
Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Viewing Guide

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. The Declaration isn't about safety or things government should do. It's about _____ . It's about freedom.
2. "Trust no man with too much government power, said Jefferson, "bind them with the chains of the _____."
3. Fortunately in America, thanks to the Constitution, we can say most anything we want without _____.
4. I'm glad I live in America, where I can carry pliers and _____ freely.
5. Still, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence have helped keep us free. That's something to _____!

Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:

Thomas Jefferson said that we should "trust no man with too much government power" and that we should "bind them with the chains of the Constitution." Why might he have said that?

What is the difference between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution? _____

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected, whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & Perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Declaration of Independence

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

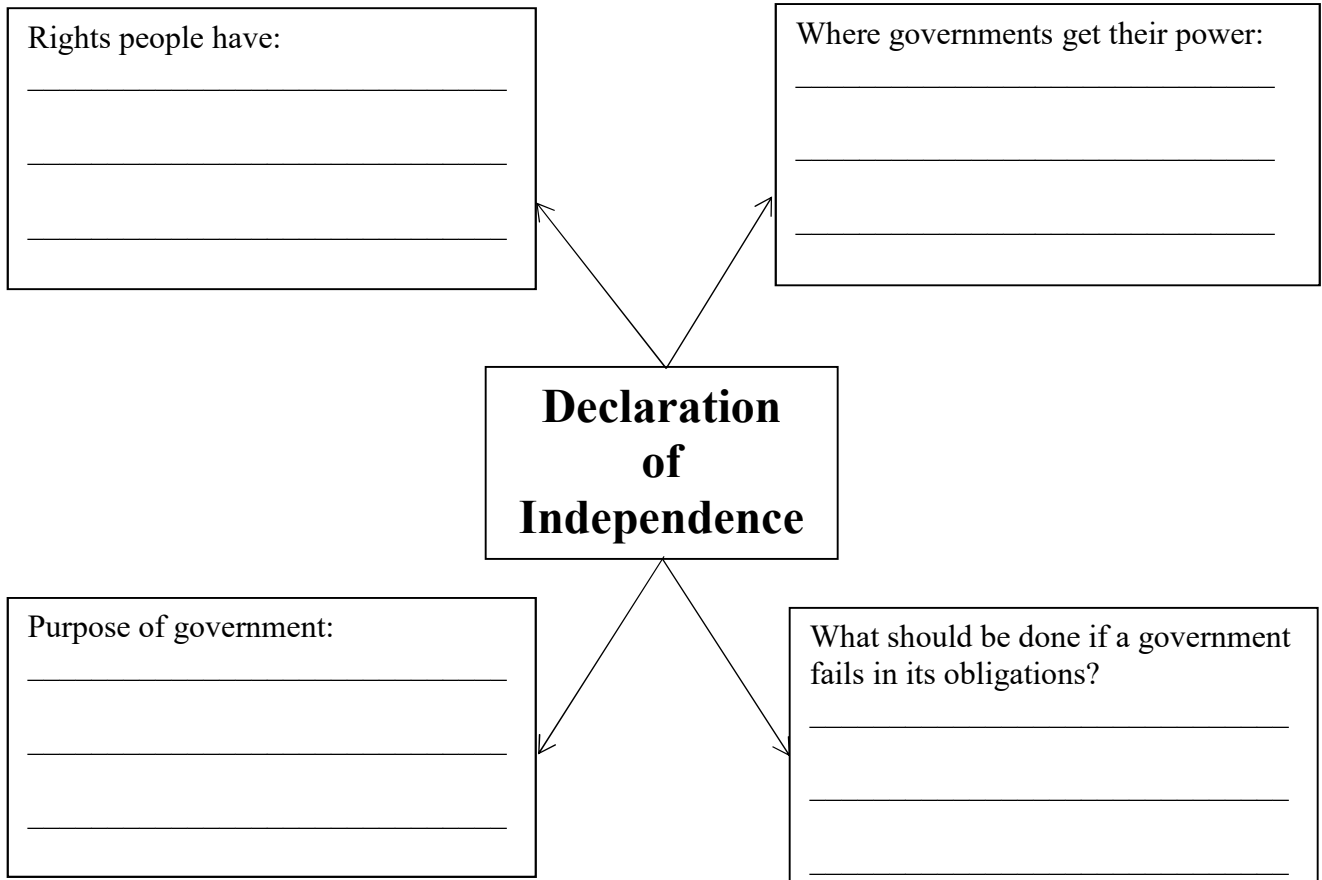
Directions: In this activity, students discuss some of the ideals in the Declaration of Independence.

Step I

1. Form small groups to discuss the meaning of the three natural rights that Jefferson identified in the Declaration of Independence: "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."
2. For each one of the three rights, group members should answer this question: What does this right specifically refer to in our lives today?
3. The groups should then post their answers for the rest of the class to see.
4. Hold a general class discussion and vote, if necessary, to drop or keep the meanings that each group has developed for the three rights.

Step II

1. Using the Declaration of Independence, discuss these questions with your group members.
2. Then, fill in the boxes below.



Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

“Why Grover Cleveland Vetoed the Texas Seed Bill” by Robert Higgs

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Directions: Read the article “Why Grover Cleveland Vetoed the Texas Seed Bill.” Use a dictionary to look up any words you don’t know. Then, re-read the article, highlighting or underlining any information you think is important to your understanding the article. Finally, answer the following questions.

