

We the People: A History

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 5–8

Curriculum Focus: Social Studies

Lesson Duration: 1–2 class periods

Program Description

American Roots (2:54) – Examine the values and beliefs that shaped the United States of America. *From Colonies to Nation* (4:55) – Explore colonial sentiment at the start of the American Revolution and learn how the colonies won independence. *The Declaration of Independence* (4:28) – Take a closer look at the drafting and passage of the document that announced the American colonists' intent to fight for freedom from British tyranny. *The Constitution* (3:34) – Learn about the U.S. Constitution, the foundation of American government. *The Bill of Rights* (3:49) – Examine the document that guarantees the freedoms and liberties of all American citizens.

Onscreen Questions

- Where do the ideas central to the American government come from?
 - Why was *Common Sense* an important document?
 - What are some values set forth in the Declaration of Independence?
 - How did the delegates settle the issue of representation in Congress?
 - Which amendment in the Bill of Rights do you think is the most important? Why?
-

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Identify the reasons the colonies fought the American Revolution.
- Describe the meaning of “taxation without representation.”
- Explain why the colonies were so angered by British-imposed taxes

Materials

- *We the People: A History* video
- Small candies (15–20 small pieces for each student)

- Disposable cups, one per student
- Chart paper
- Black marker
- Writing paper
- Pencils and erasers

Procedures

1. Discuss the reasons that American colonies fought the Revolutionary War. Why did they want independence from Britain? Do you think that Britain was right to tax the colonies on paper, tea, and other goods?
2. Introduce the phrase “taxation without representation” and explain that this slogan was a rallying cry used by colonists seeking independence from Britain. Ask students: What does the slogan mean? Talk about the pros and cons of life in colonial America. For example, the colonists enjoyed a great deal of freedom because they were governed from afar, but the taxes imposed by the British angered them. They felt exploited because no one in the British government represented their interests.
3. Tell the class that they are going to play a game about taxation. Choose two students to act as British tax collectors, one as a Member of Parliament, and one as King of England. All other students will be colonists. As a class, brainstorm some taxes that could exist in a classroom situation, possibly a tax on books, pens, or pencils or a tax on tardiness.
4. The tax collectors, Parliamentarian, and king will decide on 10–12 taxes to enact. Have these students write their list on a piece of chart paper that will be displayed in the classroom. Instruct them to include a tax on noise so students remain quiet during the lesson.
5. When the list is complete, give each student a cup of candy. Explain that the British tax collectors will collect taxes from all the colonists. Read through the list of taxes and tell students that the tax collectors will collect one piece of candy for each item on the list. If students have a pencil, they must pay the pencil tax with one piece of candy. If they do not have a pencil, they do not pay the tax. Any student found talking too loudly must pay a tax of one piece of candy.
6. Ask the king and Parliament member to stand in the front of the room, observing while one collector takes taxes from half of the students and the other takes taxes from the other half. If a student refuses to pay a tax, have the collector escort that person to a “jail” in a corner of the room and take the entire cup of candy. Instruct the tax collectors to keep 10 percent of the candy they collect, give 40 percent to the Parliament member, and 50 percent to the king.
7. After the taxes have been collected and divided, have students count how much candy they have. Tell them that they will keep only this amount. How many pieces of candy do most of the colonists have? How many pieces of candy do the tax collectors have? How about the Parliamentarian and the king?
8. Ask students to talk about how the activity made them feel. Who feels upset and why? Are they angry that they lost pieces of candy? Is it fair that the king has so much? Were the taxes fair?

What happened to a colonist who did not pay a tax? Was there a way to make the taxes fair? If so, how? In what ways did this activity resemble the taxation system in colonial America?

9. Tell students to write a one-page essay about the activity, addressing the following.
 - What was your role in this activity? How did it make you feel?
 - In what ways were the taxes fair or unfair? Was there a way to make the taxes fair for all? If so, how?
 - How was this activity similar to what happened in colonial America before the Revolutionary War?
 - What were the colonists fighting for in their battle to become independent?
 - Do you think the colonists were justified in their anger toward the British? Why or why not? Explain fully the phrase “taxation without representation.”

