

Thomas Paine and *Common Sense*

By Wendy Thowdis

Grade Level: Eight to Eleven

Number of class periods: Two block periods

Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 9-12

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source and provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text
- Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Common Core Writing Standards for Literacy in History 9-12

- Introduce a topic or thesis statement; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole
- Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented.
- Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic; convey a knowledgeable stance in a style that responds to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers.

Objective

Students will be asked to read and analyze primary source documents to gain an understanding of the role Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* played at the dawn of the American Revolution. They will increase their literacy skills as they explore the reasons the Patriots found it necessary to separate from England and compare these reasons to arguments the Loyalists made to remain committed to their Mother Country.

Introduction

Why are students always required to read and understand the *Declaration of Independence* but rarely explore Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*? With so many important documents coming out of the Revolutionary Era, it is easy to overlook this pamphlet that challenged the authority of the British government and the royal monarchy. Published on February 14, 1776, it was the first work to openly ask for independence from Great Britain. Paine spoke to the common people in plain language they could understand. He published it anonymously because of its treasonous content and donated his royalties to George Washington's Continental Army. Historian Gordon S. Wood described *Common*

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Sense as "the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary era". In this lesson, students will read excerpts from *Common Sense* to see how Paine argued that the suffering of the colonies should be directly blamed on King George III and not just Parliament and how this mandated a declaration of independence.

Materials

- Excerpts from *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine, February 14, 1776, www.teachingamericanhistory.org
- Worksheets for *Common Sense*
- Concept Definition Map
- *The Liberty Tree*, Lyrics Composed by "Atlanticus" (Thomas Paine, 1775) <http://www.americanrevolution.org/war%20songs/warsongs2.html>
- *American Revolutionary War Ballad: Liberty Tree song by Thomas Paine*, YouTube Video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAbNFF39MLw>
- Quotations from: *Plain Truth: Containing Remarks on a Late Pamphlet, Entitled Common Sense* Written under the name "Candidus;" believed to be James Chalmers http://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/historylabs/Should_the_Colo_student:RS07.pdf
- Complete text of the Declaration of Independence (PDF). This transcript of the Declaration of Independence is from the National Archives online resource The Charters of Freedom.

Procedure

Day 1

This lesson presumes that students will already have studied the Declaration of Independence.

1. Read the Document: *Common Sense*
 - a. Handout copies of the document Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Do not reveal too much to the students about the information in the document. The point will be to let the students discover the information through careful reading of the text, discussion with their classmates, and then by using the text to construct their own meaning.

Explain to the students that we will next "Share Read" the first section together. This is done by having the students follow along silently while the teacher begins reading aloud. The teacher models prosody, inflection, and punctuation. The teacher then asks the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while the teacher continues to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English Language Learners (ELL).

Handout out **Worksheet 1 for *Common Sense*** and instruct students to reread the first section, this time looking for 5-6 Key Words. Tell them to think of these Key Words as the very important contributors to understanding the paragraph and without these words the selection would not make sense. These words are usually nouns or verbs. Don't pick "connector" words (are, is, the, and, so, etc.). The other Key Words rule is

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that we cannot pick words if we don't know what they mean. Have them write the 5-6 Key Words in the box on the Worksheet.

Survey the class to find out what the most popular choices of Key Words were and decide as a class, which Key Words most capture the important meaning of this first section of *Common Sense*. Have students write in these Key Words on their worksheet.

Explain that as a class we will now create a sentence that gets at the main idea of this section by using these Key Words with whatever connectors are needed. You do not have to use all of the Key Words to do this. Have students write this sentence on their worksheet.

Explain that as a class we will now put this summary sentence into our own words. Ask for volunteers and then have the class decide which sentence best captures the main idea and write the sentence on their worksheet. This will model for the students what you will expect them to do with the rest of the document.

