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Jefferson Institute 2008

Title: The Declaration of Independence: Be Revolting

Rationale: Students need to understand core American principles and their contemporary applications. By targeting and applying key parts of the Declaration of Independence, students better understand part of our collective memory and core American values.

Students: This assignment is best for grades 6 through 12.

Why: I refer to my rationale. Students need to understand the significance and meaning of the Declaration for the United States- especially how it relates to them today.

Outcomes:

1. Students will know the structure and essential content of the Declaration.
2. Student will make a connection between the Declaration and other struggles for independence or equality.
3. Students will work as a committee or group to produce a document, just like Jefferson did.
4. Students will know what a creed and national creed are.

Resources: Handout “The Declaration of Independence: Be Revolting” and a class set of Declaration of Independence.

Instructional Process: Start with a good night’s rest, a nutritious breakfast, and some hot tea or coffee. Gird your loins, tighten your abs, and march into that classroom and give ‘em hell.

I would use this assignment as part of a larger unit on the Revolutionary War. Remind students that the Declaration of Independence has been referenced by Elizabeth Caty Stanton in the Declaration of Sentiments, Abraham Lincoln at the Gettysburg Address, MLK at the DC march (“...redeem a promissory note...”), Ho Chi Min in 1945, and even the Massachusetts Supreme Court recently referred to it in one of the gay marriage cases.

The document is important because it speaks universal truths that transcend time and place. Also, it is key to understanding our American identity and creed.

One way to introduce the assignment is to talk about what a creed is. Once you establish what a creed is, ask students to anticipate what our American creed is. With student responses listed on the board, divide students into groups, read the Declaration of Independence and go over it. Next hand out “The Declaration of Independence: Be Revolting” and read it aloud. Students need about 30 to 45 minutes to plan and write. Build in at least one night for students to type and get materials. I recommend you have students present their Declarations to the class on the date due. Don’t have them read the entire thing. Have groups share a couple of paragraphs and grievances that they are most proud of.