1. Why did Grover Cleveland believe in limited government? _____

2. Why was Cleveland known as the “veto mayor” and “veto governor”? _____

3. Based on the article, what do you think the term “essential constitutional function” means?

4. What was the issue with the Texas Seed Bill? _____

5. Why did Cleveland veto the Texas Seed Bill? _____

6. Does it matter if elected officials follow the Constitution or is it more important to give citizens what they want? Why?

7. What is the connection between the Stossel video “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” and the Texas Seed Bill story?

**IDEAS
ON LIBERTY**

JULY/AUGUST 2003

Why Grover Cleveland Vetoed the Texas Seed Bill



Grover Cleveland was the last U.S. president with a valid claim to be known as a classical liberal. (By the time “Silent Cal” Coolidge became president, the big-government horse was already out of the barn, and Ronald Reagan as president was as much the big-government problem as he was the solution.)

A lawyer who lacked a philosophical temperament or education, Cleveland derived his devotion to limited government from his reverence for the U.S. Constitution. An honest man—an *extraordinarily* honest man for a politician—he took seriously his oath to “preserve, protect, and defend” that document.

Although nineteenth-century government now appears remarkably constricted, politicians in those days were no less predatory and corrupt than our own. Our forebears, however, kept the government within tighter bounds because so many of them harbored ideological hostility to big government, and therefore they often refused to tolerate out-of-bounds government programs, regardless of the proffered rationale. Many things were still viewed as “not the proper business of government,” an attitude that allowed at least some politicians to survive while resisting raids on the public’s purse and incursions on the people’s liberties. Cleveland was one such political survivor.

As a government officer, Cleveland demonstrated that much good could be done

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simply by resisting legislative mischief. As the mayor of Buffalo, New York, for the single year 1882, he became known as the “veto mayor” by virtue of withholding his stamp of approval from the skullduggery of corrupt aldermen. Then, after taking office as New York’s governor in January 1883, he gained a reputation as the “veto governor.”¹ During his two terms as president (1885–89 and 1893–97), he vetoed more congressional bills than any other president except Franklin D. Roosevelt (who held office more than twelve years, as against Cleveland’s eight), and only seven of his 584 vetoes were overridden by Congress.²

Cleveland believed in keeping government expenditure at the minimum required to carry out essential constitutional functions. “When a man in office lays out a dollar in extravagance,” declared Cleveland, “he acts immorally by the people.”³ He fought to lower tariffs, which the Republicans had hoisted to punishing levels, and to hold back the flood of phony pensions that congressmen were awarding in order to buy votes and to placate the Grand Army of the Republic, the most powerful political pressure group of the late nineteenth century.

It should have surprised no one, therefore, when Cleveland vetoed the Texas Seed Bill early in 1887. This legislation appropriated \$10,000—a trifling sum even in those days—to allow the Commissioner of Agriculture to purchase seed grain for distribution to farmers in certain counties of Texas that had suffered from drought.⁴ The president’s veto message read in part as follows:

I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution; and I do not believe that the power and duty of the General Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering which is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit. A prevalent tendency to disregard the limited mission of this power and duty should, I think, be steadily resisted, to the end that the lesson should be constantly enforced that, though the people support the Government, the Government should not support the people.⁵

Cleveland went on to point out that “the friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied on to relieve their fellow citizens in misfortune,” and indeed that “individual aid has to some extent already been extended to the sufferers mentioned in this bill.” Further, he suggested that if members of Congress really wanted to send seed to the suffering Texans, the congressmen might personally carry out this charitable transfer by using the seed routinely provided to all members for distribution to their constituents (at an expense of \$100,000 in that fiscal year).⁶

Unpopular Man

Cleveland’s second term as president came to a sad end, as even his own party turned against him for the most part. After striving courageously for four years to preserve free markets, limited government, and a sound currency against those who urged resort to statist nostrums during the country’s worst economic slump, Cleveland left office an extremely unpopular man.⁷ Although his reputation recovered later, especially after his death (in 1908), he has never been regarded as one of the country’s “great presidents.”

In recent years, historians have tended to pooh-pooh Cleveland as a reactionary who accomplished nothing of much significance (unlike, say, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom most historians idolize), and some have gone so far as to condemn Cleveland and his supporters as “Bourbon Democrats” in cahoots with greedy businessmen and bankers.

A more just verdict was reached, however, by historian Richard Welch, who wrote of the Cleveland Democrats: “They were convinced of the superiority of free enterprise to any other economic system; they defined ‘reform’ in terms of improvements in public morality and administrative efficiency; they advocated ‘sound money’ and the preservation of the gold standard—but these convictions were shared by a majority of middle-class Americans. It is false to the historical context of Gilded Age America to see such concerns as indicative of collusion with big business.”⁸

Perhaps the highest praise came from H. L. Mencken, who wrote of Cleveland: “It is not likely that we shall see his like again, at least in the present age. The Presidency is now closed to the kind of character that he had so abundantly.”⁹ □

1. Matthew Hoffman, “Odyssey of a Statesman,” *The Free Market*, January 1991, p. 6.

2. For figures on presidential vetoes, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 1082; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2001* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001), p. 246.

3. Quoted in Hoffman, p. 6.

4. Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1932), p. 331.

5. *Congressional Record*, 49 Cong., 2d Sess., vol. XVIII, Pt. II, 1887, p. 1875.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 77–105.

8. Richard E. Welch, Jr., *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 220.

9. H. L. Mencken, “A Good Man in a Bad Trade” [1933], in H. L. Mencken, *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 229.