

**Landmarks of American History:  
“Shaping the Constitution: A View from Mount Vernon”**

**Teacher Activity Template**

***Melissa York***

***Lesson Plan- The Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights: A Comparison***

**Overview (2-3 sentences)**

US History students will work with primary and secondary source documents to determine the cause and effect relationship between the pre-American Revolution actions of the British government, and the rights Anti-federalists demanded be guaranteed in the US Constitution.

**Objectives (2-3 bullet points)**

Students will:

- Review the events leading up to the American Revolution
- Analyze the complaints made against King George III (Parliament) in the Declaration of Independence
- Determine how each of the first ten amendments to the US Constitution were reactions to the colonists' experiences

**Materials (List at least one document)**

- The Declaration of Independence
- The Bill of Rights/US Constitution
- Class textbook

**Recommended Time (Number of class periods/time of class periods)**

Two 50 minute class periods with evening homework reading of the primary source documents

(This activity may also be done as an extended activity where steps 1-2 are completed during study of the colonial/revolutionary period and steps 3-4 are completed during study of the nation's founding.)

**Activity Outline (Complete the following sections)**

**I. Context (Have the students answer the following questions for all documents in the Activity)**

- a. When was this document written?
- b. Where was this document written?
- c. Who wrote this document?
- d. What type of document is this?
- e. What is the purpose of this document?
- f. Who is the audience for this document?

**II. Warm-Up (2-3 sentences)**

Explain to students that many of the actions taken by the British government from the 1750s to 1770s not only led the colonists to rebel against England, but in the 1780s they were compelled to create a new American government aimed at preventing the abuses they accused King George III of in the Declaration of Independence.

**III. Activity (6-10 sentences)**

Homework prior to Day 1

1. Students will read the Declaration of Independence and answer the above context questions. Instruct students to pay particular attention to the middle section's list of abuses charged against King George III.

Day 1 Activities

2. For each abuse listed, instruct students to use their classroom text) or other secondary source histories of the events leading up to the American Revolution) in order to identify the specific action taken by the British government which prompted the charge against King George III. Students may work individually or in groups; you may also choose to divide the 27 "He has..." and "For..." statements between students. Information for each action should include:
  - a. Description of the Act of Parliament, law or government action
  - b. Effective Date(s)
  - c. Colonists' response—both short and long-term
3. Explain to students the context by which the Bill of Rights were included in the US Constitution (i.e. briefly explain the ratification debates).

Homework prior to Day 2

4. Students will then read the Bill of Rights and answer the above context questions.

Day 2 Activities

5. Instruct students to match the specific right listed in the Bill of Rights with the corresponding charge listed in the Declaration of Independence. For example:

Law/Action taken by the British Government, 1750s- 1770s	Charge against King George III in the Declaration of Independence	Right guaranteed in the Bill of Rights
Quartering Act, 1765: Ordered colonial legislatures to pay for supplies needed by British troops (e.g. candles, windowpanes, mattress straw, polish, liquor rations, etc.). The colonists resented the indirect tax, but didn't do much about it.	<i>For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:</i>	Amendment III: No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.
Quartering Act, 1774: Allowed the Massachusetts governor to		

requisition empty private buildings for military housing.		
Sugar Act, 1764: Allowed customs officials to transfer smuggling cases out of the colonies (where juries decided the cases) to vice-admiralty courts which were not only outside of the colonies, but were decided upon by a single judge who had incentive to come down with a guilty verdict as he'd be able to keep 5% of the confiscated cargo.	<i>For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:</i>	Amendment VI: In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

**IV. Extensions (Suggest an optional, related activity)**

1. Of the charges listed or actions taken by Parliament which do not have a corresponding right guaranteed by the US Constitution, have students choose one and write an amendment that would have addressed this abuse. Then ask students to describe how relevant or useful this amendment would be today.
2. Have students choose one amendment and research a recent (or post-American Revolution) example of how the Amendment was abused. Using their example, have students determine if the amendment protected US citizens as it was intended, and if not, what has changed (if anything) to make sure that this right is protected.