

Northwest History Consortium

Declaration of Independence

Carol Morgan

5th Grade

Era 3 / Standard 1

Montana Standards

Standard 2: Students access, synthesize, and evaluate information to communicate and apply social studies knowledge to real world situations.

Standard 4: Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships.

SCENARIO

When representatives of the American colonies met to form a new nation and declare their freedom from Great Britain, they considered many issues, including slavery. Thomas Jefferson, a slave owner from Virginia, included ideas from members of the Continental Congress as well as his own ideas about freedom to write the Declaration of Independence. In the first draft, he included a provision that abolished slavery. That section was deleted by the Continental Congress before it was signed in 1776.

The first section of the Declaration of Independence includes these words:

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness-- . . .”

The phrase “all Men” did not include African-Americans or Native American men. It also excluded all women of every race and nationality. The men who wrote the Declaration of Independence believed that men had the right to own property. Since slaves were considered property, and property had no rights, there was no reason to include any rights for slaves. Another section at the beginning of this famous document states that if any form of government does not grant life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to the people, they (the people) have the right to change or abolish the government and to form a new one that provides for their safety and happiness.

TASK(S)

You are a group of concerned citizens from 1776.

- Write a letter to Thomas Jefferson and tell him what you think "All Men are created equal, . . ." means.
- Tell him (Thomas Jefferson) what all three of our inalienable rights mean to you in your life.
- Recommend a new version for the first section of the Declaration of Independence.

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RESOURCES

Jefferson, Thomas. "Declaration of Independence." 1776. Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF-USA). 2009. Los Angeles, CA. 6 July 2009 <<http://www.crf-usa.org/foundations-of-our-constitution/declaration-of-independence-text.html>>.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Thomas Jefferson on Politics and Government: Inalienable Rights." 1995-2001. University of Virginia. 2009. Charlottesville, VA. 6 July 2009 <<http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff0100.htm>>.

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OPI. "Montana Standards for Social Studies." Montana Office of Public Instruction. 2009. Helena, MT. 6 July 2009 <<http://www.opi.state.mt.us/pdf/Standards/ContStds-SocSt.pdf>>.