

Celebrate Freedom

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.”

— Declaration of Independence

Declaration of Independence

When the Continental Congress issued the Declaration of Independence in 1776, they did more than announce their separation from Great Britain. They also summed up the most basic principles that came to underlie American government. This section is sometimes called the “social contract” section. You can read the words at left.

These ideas have had significant effect on later developments in American history. You will notice the relationship of the ideas behind the Declaration of Independence to the American Revolution, the writing of the U.S. Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, and the movements to end slavery and to give women the right to vote. You’ll see how the United States became a nation of immigrants, with its rich diversity of people, and the ways this development relates to the ideas of the Declaration of Independence.

Read the first three paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. Then recite words from the Declaration of Independence quoted at left. Consider their meaning and then answer these questions.

ASSESSMENT

- 1. Identify Central Idea** This part of the Declaration is sometimes called the “social contract” section. Based on these statements, what is a social contract? Who benefits from it?
- 2. Contrast** How does the idea of government based on a “social contract” differ from the idea behind a monarchy? A dictatorship?
- 3. Apply Information** Identify two ways that your federal, state, or local government protect the rights to life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness.



Constitution Day Assembly

September 17 is Constitution Day, and your school may hold an assembly or other celebration in honor of the day. As part of this celebration, your teacher may ask you to participate in planning and holding a Constitution Day assembly.

Organize As a class, create the basic plan for your assembly. Discuss the following:

1. When and where should the assembly take place?
2. How long should it take? Should you plan on a short program taking a single class period, or a longer program?
3. Who should be involved? Will other classes or other grades take part? Will you invite outsiders, such as parents or people from the community?
4. What activities might be included?

Plan After your discussion, divide the class into committees to complete jobs such as getting permission from the school administration, preparing a program, inviting any guests, advertising the plan beforehand, and blogging about it afterward.

Give thought to the types of activities that might be included in the assembly. You might invite a guest speaker from your community. You might run an essay contest among students and have the winners read their essays during the assembly. Some students might prepare a video presentation about the Bill of Rights. Others might write and perform a skit about what the Declaration of Independence or U.S. Constitution mean to them.

You might start your assembly by asking everyone to rise to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States flag. One student might give a brief speech about how the pledge reflects the ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.



>> Your school may hold a Constitution Day assembly like the one shown here.

Communicate Present your Constitution Day assembly. After the assembly is over, discuss the event with the class. Ask yourselves questions such as these:

1. How well was the assembly planned and organized? What improvements could we have made?
2. How would you rate each of the presentations or other activities of the assembly?
3. Was the audience engaged?
4. How effectively did the class work together?