- b. Have students complete **Worksheets 2 in pairs** and **Worksheet 3 alone**, using the same format as above. Remind them to read each section, select key words, write a sentence describing the main ideas using these key words and connectors, and then write summary sentences in their own words.
2. **Complete the Concept Definition Map**
Handout this graphic organizer to students and have them work in pairs to place information from their Worksheets in the appropriate boxes on the **Concept Definition Map**. Explain that this will help them organize information they learned from reading *Common Sense*.

Day 2

1. **Play: "Liberty Tree Song"**
Play this song & video from YouTube and handout the lyrics for students to follow:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAbNFF39MLw>
 - a. Explain to students that Thomas Paine also wrote a song in 1775 entitled, *The Liberty Tree*, that described his beliefs about why the colonies needed to separate from Great Britain. (Use this secondary source to describe the details surrounding this song:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sons_of_Liberty)
 - b. Have students add any new information from this song to the labeled box on their **Concept Definition Map**.
 - c. **Formative Assessment using the text:** Question-Answer Relationship (QAR). Describe to students that they will be writing 3 types of questions (Pearson & Johnson) as a way to summarize and show their knowledge about *Common Sense and The Liberty Tree Song*.

These 3 types of questions are:

- textually explicit (literally stated in the text) – Known as *Right There*
- textually implicit (suggested or implied by the text) – Known as *Think and Search*

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- script implicit (in the reader's background knowledge or "script" inside the reader's head)- Known as *On Your Own*

Using the information on your **Worksheets** from *Common Sense* and your **Concept Definition Map**, work in groups of three to write 2 questions for each type of question described above (6 questions total). Students will then trade questions with another group, answer their questions, and then give feedback on the categorization of the questions they answered and how accurately they reflected information learned from the text.

2. Compare to James Chalmers (A Loyalist)

- Give students a brief lecture on the background information about James Chalmers. (For information about this Loyalist document, see *James Chalmers and "Plain Truth" A Loyalist Answers Thomas Paine* <http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/fall96/loyalists.html>). Explain that most Loyalists held these views during the American Revolution.
- Handout *Selected Quotes from James Chalmers* and read aloud with students. Assist them in creating a list of 3-5 points of disagreement that Chalmers had with Thomas Paine. Explain that since Chalmers used very sophisticated language that was even way above the level of most common folk in the colonies during the 1770's, you will work together as a class to decipher his arguments.

Point out, again, that these were views held by many Loyalists. Make sure you include information learned from the texts of the 2 documents.

3. Culminating Activities for Evaluation

Make sure you include information learned from the texts of the two documents for any of the Evaluation activities selected

- Say it in a few words*: "Write a Poem for Two Voices", a "Haiku", or a "Rap" which incorporates information from the documents analyzed in this lesson.

Poem for Two Voices: A Patriot & A Loyalist

This strategy is a wonderful way to present two perspectives or opposing points of view. Students can write a poem individually or in pairs, but either way, the poem is a dialogue between the two groups and is best read aloud by 2 people. Each voice speaks individually and then the 2 voices speak together, commenting on something about which they agree or about which they agree to disagree. It is best to arrange the lines in 3 columns with the speeches moving down the page in the sequence in which they will read aloud.

VOICE 1(Patriots)

CHORAL READING

VOICE 2 (Loyalists)

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- b. *Visualization*: Visualize yourself as a Patriot during the 1770's and describe what aspects of Thomas Paine's works, *Common Sense* and *The Liberty Song*, that you would borrow or adopt as you fought for Patriot cause. Demonstrate your knowledge and application of these aspects by:
- Writing a 2-paragraph Diary entry of a day in your life as a Patriot.
 - Creating a recruitment poster where you would be seeking assistance of others to help you work for the Patriot cause.
 - Drawing a political cartoon that reflects your beliefs about the need to fight the Revolution to separate from Great Britain during the 1770's.
- c. *Writing Prompt*: Write a paragraph of 8-10 sentences where you incorporate at least 3 well-explained reasons for your response to the prompt below. Introduce your topic with a strong thesis statement. Then organize your ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole. Make sure you use information learned from the documents we just studied.

