

*2016 Teachers Guide:
Democracy*

Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

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Teachers Guide to Democracy

When Benjamin Franklin came down the steps at the end of the Constitutional Convention, a woman asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?"

With no hesitation whatsoever, Franklin responded, "A republic, if you can keep it."

How can we lose our democracy?

Check out what happened in the Weimar Republic in Germany, when the majority of voters sat on their hands and empowered Adolf Hitler.

Why?

"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal"

Read the entire Declaration of Independence aloud with each member of the class taking his/her turn at a brief passage.

When Jefferson wrote those words did he mean just men or did he mean that men and women are created equal?

How will you back up your conclusion?

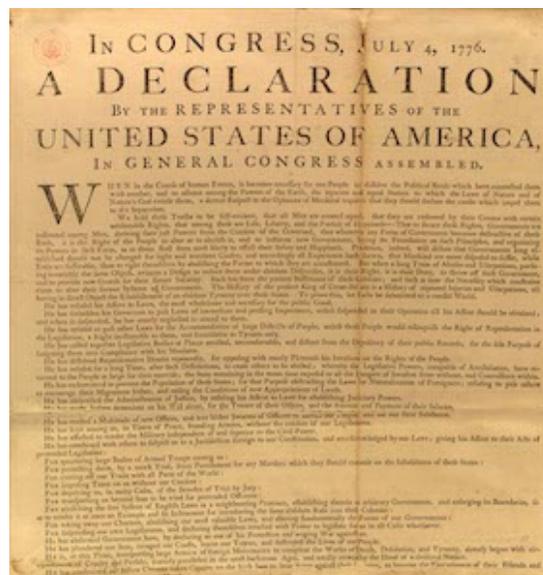
Morgan Freeman, a famous black actor, speaking on the Declaration of Independence, said, "Thomas Jefferson... It makes you wonder: How can a man, who himself held slaves, write with such incredible passion and eloquence about human liberation and the promise of a democratic republic?"

"Why, some may ask, do I bring up such embarrassing truths on this glorious occasion?"

“I answer, the real glory of the Declaration of Independence has been our nation’s epic struggle throughout history to close the gap between the ideals of this remarkable document and the sometimes painful realities of American life.”

“The Declaration symbolizes the birth of our nation, of course, but also the constant struggle to achieve its ideals.”

Do you agree? Why? Why not? How close have we come to achieving its ideals?



It is 1776. You are in Wolfeborough, a small town in New Hampshire, and the summer home of Colonial Governor John Wentworth. A broadside, the newspaper of the day, has just arrived with a galloping rider on horseback. It contains a copy of the Declaration of Independence, to be read aloud in the village square. The revolution had begun on December 14, 1774 in New Castle, NH when the first shots of the war were fired at Fort William and Mary after Paul Revere rode (in daylight) from Boston to Portsmouth to warn the Committee of Safety (mistakenly) that the British were coming to secure the powder and weapons. 400 colonists seized them from five defenders. Revere’s midnight ride was four months later, and has gotten better press.

Appoint a “Town Crier” to read the broadside to the “villagers.” Divide your class into loyalists and colonists. Role-play the village’s argument between those who are ready to support the Revolution, and those who are not. Why were the colonists of 1776 willing to risk their lives for “government by consent of the governed?” Why were the founding fathers who led the way willing to risk everything for their freedom?

“In the summer of 1776,” Justice Sandra Day O’Connor pointed out, “For the first time in the history of man, a whole people declared their right to a government of their own choice.”

“The people would lead, they declared, not be led. Their government could govern only by the consent of the governed. When the people wanted to change their government, they could do so by their votes. When the people spoke, their government would listen. When their freedoms were at stake, the freedom to say what they wanted, believe as they wished, become what they wished, their government would protect them. Their right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness would be in safe hands – their own.”

“That idea, so eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence, was treason in 1776. Fifty men pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to fight for it, to stage a revolution so that all further revolutions in the democracy they fought to establish could be peaceful and bloodless...”

Hold a mock trial in which Thomas Jefferson has been captured by the British and must fight for his life.

What is his argument?

