Rich State)**

- Wants representation based on population (more people = more votes).
- Supports a stronger national government to solve shared problems.

**2. Small State Delegate (Less Populated State)**

- Wants equal representation for each state, no matter the size.
- Fears big states will control decisions without protections.

**3. Anti Power Delegate (Worried about Central Power)**

- Remembers abuses by the king and Parliament.
- Wants strong protections for states and individual rights.

**4. Pro Order Delegate (Wants Strong Central Authority)**

- Worried the Articles of Confederation were too weak.
- Believes a strong national government is needed for defense and trade.

**Quick Mini Convention Structure (15–20 minutes):**

1. **Introduce the Question:**
"Should the new national legislature give more power to large states, small states, or be balanced between them?"

2. **Small Group Prep (5–7 minutes):**
Students with similar role cards meet to list their top 2–3 arguments.

3. **Convention Discussion (8–10 minutes):**
   - Each group shares one main argument.
   - Encourage civil disagreement and evidence based reasoning.

4. **Class Vote and Reflection (5 minutes):**

- Students vote on a simple plan: population based, equal state, or a mix (like one house of each).
- Brief reflection: "Why is it so hard to design a government that feels fair to everyone?"

## ACTIVITY

# BILL OF RIGHTS & RIGHTS TIMELINE

Core Rights that Connect with Students

Soon after the Constitution was ratified, many Americans insisted that a Bill of Rights be added to protect individual freedoms and limit government power. The first ten amendments include several rights that are especially meaningful for students to consider:

- First Amendment: Freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly, and petition.
- Fourth Amendment: Protection from unreasonable searches and seizures.
- Fifth and Sixth Amendments: Due process rights, including fair trials and protections for people accused of crimes.

You can present these in student friendly language, emphasizing both what they **allow** people to do and what they **prevent** government from doing.

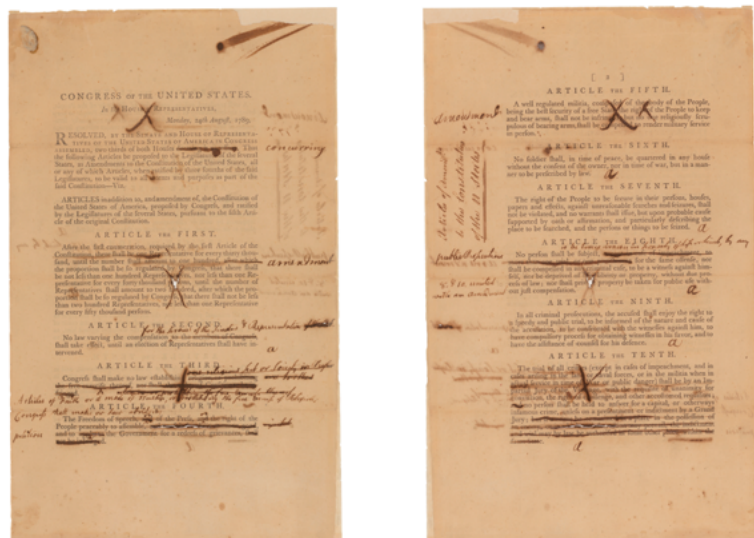
Classroom Practice: Rights in Everyday Life

Ask students to brainstorm examples of how these rights might appear in daily life, such as:

- Peaceful protests or petitions about school issues (speech, assembly, petition).
- Rules about needing a warrant or permission for certain searches (search and seizure).
- Fair procedures when someone is accused of breaking a rule (due process).

Students can create a simple two column chart:

- Column 1: “Right (Amendment)”
- Column 2: “Example in Real Life or at School”



**Senate Mark up of Bill of Rights**
1789



## ACTIVITY

# RIGHTS TIMELINE: CHANGING IDEAS OF CITIZENSHIP

To show that ideas about “We the People” continued to change after the founding era, have students build a timeline that begins with the Bill of Rights and stretches into later centuries.

**Timeline Starting Points:**

- 1791—Bill of Rights adopted (first ten amendments).
- 1865—13th Amendment abolishes slavery.
- 1868—14th Amendment defines citizenship and promises equal protection of the laws.
- 1870—15th Amendment prohibits denying the vote based on race (for men).
- 1920—19th Amendment grants women the right to vote.
- 1971—26th Amendment lowers the voting age to 18.

