

The Continental Congress Creates the Declaration of Independence

Grade Level: 10-12

Time Required: 1-2 Class Periods

Historical Thinking Skill: Analysis and Historical Context

Objective: Recreate the Continental Congress and its debate over the contents of the Declaration of Independence. Students will learn the importance of compromise and consensus building while learning in more detail the reasons for declaring independence from Great Britain. Students will also learn how and why the colonists' grievances targeted the King and not Parliament.

Required Materials:

1. The Declaration of Independence
2. Textbook
3. Independent research
4. Nametags

Directions: This activity can be done individually or in pairs. Each student, or pair, will research a delegate to the Continental Congress and role play the debates over the contents of the Declaration of Independence. The research can be done during class time or assigned as homework. Students (or pairs) will each be assigned one proposal from the Declaration of Independence to support. They should add historical context to help members understand why it is being proposed. The teacher may want to create a model of one and share it with the students.

Choose a student to chair the conference or chair the conference yourself. The Chair will facilitate the Moderated Conference and the Vote. Identify a back-up chair in case the chair is absent. Depending on the size of your class, the Moderated Conference may take an entire class period.

Moderated Conference: Time varies based on class size

- Students will have 2-3 minutes to introduce themselves and describe their proposal. Ask students to print two copies of their speech: one to turn in when they get to class, one to use during the presentation.
- The Chair will recognize other delegates to ask questions after each speech.
- Students should ask pointed questions of the other delegates. What are the consequences of what they are proposing? Are they being fair? Realistic? Should they amend their wording?

Unmoderated Conference: 10-15 minutes

- Students now get up and go around seeking support for their resolutions for the upcoming Vote.
- Students may promise support for another in return for support for their own resolution.
- Students may agree to alter the language of their proposal to gain support.
- Students need a simple majority to pass their resolutions – a tie means failure.

Congressional Vote

- The Chair will call for everyone to sit back down so they can vote on the proposals. The Chair will read each proposal – in case any language has changed – and the delegates will raise hands to vote. The Chair will count the votes and keep track of the results.

Wrap-Up

- Ask the students what they learned about compromise and reaching consensus with the other delegates. Was it difficult to get others to support their proposal? How did the successful delegates secure support? Why did some proposals fail, and others succeed?

