



Declaration of Rights, 1776

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What individual rights are most important?

Standards

Social Studies

(6-8) I.1.3, I.1.4; (9-12) I.1.4

8.B.1.2

8.C&G.1, 8.C&G.1.1, 8.C&G.1.2, 8.C&G.1.3, AH.C&G.1; AH.C&G.1.1, AH.C&G.1.2, AH.C&G.2.3

8.G.1, 8.G.1.2

8.H.1, 8.H.1.3, 8.H.1.4, 8.H.2.2, AH.H.3.1

English Language Arts:

RI.6-12.1, RI.6-8&11-12.3, RI.6-12.4, RI.6-8.5, RI.6-12.6, RI.11-12.8, RI.6-12.9, RI.6-12.10

SL.6-12.1, SL.6-12.4

L.6-12.1, L.6-12.4, L.6-12.6

Standards for extension options

Social Studies

(6-8) I.1.6, I.1.7, I.1.8, I.1.10, (9-12) I.1.5

8.B.1.1, 8.B.1.2, AH.B.1.6

8.C&G.1.5, AH.C&G.1.4

AH.H.3.2

English Language Arts

RI.6.7

SL.6-12.5

W.6-12.1, W.6-12.2, W.6-12.3, W.6-12.4,

Objectives

- Analyze the 1776 Declaration of Rights.

- Identify and evaluate the individual rights the state guaranteed at its founding and additional principles of fair government.

Lesson Contents

Between 1774 and 1776, five Provincial Congresses met in North Carolina. These Congresses did three main things: they created a new government structure; they funded their efforts using bills of credit; and they organized a provincial army.

The Fifth Provincial Congress met in Halifax from November 12 to December 23, 1776, to write a state constitution. Delegates looked to John Adams' advice and to the new constitutions from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. On December 17, 1776, North Carolina's congress adopted the Declaration of Rights, and the next day, December 18, delegates approved the state constitution. The Declaration of Rights listed many important rights that would later appear in the federal Bill of Rights. These rights announced that the people hold power, defined the separation of government powers, and listed basic civil rights including freedom of religion and the right to a fair trial.

Primary Source

Declaration of Rights, December 1776, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/declaration-of-rights-1776/787673>

Transcription

<https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/declaration-of-rights-1776/787673>

Assignment Options

(files on thumb drive)

- **Background: 1776 Declaration of Rights**
- **Activity: Comparing Constitutional Rights Documents**
- **Activity: Transcribing Selections**
- **Activity: Rights Symbol**
- **Exit Tickets**

Supplies

- Projector (optional)
- 2 quills and ink bottle provided for optional hands-on activity
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers (optional)

Lesson Preparation

- Review the primary source, transcription, related materials, and slides to determine which options are appropriate for your students. Note that this box contains a variety of options from which teachers can select, based on available time, learning goals, and student capacities.
- Access [original document](#) and transcription to project for the class and zoom in as needed. These may be found via online links or as files on the accompanying flash drive.
- Glossary terms for this lesson may be posted or projected to discuss as a class. If you prefer to distribute an individual handout, copy and modify the table in the “procedures” section below (also in the **Cross-Lesson Activities** folder) to print or create a quiz. Print a copy for each student or small group.
- Make copies of any handouts you choose and keep answer keys at hand.
Activity: Matching Sets (found in the cross-lesson activity folder). Print pages 2-4 with 2 single-sided copies for small groups of students. Cut out the squares. Separate the principles and shuffle two copies of the definitions and examples.

Document Analysis sheet (found in the cross-lesson activity folder) is an optional assignment for individual work with the transcription. Print a double-sided copy for each student.

Background: Declaration of Rights, 1776 can be printed out as a 1-sided worksheet or double-sided with the **Activity: Comparing Constitutional Rights Documents** on the back. Note: slides can substitute for background worksheets and may be more appropriate for upper levels. Also, the background information on this worksheet is nearly the same as that on **Background: North Carolina’s First Constitution**. If teaching both lessons, use either one, rather than both. If selecting this worksheet, print a copy for each student.

Activity: Transcribing Selections includes 8 selections or short paragraphs (13 sections out of 23) of the original document. Transcriptions can be found on the back of each sheet, if using double-sided printing. Options:

- Originals can either be projected for the class or provided on paper.
- If using paper, use double-sided printing and with enough copies of each for pairs or small groups to decipher the handwriting. For example, in a class of 30 students, make 3 copies and distribute each selection to pairs or groups

of 3. (Note: most are on a single page, but you'll need to cut to separate selections # 2 & #3.)

Activity: Rights Symbol. This can be completed after the **Activity: Transcribing Selections** or straight from the transcription. Print 30 copies for 30 students.

Activity: Comparing Constitutional Rights Documents—if not using the **Background: Declaration of Rights**, print a copy for each student. If using both, print double-sided with the background worksheet. This activity may be paired with **Activity: Transcribing Selections** and **Activity: Rights Symbol** so that students are familiar with the rights before the comparison or students may work from a full-document transcription. **Activity: Comparing** may be done by students individually or as a class.