### Student Timeline Activity:

1. Provide a timeline strip or a blank horizontal line across a page.
2. Have students mark and label each amendment above, with a one phrase summary (for example, “Ends slavery,” “Defines citizenship and equal protection,” “Women’s suffrage,” “Voting at 18”).
3. Leave blank spaces on the timeline for students to:
   - Add other amendments or landmark laws they study later.
   - Add personal or local milestones (first time they or a family member voted, a major civil rights event in state history, etc.).

**Reflection Questions:**

- How did the definition of “We the People” change between 1791 and 1971?
- Which amendment on your timeline do you think had the biggest impact on people’s everyday lives, and why?
- What questions about rights and citizenship are people still debating today?

## WHO COUNTED AS A CITIZEN?

### Citizenship at the Founding

When the United States was founded, the phrase "We the People" did not refer to everyone living within the new nation's borders. In most states, the right to vote or hold office was limited by a combination of **property**, **race**, **gender**, and sometimes **religion**. White men who owned a certain amount of property were most likely to be recognized as full political participants. Many poor white men, most women, free Black people, enslaved people, and most Native people were excluded from official decision making, even though their lives were directly affected by the choices leaders made.

These limits were not the same in every state. Some states gradually reduced property requirements for white men. A few allowed a small number of free Black men who met property standards to vote for a time, while others explicitly banned them. Women, including wealthy women, were almost entirely shut out of formal politics. Enslaved people were counted in complicated ways for representation and taxation but had no political rights. This unequal system meant that the founding documents were both powerful statements of ideals and products of a society that did not yet live up to those ideals.

ACTIVITY

## "GALLERY WALK ON PAPER": WHO COULD VOTE OR SERVE?

This activity helps students see, at a glance, how rules about who could vote or hold office have changed over time, and notice who was included or excluded in different eras.

**Set Up**

- Post a series of large chart papers around the room, each labeled with a different time period or key change in voting/citizenship law (for example: "Early Republic," "After the Civil War," "Early 1900s," "After the Voting Rights Act").
- On each paper, include a short, student friendly summary of who was allowed to vote or serve in government at that time (for example: "White men who owned property," "Most men, but many people of color still blocked," "Women gain the vote," "Barriers like literacy tests removed").
- Leave space on each sheet for students to add notes, questions, and simple sketches.

**Student "Walk"**

- Divide students into small groups and assign each group a starting chart paper.
- At each station, groups read the summary and discuss: Who is included? Who is left out? How would this feel if you lived then?
- Students write or draw their responses directly on the chart paper: short reactions ("unfair," "more people included"), questions ("Why were women left out?"), and connections to today.
- After a few minutes, groups rotate to the next time period and repeat the process, building on what previous groups have written.

**Debrief**

- After visiting all stations, bring the class together to "walk" the room as a whole group and quickly skim what was added to each chart.
- Ask: What patterns do you notice about who gains rights over time? Where do you still see limits or exclusions? How does this connect to the idea that "We the People" has changed through struggle and debate?
- Optionally, have students choose one time period and write a short reflection: "If I lived then, would I be able to vote or serve? How might that shape my sense of belonging?"

# CITIZENSHIP TEST & CIVIC SKILLS

## Classroom "Citizenship Test"

This activity uses a quiz style format to introduce key ideas about the founding era and the responsibilities of citizens today. It can be used as a pre assessment, review, or conversation starter.

**Instructions for Teachers:**

- Emphasize that this is a learning tool, not a high stakes exam.
- You may read questions aloud, allow open note responses, or let students work in pairs

**Sample Question Bank (Teacher Selectable):**

1. Founding Documents
   - Name one founding era document that helped shape the United States (examples might include the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights).
   - What is one main purpose of a constitution?
2. Rights and Responsibilities
   - List one right protected by the Bill of Rights that is important to you and explain why.
   - Name one responsibility of citizens in a democracy (for example, obeying just laws, serving on a jury when called, or staying informed).
3. Participation and Voice
   - Give one example of how a student your age can make their voice heard in schoo or the community.
   - What is one peaceful way people can try to change a law or policy they think is unfair?
4. Inclusion and Change Over Time
   - At the founding, could everyone living in the United States vote? Answer yes or no and explain briefly.
   - Name one group whose voting rights expanded later through amendments or laws (for example, formerly enslaved men, women, or 18 year olds).
5. Founding Figures and Debate
   - True or False: All leaders agreed about the Constitution and there were no major debates.
   - Why do you think disagreement and debate can be useful in a democracy?

