

4.1 Democracy in America Equality, liberty and republicanism.

Aspect: The origins of and the principles underpinning the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution.

Introduction:

This resource covers Unit 4.1.1, aspect: The principles underpinning the Constitution.

This resource should be undertaken first in this unit of learning. It sets the general historical context and origins of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution. It is designed to provide a background to the topic but is not inclusive of all potential material required for examination purposes.

Both teacher and students will also need to undertake their own research/reading in order to provide a fully comprehensive coverage of the origins and principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Aims and Objectives:

Aim:

To understand the origins of and the main principles underpinning both the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution.

Objectives:

1. To identify the causes and main events of the American Revolutionary War as context to the key documents.
2. To research the main philosophical influences on the framers of the founding documents.
3. To research the main Founding Fathers.
4. To identify, explain and start to analyse the importance of the main principles and concepts underpinning the Declaration of Independence.
5. To identify, explain and start to analyse the importance of the main principles and concepts underpinning the US Constitution.

WJEC Government and Politics Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Knowledge and understanding of the principles upon which the American Revolutionary War was fought and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution embody.

AO2: Connections between philosophical principles and the two key founding documents.

AO3: Analysis and synthesis of arguments about the key concepts and principles underpinning the founding documents, and conclusions about their continued relevance today.

Links to other parts of the WJEC specification:

AS Unit 1, 1.1.1 – the development of the British Constitution (illustration and comparison only)

AS Unit 2, 2.1.1 – concepts around citizenship in a democracy.

A2 Unit 3, 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 – the fundamental values and main ideas and views of liberalism.

Further guidance:

The teacher should introduce this resource by establishing knowledge of the current USA – this could be by map work, exploring students' holidays there etc. The teacher should then aim to establish how much students know of the founding of European settlement in America and the subsequent thirteen colonies by the 1780s, rivalry between European nations in America, the roles and position of the native American tribes etc.

Conclusion:

The teacher should remind students of the nature of America in terms of European settlement; the roles and importance of the Founding Fathers; the wider philosophical context surrounding the disputes with Britain and the relationship between events in France and those in America in the late 18th century as part of the Enlightenment; the significance of the Declaration of Independence in setting out the basic and fundamental principles of the new state; the main principles underpinning the Constitution and how its conception explains why it has lasted.

Exercise 1: To identify the causes and main events of the American Revolutionary War



Guidance

This activity sets the context for why the American colonists wanted independence in the first place. At A level, the teacher should aim to emphasise the economic, social, political, religious and cultural aspects of the events rather than just treat them as a story, and start to enable students to explore the underlying issues of power and control, citizenship, representation, legitimacy that arose from this situation.

Watch the video **OR** study the time line then complete the two interactive tasks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3KCvMyazjU>

View time line document



Activity - American Revolution Timeline

Students should put the following events of the American Revolution in the correct chronological order.

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 1

Events

Boston Tea Party

Battle of Yorktown

Stamp Act

Battle of Saratoga

Tea Act

France entered the war

Lexington and Concord

Writing of the Constitution

Declaration of Independence

Boston Massacre

George Washington was appointed commander of the Continental Army

First Continental Congress

Treaty of Paris

The correct order is:

Stamp Act 1765

Boston Massacre 1770

Tea Act 1773

Boston Tea Party 1773

First Continental Congress 1774

Lexington and Concord 1775

George Washington was appointed commander of the Continental Army 1775

Declaration of Independence 1776

Battle of Saratoga 1777

France entered the war 1777-8

Battle of Yorktown 1781

Treaty of Paris 1783

Writing of the Constitution 1787

Extension work:

Students could be asked to explain which causes of or aspects of the War of Independence were;

Economic

Social

Political

Religious

Cultural

They could then rank them in order of importance.

Any ranking is possible, but teachers should help students understand the significance of power struggles and arguments about representation as political arguments, and that the issue that brought these to a head was economic (taxes of various sorts). The religious differences between the American colonists and the British state were what had brought settlers to America in the first place, and by the 18th century there were social and cultural differences around class and diversity between America and Britain.

