

AGE of REVOLUTIONS

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the ripple effects of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution on a global scale, particularly within the frame of the Age of Revolutions. This unit will engage students in pondering the challenges that emerged with newly created countries and examining the impact of the world on revolutionary documents and vice versa.

All activities and resources are available online on the Museum of the American Revolution's Teacher Resource Guides page.

MATERIALS

Primary Sources

Object: Haitian Cannon
(Fort Ticonderoga) Art Card A

Document: Octava Poem
(John Carter Brown Library)

Transcript: Declaration of Independence

Transcript: Continental Congress to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec
(University of Chicago, Founders' Constitution)
<https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch14s12.html>

Transcript: Letter to the Inhabitants of Canada, May 29, 1775
(Yale University, Avalon Project)
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_05-29-75.asp

Transcript: An Address to the People of Ireland, 28 July 1775
(National Archives, Founders Online)
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/jay/01-01-02-0085>

Transcript: Address to the Assembly of Jamaica, July 25, 1775
(Yale University, Avalon Project)
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_07-25-75.asp

Transcript: A Speech to the Six Nations, July 13, 1775
(Yale University, Avalon Project)
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_07-13-75.asp

Letter: Jean-Jacques Dessalines to Thomas Jefferson, 23 June 1803
(National Archives, Founders Online)
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/jefferson/01-40-02-0450>

Translation: Kosovo Declaration of Independence
(Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich)
https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125409/8009_Kosovo_Independence.pdf

AIMS/OBJECTIVES

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Explore the debates and challenges around the creation of new countries.
- Understand the impact of the American Revolution and its documents upon other countries and revolutions.
- Examine the revolutions from the Age of Revolutions and how they impacted each other.
- Analyze the United States's relationship with other countries during the Revolutionary War and the Age of Revolutions.

Other Sources

Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions

Virtual Tour: Museum of the American Revolution
<https://museumvirtualltour.org/>

Worksheet: Poetic Independence

Worksheet: What makes a state?

Worksheet: Why We're Warring: Letters from Congress

Handout: The Documents That Did It

A virtual version of this exhibit will appear online in January 2026.

PROCEDURES

Engagement Activities

These activities can be used as hook activities, introductions to concepts, or shorter lessons.

A Newsworthy Declaration

Objective: Explore the debates and challenges around the creation of new countries.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Prepare to project or display the Haitian cannon.

Begin with a discussion about symbols. You may wish to start by asking students what a symbol is. Use the following question to help guide the students:

- What symbols represent the United States as a country? What items do you find them on? (Emphasize “country” not political party.)

Display the image of the Haitian cannon. Explain that cannons and other pieces of artillery were extremely important in 18th century warfare. They were seen as representations of a monarch’s power and were usually marked with symbols of the country or its leaders. Capturing them was a momentous accomplishment.

Have students examine the Haitian cannon, and ask them the following questions:

- What symbol is on this cannon? OR What do you notice about this cannon?
Students should note that the marking has been destroyed or worn off.
- Why do you think the Haitians removed the mark?
Student answers may include that the Haitians did not like the French and wanted to remove their symbol, that they wanted to remove the symbol for another reason, that the symbol was damaged over the years, that the Haitians wanted to create their own symbol, etc.

Explain that Haiti had been a French colony for many years, until enslaved people fought a long war for their freedom and independence. This is one of the many cannons that the Haitians captured from the French during the Haitian Revolution. It is likely that they wanted to remove symbols of the French monarchy to show their dislike of the French empire and to celebrate their status as a free and independent people.

EXTEND: Have students explore the [Virtual Museum Tour](#). Several galleries showcase a change in or creation of symbols:

- The submenu Rule Britannia under Becoming Revolutionaries includes a case of colonial objects with British symbols. Compare these to the objects in the Liberty Tree submenu.
- The submenu Flags under Darkest Hour shows the evolution of symbols within colonial flags.
- The submenu Declaration of Independence under Becoming Revolutionaries includes a display showing the creation of symbols for the United States.
- The submenu The March to Valley Forge under Darkest Hour includes the first use of USA on military buttons.

Teachers – for your own interest keep a look out for our Signs and Symbols [Professional Development Workshop](#) which we frequently offer as part of our rotation of free learning opportunities for educators.

Poetic Independence

Objective: Understand the impact of the American Revolution and its documents upon other countries and revolutions.

Time: 15-25 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Prepare copies of the Poetic Independence worksheet.

Explain to students that revolutionaries in Chile were both inspired and aided by revolutionaries from the United States. Robert Livingston, a member of the Committee of Five which drafted the Declaration of Independence, sent Chilean revolutionaries a printing press to help spread revolutionary ideas. Camilo Henríquez used it to publish Chile’s first newspaper, La Aurora de Chile. Despite censorship efforts by the Spanish Empire, Henríquez used the Aurora to share materials supporting the independence of Chile. In one paper, an eight-line poem appeared commemorating the Fourth of July.