You can select questions to fit your time and students' readiness, mixing multiple choice, short answer, and "explain your thinking" prompts.



**Reflection: More Than a Test**

After students complete the "Citizenship Test," invite them to reflect on what the quiz does—and does not—measure.

**Reflection Questions (Writing or Discussion):**

- Did this test mostly measure facts, skills, or both?
- Could someone memorize all the answers and still not be a good citizen? Why or why not?
- What is one question you wish had been on the test?

**"Beyond the Test" – What Should a Good Citizen Be Able to Do?**

Use the following prompts to help students think about citizenship as an ongoing practice rather than a list of facts.

**Prompt 1—Evaluate Evidence**

- Why is it important for citizens to check sources, consider different viewpoints, and look for evidence before making up their minds about an issue?
- Have students brainstorm one situation (online or offline) where evaluating evidence would matter.

**Prompt 2—Listen and Communicate**

- Ask: "Can you be a good citizen if you only talk and never listen?"
- Have students list one way they can show careful listening in discussions, even when they disagree.

**Prompt 3—Participate and Take Action**

- Brainstorm ways students can participate now: joining a club, helping with a community project, writing a respectful letter, speaking at a school forum, or voting in a student council election.
- Ask each student to write one concrete action they could take in the next month to improve their classroom or community.

**Optional Extension: Class Civic Skills Chart**

Create a poster titled "Citizenship in Action" with three columns:

- Know (facts and concepts)
- Think (skills like evaluating evidence, recognizing bias)
- Do (actions like voting, volunteering, speaking up respectfully)

As a class, fill in examples under each heading. This visual serves as a reminder that citizenship involves knowledge, habits of mind, and everyday choices—not just passing a test.

## HOW MUSEUMS TELL STORIES

**People Behind the Scenes**

Museums and archives are not just buildings full of objects and documents, they are teams of people who make choices about what to collect, how to protect it, and how to share it with the public. **At the Houston Museum of Natural Science** and the **National Archives**, different specialists work together to turn collections into stories.

**Curators** decide which objects and documents to collect and display. They research the history and context of each item and plan exhibitions that connect individual pieces to big ideas and questions.

**Conservators** focus on preservation. They study the materials (ink, paper, metal, fabric), repair damage when possible, and set rules for light, temperature, and handling to keep fragile items safe for future generations.

**Designers** plan how exhibits will look and feel. They choose colors, layouts, lighting, and graphics so visitors can see important details and follow a clear path through the story.

**Educators** create lesson plans, tours, labels, and programs that make exhibitions accessible to different ages and learning styles. They help visitors ask questions, make connections, and think about why the past matters today.

When the **Freedom Plane** brings founding era documents to HMNS, all of these roles are at work. Curators and archivists have chosen which nine documents travel, conservators have prepared them for safe display, designers have created cases and panels that highlight key features, and educators provide guides like this one so teachers and students can dig deeper. The way these professionals arrange and explain the documents influences what visitors notice: whose names they see, which phrases stick in their minds, and how they understand "We the People."





## ACTIVITY: WRITE A 60 WORD EXHIBIT LABEL

**Goal:** Help students practice explaining an object or document clearly and concisely, just like museum staff.

**Step 1—Choose a Focus Item**

Students select one founding era document or related object to "curate." Possibilities include:

- Declaration of Independence (Stone engraving)
- Articles of Association
- Oath of allegiance
- Draft page of the Constitution
- Treaty of Paris
- A quill pen, printing press, or spyglass (for cross curricular use)

**Step 2—Brainstorm Key Points**

Have students answer, in notes:

1. What is it? (type of document or object)
2. When and where was it created?
3. Who was involved (author, signers, users)?
4. Why does it matter? (What turning point or big idea does it connect to?)

**Step 3—Write a 60 Word Label**

Students write a label of about 60 words (you can allow ±5) that:

- Names the item and date.
- Gives one or two key facts.
- Explains why it is important or how it connects to the exhibit theme "***Documents That Forged a Nation.***"

You might provide a frame such as:

Title (Year)

This [document/object] shows . It was created by during . It matters because .
Today, it helps us understand .

**Step 4—Share and Compare**

Post labels around the room or have students read them aloud. Discuss:

- What makes a label clear and engaging?
- How do different labels tell slightly different stories about the same object?