Exercise 2: To research the main philosophical influences on the framers of the founding documents and to research the main Founding Fathers.



Activity 2a - The Founding Fathers

Students should independently research the background, career, main ideas and publications of the following people (*this is best done outside of class time*):

John Locke
Baron de Montesquieu
Thomas Paine
George Washington
Benjamin Franklin
Thomas Jefferson
James Madison
Alexander Hamilton

These websites may be useful:

<https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-founding-fathers/about-the-founding-fathers/>

<http://thefederalistpapers.org/founding-father-influences>



Activity 2b – Philosophers and Founding Fathers

Students should match the Philosopher/ Founding Father with each description.

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 2b

Below are the correct descriptions.

Philosopher/ Founding Father	Description
Washington	Was a federalist, favouring a strong central government. He was not an egalitarian and believed in the rights of property. Became the USA's first president.

Madison	Helped draft <i>Virginia's state constitution</i> when he was 25. That document later became the model for the U.S. Constitution. Sometimes known as "the Father of the Constitution".
Jefferson	Wrote the <i>Declaration of Independence</i> ; served as Minister to France. He was a Republican, which at that time was the party of the common man. He envisioned a nation built on agriculture, not industry.
Franklin	Was one of the three Americans to sign the peace treaty with England that ended the Revolutionary War. He was suspicious of strong central governments and advocated a three-person presidential committee rather than having a single president. Famous for saying, 'In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.'
Hamilton	Wrote the <i>Federalist Papers</i> along with Madison and John Jay. He had a passion for a nation built around a strong and fiscally stable central government. His political legacy is embodied in the Federal Bank.
Locke	Author of <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> in which he defended the claim that men are by nature free and equal against claims that God had made all people naturally subject to a monarch. In his view, government is obligated to serve the people.
Montesquieu	In his book <i>Spirit of the Laws (Esprit des Lois)</i> he called the idea of dividing government power into three branches the " <i>separation of powers</i> ". He thought it most important to create separate branches of government with equal but different powers.
Paine	England-born political philosopher and writer, internationalist and pamphleteer. In <i>Rights of Man</i> (1791) he argued that popular political revolution is permissible when a government does not safeguard the natural rights of its people. Served as a member of the French National Assembly during the French Revolution.

Exercise 3: To understand the purpose, main principles and importance of the Declaration of Independence.



Guidance

Students should watch two video clips. The first video introduces the basic concepts that underpin the Declaration of Independence and these concepts are then further explained and correlated to the Declaration itself in the second video clip. Students will also need their own copy of the Declaration when viewing the second video. A number of questions need to be answered after viewing the second clip.



Activity 3a - Citizenship, Equality and Representation

Students should view the first video clip at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb7MI8NQLoo>

Using the prompts in the video, students should write their definitions and thoughts about the following principles and concepts in the context of the time of the writing of these documents:

Citizenship

Equality

Representation

They should also explain what they understand by '*the United States of America*' as created by the Declaration of Independence and explain why this was, and still is, significant.



Notes

Citizenship – inalienable rights, not subjects of a monarch.

Equality – no class system or privilege of birth.

Representation – of US citizens of an independent country not subject to monarchy and Empire, decisions taken by Americans for Americans.

'The United States of America' as created by the Declaration of Independence and why this was, and still is, significant. The USA is a political, not a geographical, construct – where all thirteen states acted together, united in the interests of them all. Laid the

foundations of federalism (further explored in next video). This was important at the time because it established that all states were prepared to put aside differences to fight together for the survival of their new political system against a common enemy, and it created the concept of 'Americans' as opposed to 'Virginians' or 'Pennsylvanians'. They understood at the time that this in no way removed sovereignty from each individual state though – it was the thirteen states pooling sovereignty in the interests of them all and for clearly defined purposes. This is important today because it is the fundamental idea of federalism, and still defines where sovereignty lies (theoretically) in the USA today.



Activity 3b - The Declaration of Independence

Students should now watch this second video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS-tshQ9sys>

(Understanding the Declaration of Independence – 9 key concepts everyone should know)

The video clip relates the concepts students have already learned about regarding the document of the Declaration of Independence. Using the prompts in the video, students should annotate their own copy of the Declaration of Independence whilst listening/watching and then answer the following questions.

