



Grade 5 Lesson Plan #2: Unalienable Rights in the Declaration of Independence

Teacher Notes

Materials:

- Text: Handout 1: "Unalienable Rights: The Heart of the Declaration of Independence".
- Handouts:
 - Handout 2: Shaping Your Written Response
 - Handout 3: Graphic Organizer: Connecting Grievances to Unalienable Rights
 - Handout 4: Video Thinking Prompts and Debate Organizer

Preparation:

- Number paragraphs (1-8) of the new text. Prepare vocabulary cards.
- Check your computer to make sure it's in working order and that you have sound.

Standards Alignment:

Florida Grade 5 Civics Literacy Standard—**SS.5.CG.1.1**: Recognize that the Declaration of Independence affirms that every U.S. citizen has certain unalienable rights. *Clarification 2*: Students will describe the idea of “unalienable rights” in the Declaration of Independence as it relates to each citizen.

Reading/Writing: Students will analyze text and write a response connecting the grievances (from Lesson 1) to unalienable rights (Lesson 2).

Essential Question

How did the King's denial of the colonists' rights lead to the establishment of "**Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness**" as the foundation of the new American government?

Opening (15 minutes)

Review and Hook (5 minutes)

- **Recall:** Review the previous lesson's essential question and final vote: "Which category of grievance (Taxes, Military, Representation, or Justice) was most responsible for independence?"
- **Connect:** Pose the question: "Why did the colonists focus so much on what the King was doing **wrong**? What were they trying to protect?"

Vocabulary Instruction (10 minutes)

Direct Instruction: Introduce key terms using context and student-friendly definitions.

- **Self-evident:** Jefferson used self-evident to mean so true that no one needs to prove it, like the sun rising each morning.
- **Unalienable:** Cannot be taken away or given up; they're part of who you are.
- **Liberty:** The freedom to make your own choices, free from harsh rules.
- **Popular Sovereignty:** The idea that power comes from the people.

Paragraph	Word	How it Will be Taught	Student-Friendly Definition
1	Self-evident	Word parts: self (by oneself) - videre (easy to see) Context: "These rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—are so clear and true that they are self-evident, meaning everyone should see they belong to all people."	Something that is obviously true; it doesn't need proof
3	Unalienable	Word parts: un- (not) + alien (foreign/other) + -able (can be) Context: "can't be taken away or given up—they're part of who you are"	Rights that cannot be taken away or given up; they belong to you permanently
5	Liberty	Word parts: libertas (free) + -y (state of being)	Freedom to make your own choices without unfair control

		Context from Lesson 1: colonists wanted freedom from "Britain's harsh rules"	
7	Popular sovereignty	Word parts: popular (people) + sovereignty (supreme power) Context: "power comes from the people, not a king"	The idea that government's power comes from the people, not from kings or rulers

Linear Array Activity

Linear Array: Adapt the Linear Array activity¹⁰ for the word pair: **TEMPORARY ↔ UNALIENABLE**.

Directions: Work with your group to place these words on a line between TEMPORARY (can be taken away easily) and UNALIENABLE (can never be taken away).

TEMPORARY _____ UNALIENABLE

- Words to place on the continuum between **temporary** and **unalienable**: *short-term, given up, forever, permanent, disposable*.
- Discussion: "If a right is **unalienable**, where do you place it on the line? Why?"

Reading and Text Coding (30 minutes)

Reading #1: Categorizing and Connecting (15 minutes)

Text Coding: Students read the text "Unalienable Rights" and use three codes to mark sections:

- **L:** Information about **Life**.
- **B:** Information about **Liberty**.
- **H:** Information about **Pursuit of Happiness**.
- **I:** General information not aligned with Life, Liberty, or the Pursuit of Happiness.

Teacher Modeling: Model coding for paragraphs 1-4, specifically marking 'B' (Liberty) where the text mentions the king taxing without letting the colonists have a say, marking 'L' where there is information about rights pertaining to live safely, 'H' where the text references the opportunity to engage in activities that you like to do, and 'I' where there is general information not aligned to any of the other three codes.

Independent Practice: Students continue coding paragraphs 5-8.

Reading #2: Directed Note-Taking (15 minutes)

Guiding Question: What is the definition of each unalienable right, and how does the text show the colonists' experience was *denying* that right?

Handout 3 Graphic Organizer: Students complete a chart for each right (Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness)

Unalienable Right	Student-Friendly Definition	Textual Evidence of King DENYING the Right	Textual Evidence of RIGHT in America TODAY
Life
Liberty
Pursuit of Happiness

Extended Text Discussion (25 minutes)

Video Clip (5 minutes)

Show selected segment from "[The Declaration of Independence and the Concept of Liberty](#)" (National Constitution Center) and focus on how liberty connects to consent of the governed. Because this video uses sophisticated language and moves quickly, consider pausing at natural points to check for understanding. The following spots work well:

- 0:25 — Pause after the narrator explains “natural rights.”
 - Ask: “Which rights does he say people are born with?”
 - Clarify terms like life, liberty, pursuit of happiness.
- 0:55 — Pause when the narrator introduces “self-evident.”
 - Ask: “What does self-evident mean in your own words?”
 - Tie back to the vocabulary instruction earlier in the lesson.
- 1:30 — Pause when he describes why people form governments.
 - Ask: “What problem were the colonists trying to solve?”
- 1:55 — Pause near the end when the narrator restates the big idea.
 - Have students summarize: “Why did Jefferson say these truths did not need to be proven?”