## PLANNING THE VISIT & REFLECTION

**Pre Visit Prompts**

Use these questions as journal entries or quick writes before your trip:

1. **What do you expect to see?**
   - “When I imagine the Freedom Plane exhibit, I picture…”
   - “One document I hope to see is…, because…”
2. **What do you wonder?**
   - “One question I have about the founding documents is…”
   - “I am curious about who was left out of these documents because…”
3. **Connecting to Big Ideas**
   - “How do you think these documents might show who had power and who didn’t?”
   - “Why might a museum bring these documents to our city instead of keeping them in one place?”





## ON SITE SCAVENGER HUNT (OBSERVATION CHECKLIST)

Students can carry this simple list (on paper or a device) to guide their observations:

Find and Note:

1. **Signatures:**
   - Find a document with many signatures.
   - Record: What is the document? How many signatures can you see (estimate)? Whose names are easiest to spot?
2. **Corrections or Edits:**
   - Find a document where words are crossed out or rewritten.
   - Record: What changed? What might that tell you about debate or disagreement?
3. **Dates and Places:**
   - Find two documents created in different years or locations.
   - Record: What are the dates and places? How does the story seem to move over time or space?
4. **Language about Rights or Duties:**
   - Find one phrase that mentions rights or freedoms.
   - Find one phrase that mentions duties, oaths, or obedience.
   - Record each phrase and why you think it was important.
5. **Object or Image that Surprised You:**
   - Note something you did not expect to see (a symbol, object, or detail).
   - Record: What surprised you and why?

Encourage students to sketch one seal, signature, or decorative element they find interesting.

## POST VISIT REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After the visit, use one or more of these prompts:

1. **What Stuck With You?**
    - "Describe one document or object you remember most clearly. What details caught your attention?"
    - "What is one thing you learned that changed how you think about the founding era?"
2. **Voices and Inclusion**
    - "Whose names and stories did you see highlighted in the exhibit?"
    - "Whose voices did you not see, and what questions does that raise?"
3. **Museums and Memory**
    - "If you were designing this exhibit, what would you keep the same and what would you change?"
    - "What responsibilities do museums have when they tell the story of a nation's beginnings?"

Students can respond through writing, discussion, or a short audio/video reflection.





## DESIGN YOUR OWN FUTURE 300TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBIT

Invite students to imagine a future traveling exhibit in the year **2076** (America's 300th birthday) or **2126**. What documents from our time would help people understand the United States 50–100 years from now?

**Prompt:**

"Choose 3–5 modern documents, images, or digital artifacts that you think should travel in a future 'Documents That Forged Our Century' exhibit. These could be laws, court decisions, speeches, photos, or important digital posts."

Student Planning Box (Template):

1. Exhibit Title:
2. Document 1:
    - Name/Type:
    - Why include it?
3. Document 2:
    - Name/Type:
    - Why include it?
4. Document 3:
    - Name/Type:
    - Why include it?
5. Optional Documents 4–5:
    - Name/Type and reason.

**Wrap Up Questions:**

- What do your choices say about what you think is important in our time—technology, rights, environment, culture, something else?
- How might future students judge our choices the way we now examine the founding documents?

This activity helps students connect the Freedom Plane exhibit to their own role in shaping the records and memories future generations will inherit.

# ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY & FURTHER RESOURCES

Some of the books featured in the Freedom Plane curriculum are also available for purchase in the Museum Store, allowing teachers and families to easily extend learning beyond the classroom. Visit **museumstore.hmns.org**

## Picture Books & Early Readers

***We the Kids: The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States* by David Catrow**

Humorous, detailed illustrations walk students phrase by phrase through the Preamble in kid friendly language. Useful as an entry point for discussions about "We the People" and student written classroom preambles.

***Shh! We're Writing the Constitution* by Jean Fritz, illus. Tomie dePaola**

A lively narrative about the Constitutional Convention that mixes humor with clear explanations of debates and compromises. Good for read alouds before activities on drafts, edits, and state votes.

***A More Perfect Union: The Story of Our Constitution* by Betsy Maestro, illus. Giulio Maestro**

Straightforward, richly illustrated overview of how the Constitution was written and ratified. Helpful " background for teachers and strong readers preparing to explore structure and checks and balances.

***If You Lived at the Time of the American Revolution* by Kay Moore**

Question and answer format introduces daily life, loyalties, and choices facing colonists. Pairs well with your "Daily Life & Play" and boycott/loyalty role play activities.

