

## **America's Black Founders**

**By:** Tami Ewell, Teacher Consultant, Wasatch Range Writing Project

**Burning Questions:** What are inalienable rights? Who has inalienable rights? What is the relationship between slavery and inalienable rights?

### **Objectives:**

- Students will understand the contribution of African Americans in U.S. history and the fight for equal rights.
- Students will be able to analyze the role of African Americans in the war for independence.
- Students will understand what it was like to be an African/slave during the Revolution.

**Context:** Any middle class studying government or U.S. history.

**Materials:** *America's Black Founders: Revolutionary Heroes and Early Leaders with 21 Activities* by Nancy I. Sanders

**Time Span:** 3 class periods (45 minute class periods)

### **Procedures:**

- Give students a brief introduction to the history of the United States and discuss slavery, its purpose and consequences.
- Introduce students to the concept of inalienable rights. Explain that inalienable rights are innate and do not come from outside ourselves. They are rights we have simply by being human.
- Explain that early settlers did not see slaves as humans but as property. Slaves were therefore denied their inalienable rights. Have students analyze and discuss the 1774 petition from a group of slaves to have the colonial government of Massachusetts end slavery laws which were denying their inalienable rights.
- Using the book *America's Black Founders*, create centers (one for each section: Colonial Days, Years of Unrest, Beginnings of War, The American Revolution, African Americans as citizens, African Americans lead the way). Make copies of the passages to read. Set up the suggested activities for each section. (Some activities may be difficult, such as cook pepper pot soup, so you may wish to only choose a few activities from each section.)
- Divide the class into groups of 6 or so. Have each group start at a center. First have students read the passages. Then have them participate in the activity.
- Have students keep a journal and, after each center, have them respond to how that center helped them better understand the burning questions.

- After students have rotated through all the centers, have them come together as a class and discuss the burning questions and what they learned about African Americans and their experience in the creating of our country.

**Extensions:**

- Have students individually look up articles on inalienable rights in current media.
- Have students read Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* Speech and discuss the Civil Rights movement and how it was similar to and different from the slaves' fight for freedom.
- Have students research some of the people mentioned in the activity book.

**Resources:**

- Sanders, Nancy I. *America's Black Founders, Revolutionary Heroes and Early Leaders*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010.
- 1774 Slaves' Petition: [http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/print\\_documents/v1ch14s9.html](http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/print_documents/v1ch14s9.html)
- Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* speech  
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>
- The rough draft of the Declaration of Independence included criticism of King George for supporting the slave trade. See PBS *Africans in America*:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h33.html>
- From *Digital History* is "Explorations: the Revolutionary War," which includes materials on slavery, the American Revolution and the Constitution:  
[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning\\_history/revolution/revolution\\_slavery.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/revolution/revolution_slavery.cfm)

## **The Signers and the Modern World**

**By:** Tami Ewell, Teacher Consultant, Wasatch Range Writing Project

**Burning Questions:** Who were the signers of the Declaration of Independence? What contributions did they make to contemporary American society?

### **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to summarize the major events in the life of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.
- Students will understand the contribution of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

**Context:** 8-12 grades in American history, government, literature.

### **Materials:**

- *The Signers: The 56 Stories Behind the Declaration of Independence* by Dennis Brindell Fradin
- Writing materials
- Display materials

**Time Span:** 2-3 Class periods (45 minute class periods)

### **Procedures:**

- Discuss with students that the Declaration of Independence is a proposal justifying the legality of colonists establishing a new nation. The legal argument is based on the theory of inalienable rights.
- Discuss with students that the Declaration proposes that the new United States government will be a republic and a democracy; will protect inalienable rights; and will be composed of independent states.
  - **Republic:** A form of government with no vested offices, i.e., not headed by an inherited ruler (monarchy), a religious leader (theocracy), a military leader (dictator), or the wealthy (oligarchy). Lincoln called it government "of the people."
  - **Democracy:** A form of government in which those who are governed can participate—by voting, instructing their officers, petitioning, assembling and demonstrating. Lincoln called it government "by the people."
  - **Protection of Rights:** According to John Locke, the protection of inalienable rights is the purpose of government. Lincoln called it government "for the people."
  - **Independent States:** Independent states have sovereign powers—the power to make laws, the power to enforce laws, the "power of the purse" and the "power of the sword."

- As a class, read the introduction to *The Signers* and ask students the following discussion questions:
  - What was the purpose for the Declaration of Independence?
  - What did the Declaration do for the 13 colonies?
  - Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
  - What would have happened if some of the colonial governments had voted against independence?
  - What factors contributed to the vote for independence?
  - Why do we celebrate Independence Day on July 4<sup>th</sup>?
  - What were some of the consequences the signers of the Declaration had to face?
- After discussing the introduction, read the section on the first signer of the Declaration, John Hancock. Discuss his life and his role in independence. Have students decide the five major events of his life. Then have students choose symbols or pictures to represent those five events. Create a poster on which those images are displayed. Then as a class, write a paragraph describing John Hancock.
- Break students into groups or individuals. If in groups, have them choose a colony and create a poster for that colony or for an individual signer. If individual, have them choose a signer or assign them one.
- Have them read the brief biography of the signer and have them write down the five most important events in his life.
- Have the students draw or find pictures to represent the major events in their signer's life.
- On the back of the poster, have the students write a paragraph summarizing the significant events in the signer's life.
- Have students present their posters orally.
- Have students research contemporary news media—such as *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Times*, *Newsweek*—for stories about current issues of governance: republic, democracy, inalienable rights, creation of states. Research can be done individually or in groups.
- Have students orally report their research—as individuals or as groups.

**Extensions:**

Use one of the films in the collection Vote Democracy from [ITVS](http://www.itvs.org/educators/collections/vote-democracy/lesson-plans/democracy-around-the-world) (<http://www.itvs.org/educators/collections/vote-democracy/lesson-plans/democracy-around-the-world>) to discuss democracy around the world.

**Resources:**

- Fradin, Dennis Brindell. *The Signers, The 56 Stories Behind the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Walker & Company, 2002
- Lesson plans about the Declaration of Independence from:
  - National Endowment for the Humanities (<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/declaration-independence-expression-american-mind>)

- The Library of Congress  
(<http://myloc.gov/Education/LessonPlans/Pages/lessonplans/declaration/index.asp>)
- teachinghistory.org (<http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/lesson-plan-reviews/19572>)
- Mr. Donn.org (<http://government.mrdonn.org/declaration.html>)
- The National Constitution Center  
([http://constitutioncenter.org/ncc\\_edu\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Independence\\_Lesson\\_Plans.aspx](http://constitutioncenter.org/ncc_edu_Declaration_of_Independence_Lesson_Plans.aspx))
- Lesson plans about the theory of inalienable rights from:
  - The National Archives (<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/documented-rights/education/lesson-plan.html>)
  - Oakland Unified School District  
(<http://urbandreams.ousd.k12.ca.us/lessonplans/humanrights/lessonplan.html>)