

Founding Principles

Compelling Question

In 1788, was the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men were created equal?

State Standard(s)

Kentucky/ 8H.CH.2, 8H. CH.2, 8H.CE.1
Ohio/Eighth Grade/ Content Statements 4,5,7,12
Ohio/High School/ American History/Founding Documents/Content Statements 4,5,6,7

C3 Framework Indicator(s)

D2.His.16.6-8; D3.3.6-8; D4.3.6-8
D2.His.16.9-12; D3.3.9-12; D4.3.9-12

Learning Goals

Students will understand

- That the founding principles of the United States were revolutionary but did not apply to everyone.
- That the debate over slavery is imbedded in the foundations of our nation.
- That history can be romanticized or distorted to promote a story.

Students will be able to

- Categorize the triumphs and shortcomings of the Declaration and Independence and U.S. Constitution.
- Explore the intentions behind idealizing history.
- Create a claim and support it with evidence.

Supporting Question

Was the Declaration of Independence revolutionary?

Featured Sources

- **Video:** “A Brief History of America’s Independence: Part 1”
[youtube.com/watch?v=tfnrdWYmZus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfnrdWYmZus)
- **Guided Text:** “The Declaration of Independence and Natural Rights”
- **Map:** “Economic activities of the colonies”
cabarrus.k12.nc.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=52975&dataid=319885&FileName=economic%20development%20map.pdf

Supporting Question

Why and how did slavery impact the Constitution?

Featured Sources

- **Text:** Summaries of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The sources
[archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/what-does-it-say](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/what-does-it-say) and <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights/what-does-it-say>
- **Infographic:** “Federalist vs. Anti-Federalists”
[behance.net/gallery/36767019/Federalists-vs-Anti-Federalists-Infographic](https://www.behance.net/gallery/36767019/Federalists-vs-Anti-Federalists-Infographic)
- **Video:** “Constitutional Convention: Federalists v. Anti-Federalists”
[youtube.com/watch?v=cVhHSSa7ojY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVhHSSa7ojY)

Featured Sources (cont.)

- **Text:** “The Declaration of Independence and Slavery”
- **Webpage:** “The Declaration of Independence and Its Legacy”
<https://www.ushistory.org/us/13a.asp>

Formative Performance Task

- The Causes of the Revolutionary War and the Founding Principles guide (Appendix A)
- The Declaration of Independence and Slavery guide (Appendix B)
- The Founding Principles guide (Appendix C)

Featured Sources (cont.)

- **Guided Text:** *5 key compromises of the Constitutional Convention*. Thought.co.
thoughtco.com/compromises-of-the-constitutional-convention-105428
- **Text:** Historical Context: The Constitution and Slavery
gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/teaching-resource/historical-context-constitution-and-slavery
- **Text:** Perspectives on the Constitution: Constitutions Around the World
constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-constitutions-around-the-world

Formative Performance Task

- 5 Key Compromises of the Constitutional Convention guide (Appendix D)
- The Founding Principles guide (Appendix C)

Summative Performance Task

ARGUMENT: Students will construct written claims answering the question - In 1788, was the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men were created equal? Students' claims must be supported by evidence presented during the inquiry. Importantly, to align with the C3 Indicator D4.3.9-12, students should identify “inconsistencies in evidence in order to... strengthen claims.”

EXTENSION: For a more in-depth performance task, students could conduct additional research and include outside sources in their claim.

Taking Informed Action

UNDERSTAND: Explore the question: Today, is the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men were created equal?

ASSESS: Students generate supporting questions based upon their research and general understandings.

ACT: Students should identify individuals who can provide them with evidence to answer their supporting questions, and the guiding question - Today, is the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men were created equal? Students could invite individuals to speak to the class or respond to their questions via video chat or email.

Inquiry Description

This inquiry requires students to evaluate and critique the general understanding of the founding principles that shape the United States. Through this inquiry, students recognize that the founding principles of the United States were revolutionary but did not apply to everyone. This understanding stems from their discussion and categorization of the triumphs and shortcomings of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. Students also recognize how the debate over slavery is imbedded in the foundations of our nation.

Additionally, students will investigate and critique the “stock story” of the creation of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution (Bell, 2010) while evaluating the founding documents (Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution) and engaging in civil discourse regarding our democracy. Through exploration and discussion, students will learn that history can be romanticized or distorted to promote a story and will question of implications of this.