Viewing Guide (Handout #4, Part 1)

Students jot notes while watching:

- “What does the video say about liberty and government?”
- “How is ‘consent of the governed’ explained?”
- “What examples of liberty today does the video mention?”

Partner Share and Preparation (5 minutes)

- Question:** “Which unalienable right (Life, Liberty, or Pursuit of Happiness) was the **most revolutionary** idea for the time, and why?”

- *Task (Handout #4, Part 2):* Partners discuss and select one right, finding two pieces of evidence to support the claim that it was the most revolutionary idea.

Whole Class Discussion: The Foundation (15 minutes)

- *Focus:* Debate which right was the most crucial foundation for the new government.
 - *Teacher Facilitation:*
 - *Presentations:* Have groups argue for their chosen right, citing evidence (e.g., "Liberty was most revolutionary because the text says it came from John Locke and meant governments must have the consent of the governed").
 - *Challenge:* "How can you have liberty or pursue happiness if your life isn't safe? Doesn't the right to **Life** have to come first?"
 - *Synthesize:* Guide students to see that all three rights are connected and together form the new government's promise.
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Final Written Response and Closure (15 minutes)

Handout #2: Final Written Response (12 minutes)

Writing Prompt: How did the **grievances** against King George III prove that the King was denying the colonists their **unalienable rights** of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness?

Instructions: Write a well-developed paragraph that:

- States a claim linking one specific grievance (from Lesson 1) to one specific unalienable right (from Lesson 2).
- Explains how the King's action denied that right.
- Includes at least **TWO** pieces of textual evidence from *either* Lesson 1 or Lesson 2 text with paragraph numbers.

Closure (3 minutes)

Connection to Today: Turn-and-talk: "The Declaration was not perfect; not all people were fully included at first. What evidence in the text suggests this is a goal we're still working toward?"

Exit Ticket: "Write down one example of how a U.S. citizen uses their right to **Liberty** today."

Handout #1

Unalienable Rights: The Heart of the Declaration of Independence

1. In the summer of 1776, a group of brave leaders met in Philadelphia to write a bold letter that would change the world: the Declaration of Independence. This document was more than just a note to King George III of England—it was a powerful statement about why the American colonies wanted to be free. At its core were unalienable rights, freedoms that belong to every person from the moment they are born. These rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—are so clear and true that they are self-evident, meaning everyone should see they belong to all people. They form the foundation of what it means to be a citizen in America. Let’s explore how these ideas shaped the American Revolution and why they matter to every one of us today.
2. Back in the 1700s, the American colonies were ruled by England, far across the Atlantic Ocean. King George III made laws that the colonists thought were unfair, like taxing tea and paper without letting them have a say in Parliament. He sent soldiers to control towns, took away the right to fair trials, and even ignored colonial leaders who begged for change. By 1776, the colonists had had enough. They believed that people should govern themselves, not be ruled by a faraway king. So, leaders like Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin gathered at the Second Continental Congress to declare independence from Britain. Their words in the Declaration of Independence explained why freedom was worth fighting for.
3. One of the most important ideas in the Declaration is the concept of unalienable rights. This term comes from the Enlightenment, a time when thinkers like John Locke said that certain rights are given to people by nature and a higher power, not by kings or governments. “Unalienable” means these rights belong to every person by nature and cannot be justly taken away or denied by any fair government. The Declaration lists three big ones: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These powerful words said that all people are born with the same basic rights, a principle that would eventually be at the heart of United States of America.
4. The right to life means every person deserves to live safely, free from harm or unfair punishment. In the 1770s, this was a big deal because King George’s soldiers could barge into homes or arrest people without reason. The colonists wanted a government that protected lives, not threatened them. Today, this right means citizens can expect laws to keep them safe, like rules against crime or systems to help during emergencies.