View Declaration of Independence document

- a. What does each section of the Declaration of Independence contain?
- b. What does the introductory section say about:
 - **Equality and self-determination** for America
 - **Rights** of citizens
 - **The limited purpose** of government
 - **Sovereignty of the people.**
- c. At the end of the video, students should explain their understanding of:
 - **Sovereignty of the individual states as addressed by the Declaration of Independence.**
 - **How the Declaration of Independence is a statement of liberal ideology.**
 - **Why the Declaration of Independence is regarded as a key founding document for the United States of America.**



Notes

- **Equality and self-determination for America** – that Americans have the right to belong to a state of their own making – as much right to do this as Britain had or any other state.
- **Rights of citizens** - ‘self-evident truths’; equality of each citizen (men only, and citizenship did not extend to slaves); unalienable rights that cannot be granted and taken away at the whim of anyone e.g. a monarch (this is the basic concept of citizenship).
- **The limited purpose of government** – to protect the rights of citizens.
- **Sovereignty of the people** – ultimate authority rests with the people who can dissolve any government that fails to fulfil the limited role outlined before.
- **Sovereignty of the individual states as addressed by the Declaration of Independence** – the signers saw each individual state as sovereign – of the same order as Britain or France – each state was free and independent and they were making the Declaration on behalf of the United States – the thirteen sovereign states, acting together for mutual benefit. They had not constructed a new united country.
- **How the Declaration of Independence is a statement of liberal ideology.** A statement of national self-determination; a statement of citizenship, rights and equality; a statement of individual freedom – ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’; limited purpose of government; sovereignty of the people.
- **Why the Declaration of Independence is regarded as a key founding document for the United States of America.** It established the fundamental right of the American people to govern themselves and for citizens to enjoy ‘unalienable rights’.

Exercise 4: To understand the main principles and importance of the Constitution.



Guidance

Students will need an individual copy of the Constitution, in hard copy or they can access it here:

<http://billofrightsinstitute.org/founding-documents/constitution/>

These concepts and the Constitution are revisited in more detail in the resource covering how the Constitution upholds the principles on which it was founded. The following activity gives students a feeling for how the Constitution embeds key concepts and principles and does not cover everything. A further development activity might be for students to find other examples of each key concept/ principle within the Constitution.

View Constitution document



Activity - The Constitution - Key Concepts or Principles

[Click to open activity](#)

See **Worksheet 4**

Where does the Constitution embed the following key concepts or principles? Students should study their copy of the Constitution and then match the location with the principle below:

Location	Correct concept/principle
The first 52 words starting, 'We, the People...'	<i>Democracy and republicanism</i>
Article 1 Section 3 – each state has two senators	<i>Rights of the states</i>
Article 1 Section 3 – powers of impeachment	<i>Limited government</i>

Location	Correct concept/principle
Article 1 Section 7 – power of the purse	<i>Limited government</i>
Article 1 Section 7 – presidential veto	<i>Limited government</i>
Article 1 Section 8 – enumerated powers of Congress	<i>Limited government</i>
Article 2 Section 1 – the electoral college	<i>Rights of the states</i>
Article 2 Section 2 – enumerated powers of the president	<i>Limited government</i>
Articles 1, 2 and 3 – establishing three separate branches of government that check each other	<i>Limited government</i>
Article 4 – establishing federalism	<i>Rights of the states</i>
Article 4 Section 4 - establishing a republican form of government	<i>Democracy and republicanism</i>
Amendments 1-10 – the Bill of Rights	<i>Rights of citizens</i>



Notes

To complete this resource, students should further investigate the Constitution's purpose and be prepared to discuss what they think its overriding purpose was. It would be helpful to reflect on how many times each principle/ concept was addressed in Exercise 4. Further discussion could include the extent to which students think the purpose of the Constitution is still pertinent today, and how the circumstances of its conception have helped the document to have lasting relevance.

Limited
government

Rights of citizens

Rights of the
states

Democracy and
republicanism