How do the people of a democracy fight for their beliefs with “ballots, not bullets?”

Prepare a Power Point or portfolio presentation of the laws and/or Supreme Court cases that expanded the rights of the people to “government of the people, by the people and for the people.”

Why did “We, the People” need the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990?

Dr. Rudy Byrd of Sons of the American Revolution has pointed out, "...the Revolution was fought predominantly by 17, 18 and 19-year-old kids. They were not professional soldiers. They were farm kids, they were kids out of cities, and they fought the most powerful nation on the face of the earth and they won. That's our history."

"The sheer improbability of our being here as a country has to be realized. You look at this with absolute awe, that these kids were able to do this... We have no idea how many women served alongside the men... We know that a certain number did and they simply bound up their hair and served right alongside the units and the units protected them and kept their secret. And the reason that we know they did is they later on applied for pensions and you would have these wonderful things in the national archives, like 'Sarah Martin, who went through the Revolutionary War as Sergeant George Jones, hereby applies for a pension.' We know these things were there and that they existed."

You are 18 years old and leaving home to join the Revolutionary Army. Role-play trying to explain to your family what you believe in and why you believe you must go.

Hold a class discussion: Why must each generation create its democracy anew?

What would America be like today if we had settled for the progress the generation of 1776 had been able to make but nothing further?

"The next major date is September 17, 1787..." Dr Rudy Byrd said. "They sat for five months and created something that was extraordinary, which was the Constitution. And then occurred one of the most extraordinary things that ever happened. For the next nine months, we have this extraordinary national debate, with letters and pamphlets and broadsides and everything else, about the whole people deciding how they were going to be governed. How the government, that they are going to create, and with all the liberties that they want, is going to exist. We decided that as a whole people -- this is the example that we can use for how we decide things today. And that is, democracy is served best by fair and impartial discourse -- a civil discourse which really hears all sides, which respects all sides. No matter how passionately you believe your side is right, you have to listen fairly to the other side and be able to repeat it."

Read the decision of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (Justice Louis D. Brandeis concurring) in the case of “United States v. Schwimmer” in which he states, “... if there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other it is the principle of free thought – not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate. I would suggest that the Quakers have done their share to make the country what it is, that many citizens agree with the applicant’s belief and that I had not supposed hitherto that we regretted our inability to expel them because they believed more than some of us do in the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.”

Why have the minority opinions of one generation often become the majority opinions of the next?

Compare the opinion in United States v. Schimmer with the ruling in the case of West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnett regarding the flag salute in public schools:

What parallels can you draw? What differences?

If a member of your class stayed silent during the Pledge of Allegiance, today, would they be acting within their Constitutional rights? Why? Why not?

If you disagreed with their position how could you express your disagreement with civility, respect and understanding?

Are you willing to grant freedom for the opinions you hate in order to protect your own freedoms?

What is the importance of a free press to a democracy?

Why did Jefferson say: "The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them."

Why was a free press placed in the very first amendment to the Constitution?

In *Reynolds v. Sims*, Chief Justice Earl Warren said, “Legislators represent people, not trees or acres. Legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests.”

What is the importance of the Supreme Court’s ruling about “one man, one vote” in a democracy?

Professor Bruce Mason said of The Constitution of 1787 vs. the Constitution of 2011: “If somebody asked you about the US Constitution, you brag on it and talk, but, if you do, remind them that you’re talking about the Constitution of today, not the Constitution of 1787. Because the Constitution of 1787 did not provide the vote for women, it did not provide the vote for blacks... it did not provide the freedom of religion. Massachusetts didn’t do away with the state church until 1820. So the Constitution didn’t solve the problem with Supreme Court decisions – that happened in 1807. The Constitution added the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to solve the problems that resulted from Civil War and from lack of freedom [for] black persons in America.”

What were the “checks and balances” the founding fathers built into our “government of the people, by the people and for the people?”

Can the president decide who he will put in jail?

Can a judge decide what the law should say?

Can a legislator dictate what the judge’s decision should be? Why? Why not?

Why did the founding fathers decide to incorporate the system of checks and balances in the Constitution?

Try a Constitution Treasure Hunt. Compare the ideals in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of 1787 and the Constitution of today.