5. Liberty meant being free to make your own choices without a distant king controlling everything. For the colonists, liberty meant no more unfair taxes without representation, the freedom to speak their minds, practice their religion, and meet to discuss ideas. The Declaration announced that governments should rule only with the consent of the people, but it was the state constitutions written at that time and later the U.S. Constitution that began turning those big ideas into real rules, including the right to vote for some citizens.
6. The pursuit of happiness meant people should be free to work hard, improve their lives, and enjoy what they earn without a king or government getting in the way. Thomas Jefferson chose those words in 1776 to express an idea many thinkers had already discussed: that ordinary people—like a Virginia farmer or a New England merchant—have a natural right to build a better future. It wasn't a totally brand-new idea but putting it in the Declaration made it a guiding star for the new country.
7. These unalienable rights were revolutionary because they said power comes from the people, not a king. The Declaration argued that if a government fails to protect these rights, the people can change it. This idea, called popular sovereignty, helped explain why the colonies were already fighting the American Revolution—a war from 1775 to 1783 that won their freedom. Battles like Lexington and Concord in 1775 showed the colonists' determination to fight for their rights. Later, these ideas inspired the U.S. Constitution, which created a government with checks and balances to make sure no one—like a president or Congress—could act like a king and take rights away.
8. In 1776, the Declaration announced to the world that every person is born with the same basic rights—rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It didn't create a government or write new laws, but it set a huge goal: build a country that actually protects those rights for everyone. It wasn't perfect—many people, like enslaved Africans and women, were left out at first—but those powerful words became a promise Americans have been working to keep ever since. Today, the laws and freedoms you enjoy in school and in life are part of that long effort to make the Declaration's dream come true for all of us.

Handout #2

Shaping Your Written Response

Unalienable Rights: The Heart of the Declaration of Independence

PREDICT —

In Lesson 1, we learned that King George III taxed colonists without their consent, kept soldiers in their towns, shut down their assemblies, and denied them fair trials. If the colonists were declaring independence from these problems, what rights do you think they would want to guarantee for themselves in their new country?

List at least THREE rights you predict they would include and explain WHY each one matters based on the grievances we studied.

Example to guide thinking: If the King denied fair trials (Justice grievance), maybe the colonists would want the right to _____.

FINAL WRITTEN RESPONSE —

How did the colonists' grievances against King George III prove that the King was denying their unalienable rights and lead them to establish Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness as the foundation of American government?

Write a well-developed paragraph (or two shorter paragraphs) that:

- **Names at least TWO grievance categories from Lesson 1** (Taxes, Military, Representation, Justice).
- **Connects each grievance to a specific unalienable right** (Life, Liberty, or Pursuit of Happiness) that was violated.
- **Uses evidence from today's text** with paragraph numbers to explain the connection.
- **Explains how declaring these rights as "unalienable" solved the problems** the colonists faced.
- **Includes a concluding sentence** about why these rights matter today.

Sentence Starters to help you:

- "The colonists' grievances against King George III proved he was denying their unalienable rights in several ways..."
- "For example, the King's _____ grievances (from Lesson 1) violated the right to _____ because..."
- "According to paragraph _____, the colonists wanted _____..."
- "By declaring _____ as an unalienable right, the colonists ensured that..."
- "This connection between grievances and rights shows that..."
- "These rights still matter today because..."

[illegible]

Handout #3

Graphic Organizer:

Connecting Grievances to Unalienable Rights

Directions: Complete this chart using evidence from today's text. Connect each unalienable right back to the grievances we studied in Lesson 1.

TEACHER EXAMPLE – LIFE ROW (completed)

Unalienable Right	Student-Friendly Definition	Evidence: How King Denied This Right	Grievance Category from Lesson 1	Evidence: How This Right Protects Citizens Today
LIFE	The right to live safely, free from harm or unfair punishment	Soldiers barged into homes, arrested people without reason - paragraph 4	Military	Citizens can expect laws to keep them safe, rules against crime, systems to help during emergencies - paragraph 4

YOUR TURN – LIBERTY ROW

Unalienable Right	Student-Friendly Definition	Evidence: How King Denied This Right	Grievance Category from Lesson 1	Evidence: How This Right Protects Citizens Today
LIBERTY		<i>(Find evidence in paragraph 5)</i>		<i>(Find evidence in paragraph 5)</i>

YOUR TURN – PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS ROW

Unalienable Right	Student-Friendly Definition	Evidence: How King Denied This Right	Grievance Category from Lesson 1	Evidence: How This Right Protects Citizens Today
PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS		<i>(Find evidence in paragraph 6)</i>		<i>(Find evidence in paragraph 6)</i>

Handout #4

Video Thinking Prompts & Debate Organizer

PART 1: VIDEO NOTES

Video: [The Declaration of Independence and the Concept of Liberty](#) (National Constitution Center)

Directions: As you watch the video, jot down your thoughts:

Question	My Notes
What principle or right is being discussed?	
How is liberty described or shown?	
What examples of rights or government responsibilities stand out?	

PART 2: DEBATE PREPARATION

Debate Question: Which unalienable right - Life, Liberty, or Pursuit of Happiness - was MOST revolutionary (most bold or groundbreaking) for the colonists to declare in 1776?

Directions: Work with your partner to choose a right and prepare your argument.

OUR POSITION:

We believe _____ was the most revolutionary right because:

(Write at least 2 reasons with evidence)

REASON 1:

Evidence from text (paragraph #):

Connection to Lesson 1 grievance:

REASON 2:

Evidence from text (paragraph #):

Connection to Lesson 1 grievance:

ANTICIPATING OTHER ARGUMENTS

What will the other groups say? How will we respond?

Other Group's Position	Their Best Argument	Our Counter-Argument
Life was most revolutionary		