Have students read the poem on the worksheet Poetic Independence and complete the questions.

After students have finished the worksheet, review their answers and have a discussion around the final question: How does this poem show the global influence of the Declaration of Independence?

EXTEND: ELA Cross Curricular – Using the original Spanish poem, have students see if they can find the rhyme scheme and/or rhythm of the poem.

Development Activities

These activities are suitable for diving deeper into a particular concept and can be used for an entire class period.

Why We're Warring: Letters from Congress

Objective: Analyze the United States's relationship with other countries during the Revolutionary War and the Age of Revolutions.

Time: 1-2 days (50-minute classes)

Teacher Preparation: Prepare copies of the worksheet and enough copies of each document (listed below) to distribute one document per student. Make sure that the documents are evenly divided among the students.

Explain to students that the Continental Congress was thinking beyond the thirteen colonies as they fought against the British. Though the Declaration of Independence was an appeal to a "candid world" as a whole, Congress also sent letters to specific places to explain themselves and, in some cases, invite them to join the thirteen colonies.

Provide students with one of the letters below and the worksheet:

- [Continental Congress to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec \(1774\)](#)
- [Letter to the Inhabitants of Canada \(1775\)](#)
- [An Address to the People of Ireland \(1775\)](#)
- [Address to the Assembly of Jamaica \(1775\)](#)
- [A Speech to the Six Nations \(1775\)](#)

Have students annotate their document and complete the guiding questions on the worksheet.

After students have completed the worksheet, place students into groups so each document is represented. Tell them to share their findings and a summary of their letter with their classmates.

Conclude with a discussion around the big-picture reason for why Congress decided to write to all these other colonies and nations. Why might they have made the decision to reach out to other colonies? Students may refer to their own specific letter, but they should look at the bigger picture.

Conclude with the following questions: Based on these letters, what can we learn about the 13 colonies' relationships to the wider world? Why might the Continental Congress have decided to reach out to plead its case? How might these letters have helped them?

Fragile Democracies

Objective: Explore the debates and challenges around the creation of new countries.

Time: 1-2 days (50-minute classes)

As an opening discussion or entrance ticket, have students explain what a democracy is in their own words. Discuss their responses as a class and explain that a democracy is a form of government where ultimate power is in the hands of the people.

Explain that the United States is an example of a representative democracy, where the people elect specific people to represent their needs and wishes. Though the United States has existed as a democracy for 250 years, democracies do not always last. Some nations have seen democratic government come and go.

Have students choose, or assign, a revolution during the Age of Revolutions to research/explore. Then have them create a timeline centered around the governmental structure for that country. What type of government did they have before their revolution? During? After? What other milestones did the country go through during the development of their government? You may wish to have students explore their country's system of government through to the present day.

Give students time to present their timeline.

Once students have finished presenting, wrap up by discussing the different types of government structures that appeared in the students' timelines.

Revolutionary Ripple Effect

Objective: Examine the revolutions from the Age of Revolutions and how they impacted each other.

Time: 35-45 minutes, plus homework

Teacher Preparation: Review *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions*. Print enough copies of *Big Idea 2* or ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to access it online.

Have students read *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions* at the beginning of class or for homework the night before.

Tell students they will be creating a timeline of the revolutions mentioned in the *Big Idea* using it and additional research. Their timelines should include the start and end dates and a 2-3 sentence summary for each revolution.

Conclude by discussing how these revolutions, or some of these revolutions, were related to each other. Some examples might be geography, ideology, colonial separation, etc.

EXTEND: Discuss as a class: What does a successful revolution look like? Based on your response, how successful were the revolutions? What makes you say that?

EXTEND: Project the following quote by Benjamin Rush: “The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution.” Have a discussion around the following questions:

- What marks the end of a revolution? A peace treaty? Or is that just the end of the war?
- What might make the American Revolution an on-going revolution?
- Do you think any of the other revolutions could be considered on-going revolutions? Why or why not?

What Makes a State?

Objective: Explore the debates and challenges around the creation of new countries.

Time: 20-30 minutes, plus homework

Teacher Preparation: Review *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions*. Print enough copies of *Big Idea 2* and the worksheet or ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to access it online.

Have students read *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions* at the beginning of class or for homework the night before.

If needed, discuss with students the definition of a state, which may also be considered a country or a nation.

Ask students the following question: How are new states made? Encourage students, individually or in small groups, to create a set of steps or requirements necessary to create a new state.

Provide students with the worksheet and have them read through Emer de Vattel’s definition of statehood, John Adams’s strategy for independence, and Richard Henry Lee’s advocacy for it and complete the worksheet.

Have students compare their steps to Vattel’s, Adams’s, Lee’s explanations. Are there any similarities? Did they have something you didn’t? What was it, and why do you think they included it?

Conclude with a discussion around the following questions:

- What made the United States a state/country in the eyes of the world at that time?
Some examples could include that the United States separated themselves from the British government with the Declaration of Independence, that they created their own government, that they created their own alliances and established themselves as a military power.