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students wrote thoughtful essays that clearly identified the reasons for the American Revolution, clearly and correctly described the phrase “taxation without representation,” and clearly explained why the colonists were so angered by British taxes.
- **2 points:** Students wrote somewhat thoughtful essays that adequately identified the reasons for the American Revolution, adequately and somewhat correctly described the meaning of “taxation without representation,” and adequately explained why the colonists were so angered by British taxes.
- **1 point:** Students wrote incomplete essays that did not identify the reasons for the American Revolution, did not describe the meaning of “taxation without representation,” and did not explain why the colonists were so angered by British taxes.

Vocabulary

colony

Definition: A region politically controlled by a distant country; a dependency

Context: Seeing Spain grow rich from American colonies, France, the Netherlands, and England sought to establish their own colonies.

democracy

Definition: Government by the people; exercised directly or through elected representatives

Context: The government of Athens in ancient Greece was a democracy.

protest

Definition: An individual or collective gesture or display of disapproval

Context: Taxes imposed by Britain sparked angry protests.

representative

Definition: One that serves as a delegate or agent for another; a member of a governmental body, usually legislative, chosen by popular vote

Context: A representative from each of the 13 colonies gathered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for the Second Continental Congress.

revenue

Definition: The income of a government from all sources appropriated for the payment of the public expenses

Context: The Stamp Act required every piece of paper, from pamphlets to playing cards, to display a revenue stamp.

tax

Definition: A contribution for the support of a government required of persons, groups, or businesses within the domain of that government

Context: A document known as the Magna Carta put restrictions on an English king's power and rights to tax the English people.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Historical Understanding – Understands the historical perspective
- U.S. History: Era 3 – Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for American victory; Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, the economy, and society
- U.S. History: Era 6 – Understands the rise of the American labor movement and how political issues reflected social and economic changes

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Culture
 - Individual Development and Identity
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
 - Civic Ideals and Practices
 - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They

include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. American Roots (3 min.)

Established more than 200 years ago, the United States was founded on ideas from ancient societies. Discover the values and beliefs that laid the foundation of our nation.

II. From Colonies to Nation (5 min.)

Explore colonial attitudes and sentiment at the beginning of the American Revolution, and learn about the war that gave birth to the United States of America.

III. The Declaration of Independence (4 min.)

The Declaration of Independence declared that Americans had the right to certain freedoms. Explore the drafting and passage of this historic document.

IV. The Constitution (4 min.)

After defeating the British, the colonists needed to establish a government that would protect the rights of its people. See how the U.S. Constitution came to be.

V. The Bill of Rights (4 min.)

The Bill of Rights protects freedoms and liberties not specifically addressed in the Constitution. Examine the first 10 amendments in this document.

Curriculum Units

1. Influences on American Government

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What kinds of beliefs are important to you?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What was the Magna Carta?

A: Created in England in 1215, the Magna Carta was a document that placed restrictions on the English king's power and rights to tax the people.

2. Setting the Stage for Conflict

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What do you know about the actions that led to the American Revolution?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What two major movements in America set the stage for conflict with the British government in the 1760s?

A: The movement called the Great Awakening helped convince people that they had the right to decide how to govern themselves. And the Enlightenment contributed, particularly philosopher John Locke, who wrote about the rights of people in society.

3. The Revolution Begins

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What revolutions do you know of? Why did they occur?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: When the colonists began their rebellion, what was the sentiment about fighting the British?

A: At first only about one-third of the colonists supported the rebellion, another third were against the war, and the remaining third were indifferent.

4. Swaying Colonial Opinion

Pre-viewing question:

Q: How does the media influence you?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: Do you think the colonists would have eventually supported the war without the publication of *Common Sense*, by Thomas Paine?

A: Answers will vary.

5. The Declaration of Independence

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What does independence mean to you?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: How might history have been changed if the Declaration of Independence had not been passed?

A: Answers will vary.

6. Approving the Constitution

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What powers should a federal government have?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question:

Q: Describe the system of checks and balances.

A: The United States government is set up with a power-sharing system called checks and balances. The legislative branch makes the laws, the executive branch carries out the laws, and the judiciary branch settles disputes. No one branch of government has complete power.

7. Establishing the Bill of Rights

Pre-viewing question:

Q: What rights do Americans have?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question:

Q: What is the purpose of the Bill of Rights?

A: The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, protects many freedoms that were fought for during the American Revolution, including the freedom of religion, speech, and the press; the right to keep and bear arms; freedom from unreasonable search and seizure; the right to a speedy and public trial by jury; and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment or excessive bail or fines.