"If I lived during the 1770's, Thomas Paine would surely have inspired me because"

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POEM FOR TWO VOICES

(A Sample)

Voice 1: A Patriot

1. It's 1775 & independence we
now demand
2. We tried as colonies to remain
loyal but our voices were not
heard
3. It's actual representation we
need, not power & decisions from
afar
4. We have the support and
organization to carry out this
Revolution
5. We are good trading partners
you and with free ports
6. I tell you it's just "Common
Sense"

Choral Reading

- !! Liberty ??
- ?? Colonialism !!
- !! Republicanism ??
- !! Tyranny ??
- ?? Mercantilism !!
- !! REVOLUTION !!

Voice 2: A Loyalist

1. You must remain loyal to
King George III for he is our
monarch
2. You colonists must respect our
benevolent King & the laws
created by Parliament
3. But virtual representation lets
Parliament work for your best
interests
4. Great Britain is too powerful
and will easily put down your
revolt
5. Foreign powers will shun you
will suffer this economic loss
6. I tell you the "Plain Truth"

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Excerpts from *Common Sense*

Thomas Paine, February 14, 1776

"In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense;...

Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms, as the last resource, decide the contest; the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent hath accepted the challenge...

America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had anything to do with her. The articles of commerce, by which she has enriched herself, are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe...

But she has protected us, say some. That she has engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expense as well as her own is admitted and she would have defended Turkey from the same motives, viz (that is) for the sake of trade and dominion... We have boasted the protection of Great Britain without considering that her motive was *interest* not *attachment* and that she did not protect us from *our enemies on our account* but from *her enemies on her own account*, from those who had no quarrel with us on any *other account*, and who will always be our enemies on the *same account*... France and Spain never were, nor perhaps ever will be, our enemies as *Americans* but as our being the *subjects of Great Britain*...

Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because it is the interest of all Europe to have America a *free port*. Her traded will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders...

I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent can reap by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge; not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for, buy them where we will...

But the injuries and disadvantages which we sustain by that connection are without number; and our duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instructs us to renounce the alliance, because any submission to or dependence on Great Britain tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and sets us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions which she never can do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics...

As to government matters, it is not in the power of Britain to do this continent justice. The business of it will soon be too weighty and intricate to be managed with any tolerable degree of convenience by a power so distant from us, and so very ignorant of us; for if they cannot conquer us, they cannot govern us. To be always running 3,000 or 4,000 miles with a tale or a petition, waiting four or five months for an answer, which, when obtained, requires five or six more to explain it in, will in a few years be looked

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upon as folly and childishness—there was a time when it was proper, and there is a proper time for it to cease...”

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Liberty Tree

Lyrics Composed by "Atlanticus" (Thomas Paine, 1775)

The God of the Greeks Melody (origin unknown)

In a chariot of light from the regions of day,
The Goddess of Liberty came;
Ten thousand celestials directed the way,
And hither conducted the dame.
A fair budding branch from the gardens above,
Where millions and millions agree,
She brought in her hand, as a pledge of her love,
And the plant is named, *Liberty Tree*.

The celestial exotic stuck deep in the ground,
Like a native it flourish'd and bore,
The fame of its fruit drew nations around,
To seek out this peaceable shore.
Unmindful of names or distinctions they came,
For freeman and brothers agree,
With one spirit [indeed], they one friendship pursued,
And their temple was *Liberty Tree*.

Beneath this fair tree, like the patriarchs of old,
Their bread in contentment they eat,
Unvex'd with the troubles of silver and gold,
The cares of the grand and the great.
With timber and tar they Old England supply'd,
And supported her power on the sea;
Her battles they fought, without getting a groat,
For the honour of *Liberty Tree*,

But hear, O ye swains, ('tis a tale most profane)
How all the tyrannical powers,
King, Commons, and Lords, are uniting amain,
To cut down this guardian of ours;
From the east to the west, blow the trumpet to arms,
Tho' the land let the sound of it flee,
Let the far and the near—all unite with a cheer,
In the defence of our Liberty Tree.