Students will engage in social justice work by challenging normative thought regarding our nation’s founding documents. Students will consider the voices of those who were overlooked and disregarded as the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were written and consider the lasting impact of this action.

This inquiry embodies the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center principles of **courage** and **perseverance**. When challenging a “stock story” and broadening people’s understanding, they will learn that it takes courage to critique tightly held beliefs and perseverance to make a lasting impact on those beliefs.

We encourage teachers and students to visit our museum and further explore how slavery evolved during the colonial and Revolutionary War eras. Students will learn that our founding principles – “Laws of Nature”... “truths”... “all men are created equal”... “unalienable rights”... “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” – and others like it were entrenched in the Underground Railroad and Abolitionist Movement long before the Declaration of Independence. Freedom Seekers, Conductors and Abolitionists stood on the foundation and principles of freedom to fight against the institution of slavery. Students will learn about the diversity of this country, and how diverse groups can work together.

Required Prior Knowledge

This inquiry requires students to have existing knowledge about the causes of the Revolutionary War, the Enlightenment and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In addition, students will be tasked with identifying “stock story” elements and to question how and why history can be romanticized or idealized. If students have not engaged in such tasks, they need exploration and discussion of these concepts. Lee Anne Bell’s (2010) *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching* is a great teacher reference. A summary of this work can be found at lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/lee-anne-bell-counters-the-stock-stories-of-race-and-racism.

Staging The Compelling Question

Have students examine their reactions upon reading and listening to excerpts of the Declaration of Independence (archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript and youtube.com/watch?v=4uE-tqe0xsQ) and viewing Trumbull’s 1818 painting *Declaration of Independence* (aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/declaration-independence). You may choose to show an overview, such as this video (youtube.com/watch?v=faa5YMquv_8) instead of reading the entire document. Ask students how the texts make them feel and what messages are conveyed by the texts. Students should highlight poignant words and images in the texts. Prompts may include: What were the intentions of the Founding Fathers? What is the overall feeling you get from the texts? You may ask students to reflect upon the words “patriotic,” and “revolutionary.”

You may choose to have students evaluate books and videos, that are used to teach elementary students about the story of the creation of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. Provide students will the same prompts provided for the Declaration of Independence.

As a class, discuss the “stock story” of the foundations of the U.S. Have students determine the principles and



values this story typically promotes and the narratives and people that are typically included. Explore the concept of romanticizing and distorting history. Why does it happen? Can it be done to promote a version of a story? Is it a positive or negative thing?

Present the “stock story” of the U.S. as a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men were created equal. Explain that students will be critiquing this concept in the context of the Revolutionary War Era.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question asks – Was the Declaration of Independence revolutionary? Through exploration:

- **Students will understand** that the founding principles of the United States were revolutionary but did not apply to everyone.
- **Students will understand** that the debate over slavery is imbedded in the foundations of our nation.
- **Students will understand** that history can be romanticized or distorted to promote a story.
- **Students will be able** to categorize the triumphs and shortcomings of the Declaration and Independence and U.S. Constitution.
- **Students will be able** to explore the intentions behind idealizing history.

To activate their prior knowledge regarding the Enlightenment and the Revolutionary War, we recommend a brief video outlining the causes of the Revolutionary War ([youtube.com/watch?v=tfnrDWYmZus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfnrDWYmZus)) and the text “The Declaration of Independence and Natural Rights.” See appendix A for the text and guided reading activity. Discuss the prompts as a class.

Next, introduce the following 2 maps. The maps allow students to examine the relationship between:

- Economic activities of the colonies (cabarrus.k12.nc.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=52975&dataid=319885&FileName=economic%20development%20map.pdf)
- The spread of U.S. slavery 1790 – 1860 (lincolnmullen.com/projects/slavery)

Prompt students to compare the maps and draw conclusions regarding who supported slavery and why they supported it. Students should make the connection that agricultural areas depended upon slavery to maximize profits. Then, introduce “The Declaration of Independence and Slavery” (Appendix B) as a continuation of the story of the Declaration of Independence. Have students read individually, with a partner, or as a class. Discuss the prompts as a class.

To conclude, have students complete the Declaration of Independence portion of the Founding Principles guide (Appendix C). Emphasize the following civil liberties: unalienable rights; consent of the people; equality of rights for all citizens; and responsibility of the government to protect the rights of its citizens. You may choose to have students read “The Declaration of Independence and Its Legacy” (ushistory.org/us/13a.asp) prior to completing the guide.

Supporting Question 2

Supporting question 2 asks – Why and how did slavery impact the Constitution? While exploring this question:

- **Students will understand** that the founding principles of the United States were revolutionary but did not apply to everyone.
- **Students will understand** that the debate over slavery is imbedded in the foundations of our nation.
- **Students will understand** that history can be romanticized or distorted to promote a story.
- **Students will be able** to categorize the triumphs and shortcomings of the Declaration and Independence and U.S. Constitution.
- **Students will be able** to explore the intentions behind idealizing history.

Students should watch the video (6:15) explaining how The Constitution structured the national government and

defined the relationship between people and their government ([youtube.com/watch?v=bZ3Wjqp-4Fk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ3Wjqp-4Fk)). Students should note important information on the Triumphs and Shortcomings guide (Appendix C) while evaluating the video for stock story elements. Guide students in a discussion about important information and stock story elements of the video.

Next, lead students through an examination of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The sources [archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/what-does-it-say](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/what-does-it-say) and [archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights/what-does-it-say](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights/what-does-it-say) provide concise summaries. When examining the Bill of Rights, ask students to consider, why people would want these basic civil rights specifically outlined in the Constitution? What does this tell us about the concerns of colonists?

Continue by having students examine the challenges faced by the Founding Fathers when designing a government based upon the civil liberties promised in the Declaration of Independence: unalienable rights; consent of the people; equality of rights for all citizens; and responsibility of the government to protect the rights of its citizens. Students should watch this video (5:20) explaining the political differences between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVhHSSa7ojY>. As students watch, they can add notes to their copy of Federalist and Anti-Federalist infographic found at <https://www.behance.net/gallery/36767019/Federalists-vs-Anti-Federalists-Infographic>

Students should work with a partner or in groups to complete Appendix D, 5 Key Compromises of the Constitutional Convention. While discussing the prompts, students will answer the supporting question – Why and how did slavery impact the Constitution?

If you wish to include an examination of the Northwest Ordinance, the original text can be found at <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=032/lljc032.db&recNum=343>. A very brief overview of the Northwest Ordinance can be found at <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/congress-enacts-the-northwest-ordinance>. Ask students to consider the ordinance’s assurance of civil liberties and public education, and its ban on slavery. Students could also examine its consideration of the American Indians living in the territory (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/241.html>). This examination will help answer: What does the Northwest Ordinance tell us about the concerns and values of the emerging nation?

At this point, students should complete the final section of Appendix C, Founding Principles – “What were the triumphs and shortcomings of the U.S. Constitution?” To answer this question and finalize their inquiry notes, students should read the following arguments:

- Historical Context: The Constitution and Slavery
gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/teaching-resource/historical-context-constitution-and-slavery
- Perspectives on the Constitution: Constitutions Around the World
constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-constitutions-around-the-world

The formative performance requires students to classify essential elements of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution as triumphs or shortcomings and justify their choices by referencing the featured sources. Encourage students to engage in small group discussion as they classify information from the texts.

Summative Performance Task

In this task, students construct an evidence-based claim using multiple sources to answer the question – In 1788, was the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men were created equal? Students’ claims must be supported by evidence presented during the inquiry. Importantly, to align with the C3 Indicator D3.3.9-12, students need to identify “inconsistencies in evidence in order to...strengthen claims.” For a more in-depth performance task, students could conduct additional research and include outside sources in their claim. Another option is for students to present their claims in a form other than a formal written response. Students could write a poem or create an art piece and tell how it conveys their claim. Additionally, students could participate in a debate where each side represents yes or no regarding the compelling question. As an extension,

students could conduct further research on the topic and include this research in their argument.

Taking Informed Action

To connect past to present, students could explore the question: Today, is the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men are created equal? To promote inquiry, have students generate supporting questions based upon their research and general understandings. Students should identify individuals who can provide them with evidence to answer their supporting questions, and the guiding question - Today, is the United States a champion of unalienable rights and civil liberties where all men are created equal? Students could invite individuals to speak to the class or respond to their questions via video chat or email.

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