## Middle Grade, YA, & Graphic Histories

***Chains* (and the Seeds of America trilogy) by Laurie Halse Anderson**

Historical fiction following an enslaved girl in New York City during the Revolution. Offers a powerful lens on freedom, loyalty, and exclusion for literature circles and cross curricular discussions.

***The Notorious Benedict Arnold* by Steve Sheinkin**

Fast paced biography that complicates the "hero/ traitor" narrative and highlights the role of ambition, risk, and shifting allegiance. Works well with sections on oaths, loyalty, and turning points.

***Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution* by Gretchen Woelfle**

Short narrative profiles of Black Patriots, Loyalists, and others whose lives were changed by the war. Ideal for station work or jigsaw activities focused on whose voices are present or absent in the documents.

***Give Me Liberty! The Story of the Declaration of Independence* (graphic history, various publishers)**

Comic style retellings of the road to 1776 help visual learners follow key events and ideas. Pair with your Declaration page and "kid friendly preamble" activity.

***Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America* (select chapters or adapted resources)**

While written for adults, excerpts or teacher created adaptations can introduce students to Native perspectives on land, borders, and treaties, supporting your Treaty of Paris and "voices not at the table" work.

## Teacher Resources & Digital Materials

***Freedom Plane National Tour: Documents that Forged a Nation***

Explore primary source sets, and exhibit supports connected to the Freedom Plane National Tour and the documents it carries.

Use these materials to introduce students to the featured records before a visit, extend learning afterwards, or teach about the founding era even if you cannot see the exhibit in person. Many resources include downloadable document facsimiles, guiding questions, and adaptable activities for upper elementary through high school.

Website: DocsTeach → "Topics" → Freedom Plane → Teacher Resources & Digital Materials.

**Museum of the American Revolution —Teacher Resource Guides & Mini Lessons**

The museum offers downloadable lesson plans, primary source sets, and short "mini lessons" on topics such as protest, propaganda, and diverse participants in the Revolution. Materials often include ready to print handouts and discussion questions that align well with primary source analysis and turning point activities.

Website: Museum of the American Revolution → "For Students & Educators" → Teacher Resources.

**National Archives —DocsTeach & Founders' Documents**

DocsTeach provides digitized primary sources with built in interactive activities, plus tools for teachers to create their own document based tasks. The National Archives' founding documents pages supply high resolution images and transcripts of the Declaration, Constitution, Bill of Rights, and related materials—ideal for close reading, annotation, and "spot the edits" lessons.

Website: National Archives → DocsTeach; National Archives → "America's Founding Documents."

**Library of Congress—"Primary Source Sets" and "Creating the United States"**

Curated sets of documents, images, and maps on the Revolution and the creation of the Constitution, often with teacher guides and suggested questions. The "Creating the United States" exhibition materials are especially useful for connecting drafts, debates, and final texts.

Website: Library of Congress → Teachers → Primary Source Sets / "Creating the United States."

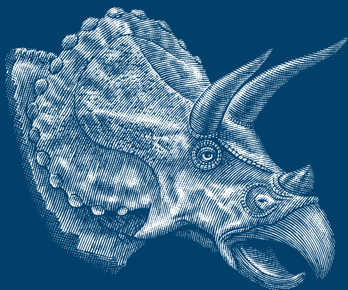
**Humanities Councils & State Archives (e.g., Humanities Texas)**

Many state level organizations provide free lesson plans, essays, and workshop recordings on the American Revolution, founding documents, and teaching controversial issues. These can give teachers concise content refreshers plus classroom strategies for discussing power, voice, and inclusion.

## IN CLOSING

The ***Freedom Plane National Tour: Documents That Forged a Nation*** offers a rare chance for students to encounter the founding era not as distant myth, but as a series of human decisions captured on paper. By pairing these documents with science, daily life, games, and civic practice, this guide invites learners to see the Revolution as both an 18th century event and an ongoing conversation about rights, responsibilities, and belonging.

You are encouraged to treat these pages as a toolkit rather than a script—adapting activities to your students, mixing them with your existing resources, and adding local connections and contemporary issues. As your students annotate preambles, debate boycotts, design games, and draft their own oaths and exhibits, they are not only studying history; they are practicing the skills of thoughtful, informed citizenship that will shape the documents and decisions of our shared future.



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