Source: The Pennsylvania Ledger, August 12, 1775.

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SELECTED QUOTES

In answer to Paine's "Common Sense"; written by James Chalmers

http://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/historylabs/Should_the_Colo_student:RS07.pdf

Written under the name "Candidus

PLAIN TRUTH;
CONTAINING, REMARKS ON A LATE PAMPHLET, ENTITLED COMMON SENSE.

His [Paine's] first indecent attack is against the English constitution; which with all its imperfections, is, and ever will be the pride and envy of mankind...This beautiful system...our constitution, is a compound of Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy...

After impotently attacking our Sovereign; and the constitution: He contradicts the voice of all mankind, by declaring, that America "would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her." If he means, that had this Continent been unexplored, the original inhabitants would have been happier: For once, I agree with him...

...I shall humbly endeavour to shew, that our author shamefully misrepresents facts, is ignorant of the true state of Great Britain and her Colonies, utterly unqualified for the arduous task,...

...With the utmost deference to the honorable Congress, I do not view the most distant gleam of aid from foreign powers...At present Great Britain is the umpire of Europe...

...Can a reasonable being for a moment believe that Great Britain...will not exert herself as powerfully to preserve us from our frantic schemes of independency... Can we a moment doubt, that the Sovereign of Great Britain and his ministers, whose glory as well as personal safety depends on our obedience, will not exert every nerve of the British power, to save themselves and us from ruin...

...Until the present unhappy period, Great Britain has afforded to all mankind, the most perfect proof of her wise, lenient, and magnanimous government of the Colonies...

INDEPENDENCE AND SLAVERY ARE SYNONYMOUS TERMS.

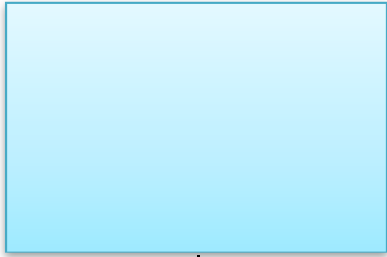
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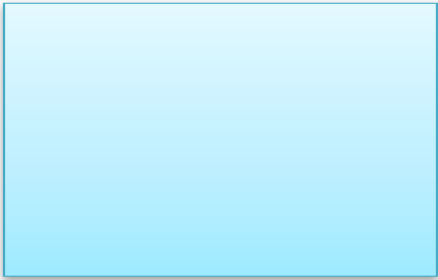
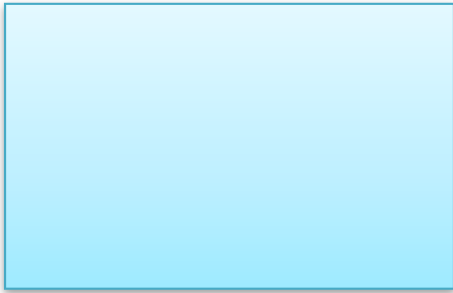
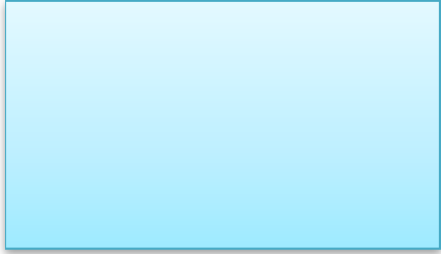
Concept Definition Map

Reasons for Separation from Great Britain

What is it?

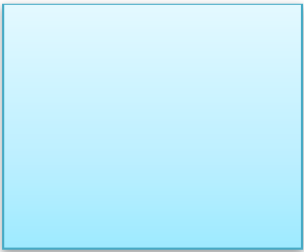
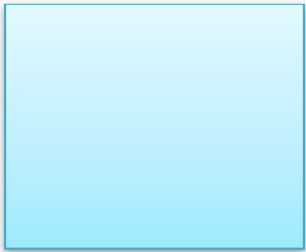


Thomas Paine
COMMON SENSE, 1776



Supporters

Opponents



"The Liberty Tree" Song