- What about other countries during this time – particularly those that had their own revolutions?
Student answers may vary based on what they read in Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions.

- What about countries today? Do you think these steps still apply? Why or why not?

EXPAND: Explore Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence from 2008. Do you think Kosovo’s declaration matches up with Vattel, Adams, and Lee? Why or why not?

Culmination Activities, Research Projects, and Group Projects

Culmination Activity: The Documents That Did It

Objective: Understand the impact of the American Revolution and its documents upon other countries and revolutions.

Time: 1-2 days (50-minute classes)

Teacher Preparation: Prepare to display or print enough copies of the handout *The Documents That Did It*.

Explain to students that during the Age of Revolutions, many revolutionaries looked to the United States as the first successful example of independence. Because of this, revolutionaries circulated translated copies of revolutionary documents from the United States to inspire their people and, in some cases, guide them in creating their own governments.

As a class, brainstorm a list of documents from the Revolutionary War and Early Republic that may have served as an inspiration for revolutionaries in other countries. The list could include the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, *Common Sense*, various state constitutions or bill of rights, published letters from Congress or delegates, poems, song lyrics, or might simply reference these and other categories. Write student responses on the board or somewhere the class can see the list.

Using the completed list, have students determine which documents they would choose to translate and why those ones. Then tell students to create a pamphlet or booklet with their chosen documents to give to revolutionaries. Their pamphlet should include their reasons for choosing those documents to help persuade their audience.

As a wrap up, have students examine the indexes from Manuel Garcia de Sena’s *La Independencia* and Vicente Rocafructe’s *Ideas Necesarias* on the handout *The Documents That Did It*. Instruct students to compare de Sena and Rocafructe’s choices with their own choices. Why do students think these translators chose each document?

Research Project: A Revolution Potluck

Objective: Examine the revolutions from the Age of Revolutions and how they impacted each other.

Time: Multiple day research and presentation project

Teacher Preparation: Ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to read *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions* or print out enough copies for each student.

Have students read *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions* at the beginning of class or for homework the night before.

Assign students one of the revolutions mentioned in the *Big Idea*, and have them research that revolution to find the answers to the following questions:

- Who was fighting for change? Against whom or what?
- When did this revolution take place?
- Who were the influential leaders of your revolution?
Were there any individuals or groups of everyday people who supported this revolution? If you can find examples of them, include them as well.
- What were the key events, or phases (if applicable), of your revolution?
For example: The French Revolution can be divided into the early revolution, the Reign of Terror, the Napoleonic Era, etc.
- Did your revolution impact or inspire any other revolutions?
- Were there any revolutions your revolution was inspired or impacted by?
- How is this revolution remembered or commemorated by this country today?

For the last piece of their research, have students find an object/artifact to bring to a Revolution Picnic. Students should choose an object/artifact they feel represents their assigned revolution, and they should be able to explain why they chose it.

Set aside time for them to present their research and objects to the class.

Extension Activities

A Letter from Haiti

Objective: Explore the debates and challenges around the creation of new countries. Analyze the United States's relationship with other countries during the Revolutionary War and the Age of Revolutions.

Time: 35-45 minutes

Teacher Preparation: Ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to read *Big Idea 2: Age of Revolutions* and the letter from Jean-Jacques Dessalines to Thomas Jefferson or print out enough copies for each student.

If needed, have students read the section The Haitian Revolution in *Big Idea 2* for background on the Haitian Revolution and Jean-Jacques Dessalines.

Tell students to read through the letter [Jean-Jacques Dessalines to Thomas Jefferson, 23 June 1803](#) with a partner or read through it as a class. Remind students that at the time this letter was written, Thomas Jefferson was the President of the United States. Have students answer and then discuss the following questions:

- Based on the letter, what is Dessalines opinion on France? The United States? What makes you say that?
France: "oppressive government," "a mother country that cuts her children's throats," "yoke of tyranny," "torturers"
United States: "expression of my highest admiration" for Thomas Jefferson; Students may note that Dessalines is appealing to the United States to gain a trade relationship with them.
- What are Dessalines's goals with this letter?
To inform Jefferson of Haitian Independence and explain the reasoning of their revolution.
To establish a trade partnership with the United States.
- Why is establishing trade partnerships important for a new country?
Possible answers may include that it helps with the country's economy, that it helps establish them as an independent power by establishing their authority to treat with other countries, it helps people get the goods and supplies they may need to survive and thrive, etc.

Explain to students that Jefferson and the United States did not establish a trade relationship with Haiti and ultimately refused to acknowledge Haiti's independence. It was only under President Abraham Lincoln almost 60 years later that the United States finally acknowledged an independent Haiti. Though Dessalines may have wanted acknowledgement from the United States, Haiti did not need it to thrive and extend their aid to others. Haiti went on to support many new countries in the Americas in asserting their independence against Spain.

EXTEND: Have students annotate Dessalines's letter to Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence and compare and contrast the reasons stated for declaring independence in each.