

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

The Socratic Seminar: A Declaration of Independence *Developed by Maureen Festi*

Grade - 5

Length of class period: 60 – 90 minutes depending on the class's familiarity with Socratic seminars

Essential Question: Why do people choose to declare their independence, and what effect does this process of becoming independent have on themselves and others?

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

- Analyze the purpose and content of the preamble to the Declaration of Independence and a run away slave ad written by Thomas Jefferson using a document analysis sheet.
- Engage in a Socratic seminar format by respectfully listening and discussing, asking questions, considering different points of view, and providing evidence from the documents to support their contributions.

Materials

- Thomas Jefferson slave advertisement from 1769:
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/RunawayAd1.pdf>
- Preamble of the Declaration of Independence- see attachment
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/dec4laration_transcript.html
- Document Analysis Sheet- see attachment
- Socratic seminar self-reflection and observation sheets – see attachments

Activities:

- **Initiation:** Everyone starts out in this world being dependent on others, but as we grow we are able to do things by ourselves. Take a few minutes to journal about a time in your life when you were able to do something independently for the first time. Describe what you did, how you felt about it, and how it affected the people on whom you were dependent. Share and discuss a few entries. Did this independence bring more freedom into your life?
- Tell students that they will be analyzing two documents written by Thomas Jefferson that directly or indirectly deal with issues of freedom and independence. Pass out documents and analysis sheets. Read the documents to the students and discuss the meaning of some of the vocabulary words that may be difficult for them, but do not discuss the documents at this time. Let students fill out the analysis sheets individually.

- Students bring their documents and analysis sheets to meet in a circle with everyone facing each other. The purpose of the Socratic seminar is for everyone to respectfully listen to each other as they discuss the documents, provide evidence for their positions, ask each other questions and learn from each other's different point of view. The role of the teacher is to be a neutral facilitator and keep the students on topic and focused on discussion rather than entering into arguments or debate. For more information on Socratic seminars: <http://www.middleweb.com/Socratic.html>
- Review the participant reflection sheet to establish ground rules for the seminar. Remind the students that everyone needs to have a chance to speak. Some students may be chosen to be observers and keep track of how many times members are following the format of the seminar and complete an observation sheet.
- Begin the discussion with the essential question: Why did people choose to declare their independence in each of these documents, and what effect did this process of becoming independent have on themselves and others? (The students need to have a conversation about this on their own using evidence from the text and without raising hands. Hopefully, out of their discussion will come the conflicting messages of Jefferson, the inequality, the colonists and the slaves need for freedom from their oppressors, the two different approaches to obtaining freedom, and the people loyal to the established British government and those loyal to the established institution of slavery... and new insights... If the conversation stops or needs new insights, the teacher needs to interject other open-ended questions to stimulate the discussion.)
- Ask this closing question for the seminar: If both of these documents were put into a book written by Jefferson, what do you think would be an effective title for the book?
- Share feedback from the observers.
- Complete the self-reflection rubric.

Assessment:

- Completion of the document analysis sheet for each primary document written by Thomas Jefferson
- Completion of the self- reflection rubric for participation in the Socratic seminar
- Observation of the contributions to and the participation in the Socratic seminar

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

- initiate questions and hypotheses about historic events being studied;
- display empathy for people who have lived in the past;
- demonstrate an understanding of the historical background of the Declaration of Independence;
- evaluate situations involving conflicts between rights and propose solutions to these conflicts;

The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Name _____ Date _____

Why do people choose to declare their independence, and what effect does this process of becoming independent have on themselves and others?

1. Type of document: _____
2. Date of document: _____
3. Author of document: _____
4. Position of author: _____

5. For what audience was the document written? _____

6. Why did Jefferson write this documents? _____

7. What specific evidence, or powerful words, did you find in the document that supports why someone is/may be seeking independence and freedom? Underline the evidence in the document or write quotes below.

8. What does this document tell you about life in America at the time the document was written?

9. What connections or contradictions are there between this document and the other document?

10. What questions would you like to ask Thomas Jefferson about this document?

Consider the information from both documents as you prepare to begin to share your thoughts.

_____’s Socratic Seminar Self-Reflection Sheet

3=Completely 2=Mostly 1=Somewhat 0=No opportunity

Reading and Preparing for the Seminar

- _____ Read the complete text/s
- _____ Analyzed the text/s to discover meaning and ideas
- _____ Found evidence in the text/s to support ideas
- _____ Thought about comments and connections to bring to the seminar

Listening during the Seminar

- _____ Actively listened (eye contact with speaker, quiet body, and silent voice)
- _____ Waited until the speaker was finished and did not interrupt or use side-talk
- _____ Paraphrased what a speaker said or referred to a previous speaker’s comments

Speaking during the seminar

- _____ Supported statements and ideas with evidence from the text/s
- _____ Spoke clearly, respectfully, and with a voice that could be heard by everyone
- _____ Used non-judgmental words like “I noticed...”
- _____ Self-monitored the amount of time speaking and gave others a chance to speak
- _____ Spoke only when appropriate

Interacting with Others during the Seminar

- _____ Analyzed ideas of others, made thoughtful connections, and built on their ideas
- _____ Asked questions of the text or participant/s that clarified meaning or stimulated thoughtful conversation
- _____ Appropriately introduced a unique idea or perspective for others to build on
- _____ Invited others to speak or join in the conversation
- _____ Accepted differing opinions and was willing to consider new ideas
- _____ Used positive and inclusive verbal and non-verbal cues
- _____ Entered into discussions rather than debates

Written Reflection: Write a paragraph about a new insight that you discovered about the text, about others, and/or about yourself as a result of participating in this Socratic seminar format.

Socratic Seminar Observation Worksheet

Observer _____

Seminar Observed _____

Section 1: Reading and Preparing for the Seminar

- How many participants came prepared for the seminar? How do you know?

- How many participants used evidence from the text to support ideas or ask questions?

- How many times did participants refer to the text during the discussion?

Comments:

