

# kennesawor

## Classroom Activities (K-12 and University)

Item Type	text
Rights	The digital reproductions on this site are provided for research consultation and scholarly purposes only. To request permission to publish, reproduce, publicly display, broadcast, or distribute this material in any format outside of fair use please contact the Kennesaw State University Archives.
Download date	2026-04-21 04:29:13
Link to Item	<a href="https://soar.kennesaw.edu/handle/11360/7629">https://soar.kennesaw.edu/handle/11360/7629</a>

# Classroom Activities (K-12 and University)

*We the People: The Documents that Made a Nation* is a traveling exhibit that tells the story of the founding of the United States. The 10-panel exhibit looks at how specific documents helped shape the fight for independence, generated support for the Revolutionary War, and inspired the founders to create a new nation.

These classroom activities draw upon the exhibit and related primary sources to help students engage with this important historical period.

## Why We Need Independence (4th Grade)

This activity supports the Georgia Standards of Excellence for 4th Grade Social Studies (SS4H1, SS4H2): Covers causes (Stamp Act, Tea Party), key figures (Washington, Jefferson), major battles, and the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

**Activity:** Students create a timeline from 1764 to 1776 as the American colonists' support for independence grows.

**Goal:** To visually summarize the causes of the revolution.

**Materials Needed:** printed copy of timeline grid for each group, online access to sample timelines below, PDF of the *We the People* exhibit for each group, pens/pencils.

### Sample Timelines:

- American Battlefield Trust: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/american-revolution-timeline>
- White House: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america250/founders-museum/major-events/timeline/>

### Instructions:

1. Provide overview: The American Revolution was primarily caused by the British government's attempts to tax the 13 American colonies to pay debts from the French and Indian War. Parliament imposed unpopular taxes—such as the Stamp Act (1765) and Townshend Acts (1767)—without colonial representation, violating the principle of “no taxation without representation.” This created resentment and calls for independence from Britain. Acts of resistance, including the Boston Tea Party and the imposition of the Intolerable Acts (1774), led to open rebellion by 1775.

2. Watch a short video, "Why did the Colonies Declare Independence," Untold History, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTliCl6uwmo>
3. Review the above timelines from 1764 and 1776 and *We the People* exhibit
4. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students.
5. Ask each group to select 8 events that led to the American colonists fight for independence (between 1764-1776) and complete the grid below.
6. Ask the students to review the 8 events and select the 1 event that they think is the most important factor leading the colonies to fight for independence.
7. Have each student group present their findings and discuss which event they chose and why it is important.

Grid for Why We Need Independence Activity (4th Grade)

<b>1764</b>	<b>1765</b>	<b>1766</b>
<b>1767</b>	<b>1768</b>	<b>1769</b>
<b>1770</b>	<b>1771</b>	<b>1772</b>
<b>1773</b>	<b>1774</b>	<b>1775</b>
<b>1776</b>		

## The First Constitution Graphic Organizer Activity (8th Grade)

This activity supports the Georgia Standards of Excellence for 8th Grade Georgia Studies (SS8H3, SS8H4): Focuses on Georgia's specific role in the revolution, the impact of the Proclamation of 1763, and the transition from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution.

**Activity:** Complete a graphic organizer by answering 12 questions about the Articles of Confederation.

**Goal:** To understand the limitations of the Articles of Confederation that resulted in a need for the U.S. Constitution.

**Materials Needed:** printed copy of graphic organizer for each group, online access to full text link of the Articles of Confederation at link: <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/articles-of-confederation>, PDF of the *We the People* exhibit, pens/pencils.

### Instructions:

1. Provide overview: Adopted in 1777 and effective from 1781–1789, the Articles of Confederation were the first U.S. constitution, establishing a “league of friendship” among 13 sovereign states. Designed to unite war efforts while preserving state autonomy, it created a weak central government, lacking powers to tax, regulate commerce, or draft soldiers. These deficiencies led to the 1787 Constitutional Convention.
2. Watch the short video from Khan Academy about the Articles of Confederation.  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/road-to-revolution/creating-a-nation/v/the-articles-of-confederation>
3. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students.
4. Ask each group to complete the graphic organizer below, answering questions about the Articles of Confederation using the online link and the *We the People* exhibit.
5. Bring group back together and invite each group to answer one of the 12 questions.

## Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer for First Constitution Activity (8th Grade)

What were the Articles of Confederation?	Who was the primary author of the document?	When was it ratified?
How did it organize the government?	How were laws passed?	What could Congress do?
What could Congress not do?	What were five main problems with the Articles of Confederation?	Why was there resistance to a strong federal government?
How long did the Articles of Confederation serve as our first constitution?	How did Shay's Rebellion (1786-87) demonstrate the weakness of the Articles of Confederation?	What replaced the Articles of Confederation and how was it different?

## Understanding *Common Sense*: Graphic Organizer Activity (12<sup>th</sup> grade and University)

This activity supports the Georgia Standards of Excellence for High School U.S. History (SSUSH3, SSUSH4, SSUSH5): Analyzes the ideological, military, and diplomatic aspects of the Revolution, including the move toward independence and the development of the new government.

**Activity:** Complete a graphic organizer by answering 12 questions about Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*.

**Goal:** To understand the impact of Paine’s writings on galvanizing support for independence and the American Revolution.

**Materials Needed:** printed copy of graphic organizer for each group, online access to full text link of *Common Sense* <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm>, PDF of the *We the People* exhibit, pens/pencils.

### Instructions:

1. Provide overview: Published in January of 1776, Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* was a 47-page pamphlet that used simple, direct language to argue for immediate independence from Britain and the creation of a republic. It broke down complex political issues into “common sense,” shifting public opinion from reconciliation to revolution. The pamphlet sold nearly 150,000 copies, making it an early bestseller.
2. Watch a short video: How did Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* shape the American Revolution? <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/constitution-101/x7a03a96a83aa80ff:principles-of-the-american-revolution-the-ideas-and-events-that-led-to-change/x7a03a96a83aa80ff:the-reasons-for-the-revolution/v/how-did-thomas-paines-common-sense-shape-the-american-revolution>
3. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students.
4. Ask each group to complete the graphic organizer below, answering questions about the *Common Sense* using the online link and the *We the People* exhibit.
5. Bring group back together and invite each group to answer one of the 12 questions.

### Extension Activity:

Invite students to complete additional research on these three questions:

1. How did Thomas Paine’s use of simple, direct language—rather than elevated, formal prose—effectively persuade the average colonist toward revolution?

2. Analyze Paine's rhetorical strategies in *Common Sense*: How does he combine religious, economic, and rational arguments to make the case for independence?
3. What role did shame and pride play in Paine's argument against continued allegiance to the British crown?

## Common Sense Graphic Organizer

Who was Thomas Paine?	Describe the circumstances of the first publication of <i>Common Sense</i> .	What is the significance of the title of the pamphlet?
Why was it published as a pamphlet and how was it distributed?	What were Paine's main arguments for independence?	What kinds of language does Paine use to appeal to a large audience?
How does <i>Common Sense</i> reflect Enlightenment ideals?	In what ways does Paine use Biblical references to make his argument?	Why was the pamphlet so popular?
What is Paine's view of a just government?	For Paine, what is the relationship between law and liberty?	What can <i>Common Sense</i> teach us about persuasion, the power of the printed word, and democracy?

## Additional Primary Sources and Curriculum Links

- Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/curriculum/elementary/american-revolution#elementary-lesson-plans>
- American Battlefield Trust; <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/curriculum/revolutionary-war-curriculum>
- PBS: <https://nhpbs.org/learnathome/?resource=8387>
- American Historical Association: <https://www.historians.org/teaching-learning/k-12-education/american-lesson-plan/curricular-content/>
- Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/american-revolution/>