**Author:** Megan Chaplin  
  
**Lesson Title:** Declaration of Independence  
  
**Suggested Grade Level:** 8

**Estimated Lesson Time:** 50 minutes

**Student Prior Knowledge:** Students will know about the purpose for the Second Continental Congress and the deteriorating relations between the American colonists and the British government.

**Standards:** SS.8.A.3.7 Examine the structure, content, and consequences of the Declaration of Independence.

**Goals:** Students will be able to identify the different sections of the Declaration of Independence and interpret its meaning in order to understand why the colonists waged a war for independence.

**Learning Objective:** As a result of class discussion and group work, students will interpret the Declaration of Independence using compelling evidence.

**Resources:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb7MI8NQLoo> History Channel documentary clip  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcZK2CF3mZ8> National Treasure clip

<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/freedom/doi/text.html> Declaration of Independence text

**Procedures:**

**1. Warm-up activity**: On board- What does it mean to declare? What is a declaration? Respond in at least 5 sentences and include an example of when you declared something. <Give students 5 minutes to complete>

Choose at least 2 students to give their response. <5 minutes>

Give students a more precise definition of “declaration.” Definition: an explicit, formal announcement, either oral or written. Write the definition on the board and have them write the definition in their notebooks. <1 minutes>

**2. Introduce the Declaration of Independence**: “We’ve been studying the 2nd Continental Congress and today we are going to focus on the Declaration of Independence. It was written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776 and was commissioned by the 2nd Continental Congress. Let’s watch this video clip to get a better idea of what it’s about.”

Clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb7MI8NQLoo> <4 minutes>

**3. Lecture:** Have the Declaration of Independence projected on the smart board. Read the text up until the list of grievances. Discuss the meaning and ask if there are any questions. <8.5 minutes>

Show National Treasure clip to demonstrate how one can interpret the Declaration into more common terms. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcZK2CF3mZ8> <1.5 minutes>

Go through the first 3 grievances of the Declaration of Independence and interpret their meaning. <5 minutes>

**4. Activity:** Assign students into 5 groups of 5 students. Each group will be given a poster board and markers. Students are to write each grievance in its original form and then their interpretation. Each group will be given 3 grievances to interpret. Each group should choose a “reader” because they will be presenting their group’s interpretation to the class. <3 minutes>

Circulate the room and answer questions while students work. <20 minutes>

**Assessment:** Have students present their interpretations the next day.