Exit Tickets—print and cut, 4 tickets per page (8 copies for 32 students)

Background Knowledge (15 minutes)

Facilitate a class discussion with these questions: *what are rights? Why do we need a list? Who decides the items? What rights do you consider most important in our society?*

Procedure

- Pass one principle from **Activity: Matching Sets** (found in the **Cross-Lesson Activities** folder) to each group. In a class of 30, groups of 3 or 4 may work together to match 1 of the 9 principles to the correct definition and example. This exercise will help students review fundamental principles and structure of government. (See p. 1 of the handout for an answer key and additional time challenge options. (20 minutes)
- Review, project, or distribute vocabulary terms necessary to understand the document. Discuss any additional terms that cause students comprehension difficulty during the lesson. (10 minutes)

bulwark	a strong support or protection
compel	force someone to do something
dictate	an order given with authority or power
derive	to take or receive something from a specific source
distinct	recognizably different in nature from something else
duty	a tax
fundamental	of central importance
impost	a tax or some other money collected by the government
monopoly	one company's full control of a supply or trade of good or service

- Pass out **Background** worksheets and allow students to complete. Review fact-check answers using key. (15 minutes)

Option: Show students a four-minute video about the [Office of State Archaeology's investigation](#) of the possible site of the Halifax courthouse, where the Declaration of Rights was debated and passed in 1776.

- Ask students: *What do we need to know to read documents from the 1770s?* Answers will vary and should include a reminder that spelling and grammar were not standardized and may be different than what we expect today. Reading cursive is a challenge but can be fun, like completing a puzzle, and is a way to look closely at the document and identify its meaning. Note: the [long “s”](#) letter looks like an “f” and is a common stumbling block in transcription. (5 minutes)

- Put students in pairs or small groups for jigsawing. For example: in a class of 30, form 10-15 groups of 2 or 3. Distribute pre-cut **Selections** pieces for students to begin transcriptions. Have each group work to decipher the handwriting and write on a piece of notebook paper. After 5-10 minutes (depending on selection size) have them flip their sentences or paragraphs over to see how the completed transcription compares with their own. 8 different students can then read a transcribed selection aloud to the class. Ask the class: *How hard was the selection to read? What was especially challenging? What does the selection mean?* (30 minutes; 10 for transcribing; 20 for reading aloud and discussion)

Modification—skip the transcription activity and lead discussion from the transcribed passages.

- Pass out **Document Analysis** sheet, along with the transcribed selections found in the **Primary Sources** folder. Allow students to come to their own conclusions after reading the transcription. This activity may work best in conjunction with the **Selections**. (20 minutes)
- Ask the class *how do the rights in the Declaration of Rights differ from those you mentioned at the beginning of this lesson? Is anything in this Declaration now unnecessary? Is anything missing? Who would benefit from the list of rights? Who might be left out?* Answers will vary but may include a discussion of free-holders and lack of rights for women and the enslaved. (20 minutes)
- Pass out **Activity: Comparing Constitutional Rights Documents** [found on the back of **Background** worksheet]. Students will need to complete the **Activity: Transcribing Selections** and **Activity: Rights Symbol** first or to refer to the transcription of the Declaration, found in the primary source folder. Print 30 copies

for 30 students if completing individually. This activity may also be completed as a class. Discuss answers as a class. (20 minutes)

- Ask students *why did the delegates include these particular rights in the Declaration? What can they tell us about the experiences of colonists and the values of the delegates in 1776?* (10 minutes)
- Pass out **Exit Tickets**. Allow time to complete before collecting. Choose an option or use both if lesson extends multiple days: (5 minutes)
 - Which right is most important to you?
 - What additional right would you propose?

Extension Options

- Propose a right to add to the Declaration. This can be one of the rights in the Declaration or a new proposal. *What would you choose?* Write a 3-paragraph essay to convince the Constitutional Convention to include it.
- Design a “breaking news” screenshot about the passage of the Declaration of Rights on December 17, 1776. Include the key location (top left), the title of the news channel, the headline, the ticker with related news and the most appropriate image. See classtools.net/blog/design-a-breaking-news-screenshot/ for examples.
- Imagine you are an American Indian from Halifax or a neighboring county (Warren, Bertie) and have come to Halifax to listen to the Fifth Provincial Congress’ discussion of the Declaration of Rights. The [25th and final section](#) delineates the state’s borders and includes this statement, “this declaration of right shall not prejudice any Nation or Nations of Indians, from enjoying such hunting grounds as may have been, or hereafter shall be, secured to them by any former or future Legislature of this State.” What additional rights might you hope for that are not included in the current list? Write a 3-paragraph essay to petition the delegates to include one or more rights.

Field Trip Connection

Visit **Historic Halifax**, where the 5th Provincial Congress met and established North Carolina’s first state constitution, historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/historic-halifax/plan-your-visit

Recommended Resources

National Archives, “**The Long S**” in U.S. foundational documents,
prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2021/12/14/the-long-s/

Office of State Archaeology’s Investigation of the Halifax Courthouse, blog post,
archaeology.ncdcr.gov/blog/history-insites/historic-halifax-courthouse; 4-minute video
showing the dig and various fragments, youtube.com/watch?v=UEmxOr9rT6s

NC Pedia **Biography of Richard Caswell**, presiding officer of the Constitutional
Convention of 1776 and later 1st governor of N.C., [ncpedia.org/caswell-richard-research-
branch-nc](https://ncpedia.org/caswell-richard-research-branch-nc)

Compilation from the National Archives, **biographies of 5 additional delegates** to the N.C.
Constitutional Convention,
law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/marrynorthcar.html