Why were the only voters in our democracy in 1787 free white males over 21 with property?

What else has changed since the Declaration was first written?

Dr. Leo Shapiro wrote, “The United States of America is and from its founding fathers has been, a work in progress. It is the duty of each generation of Americans to take up the work of achieving the founders’ goals.

“The founders saw the United States becoming a nation that would treat all men as created equal even though, when the Declaration was ratified, Blacks were enslaved, women were property, and Native Americans were non-persons.

“The founders saw the government of the United States deriving its powers from the consent of the governed even though, in the first national election, the right to vote was extended only to white, male, propertied land owners.

“Eight in ten Americans found themselves subject to a government which they had not consented to obey.

“Recognizing that the reality of the new nation departed from the ideal, the Constitution the founders created established that the government guaranteed the rights of freedom of assembly and freedom of speech so that the people could let their elected officials know their wishes.”

Why did Dr. Shapiro call elections “bloodless revolutions?”

Why did the Spanish soldiers serving in Tucson Arizona’s Presidio (fort) send money and a mule to the American soldiers fighting for their freedom? Which ethical beliefs can you find embedded in the Declaration of Independence? In the Constitution and the Bill of Rights? Were they the standard of law elsewhere around the world in 1776? Are they today? Where?

Select an emerging democracy elsewhere in today’s world to research; perhaps in Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other country of your choice.

What successes has it achieved? What failures is it facing?

“They told us if we would not be their slaves they would kill us,” the New York Times reports a young Kurd, speaking about the Turkish, told a New York Times reporter.

The Kurds have been in Turkey for over 1000 years.

Why are they considered dangerous now? What has been happening to Turkey’s democracy?

Why would any Turks be giving Kurds a choice between slavery and death?

What protects America – the world’s longest lasting democracy – from such dangers?

Because her then 18-year-old daughter participated in a sit down for a cause in which she believed – the homeless – she now has a criminal record and is unable to get a job, a mother wrote in a 2016 Letter to The Editor of the Arizona Daily Star.

When Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Henry David Thoreau in jail and asked, “Henry, what are you doing in there?” why did Thoreau reply, “Waldo, the question is ‘What are you doing out there?’”

What was Thoreau doing in jail? What was Emerson doing out?

Read Thoreau’s brief essay on “Civil Disobedience.”

Why is it considered one of the most influential political tracts ever written by an American?

How did Thoreau profoundly influence Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King?

What is “civil disobedience” in a democracy? What is its purpose?

Should a participant in an act of civil disobedience in a democracy be willing to pay the price? Why? Why not?

When Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on a bus to a white man was she considered a criminal?

Should those Americans who refused to abide by Jim Crow laws after the Civil War have been punished? Why? Why not?

What did Thomas Jefferson mean when he said “Moral duties are as obligatory on nations as individuals?”

Write a letter to the grandchildren you hope to have someday describing the democracy you hope they will all be living in.

What kind of world would you like to be leaving them?

What is the “rule of law”? How do the citizens of a democracy effect change within the rule of law?

Can you find any other nation that gives its citizens all the freedoms you have as an American? The protections?

What responsibilities do you have in return?

Write a letter to the student who will be sitting in your seat 50 years from now. How do you believe the Constitution of 2066 might be different from the Constitution of 2016? What would you like to see in the Constitution of 2061 about the freedom of speech? Freedom of the press? The freedom to travel anywhere you wish?

How else would you like to see “The land of the free and the home of the brave” protect its citizens?

How should the citizens of a democracy be prepared to protect it at any time?

How can they protect “government of the people, by the people and for the people” in this year’s election?

What dangers does a democracy face if its citizens, whether they are age 18 or 88, fail to vote?

What do you think you should do, as a citizen, or citizen-to-be, of the world's longest lasting democracy to help solve some of the problems of your democracy? (Check as many as you wish)

- A) Nothing?
- B) Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper?
- C) Contact your local radio or TV station?
- D) Contact the authorities responsible for the area of your concern and ask what they are doing and what help they need?
- E) Use social media and the internet to find others who are concerned?
- F) Put together a group who share your views to work for change?