



Independence Day: The Pursuit of Happiness

Grades 9-12

Background/Objective:

Throughout June and July 1776 the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia to formally adopt the Declaration of Independence. This was a monumental document because it led to independence from King George III and justified the colonists' revolt against a government that no longer guaranteed their natural rights.

The Declaration of Independence stated certain ideals that the colonists believed were important for man to have, such as life, liberty, and the "pursuit of happiness". The preamble states that, "to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

But what exactly did the founders mean by "the pursuit of happiness" and consent of the governed? Your student will explore these concepts in more detail throughout this lesson.

Activator: [TED-Ed: What You Might Now Know about the Declaration of Independence](#) video (3:38 minutes)

- *In this short video, the student will learn about a brief background of the Declaration of Independence. This monumental document officially created our new sovereign nation!*

Activity: [TED Talk: America's Pursuit of Happiness and Why It's Gone Wrong](#) video (10:34 minutes)

- *What did the founders truly mean by the "pursuit of happiness"? In this video, the student will reflect on the intent of the founders and how the "pursuit of happiness" is reflected in today's society.*

Closure: *After completing the activator and activity, close the lesson through a discussion with your student based on the Pursuit of Happiness TED Talk video.*

1. According to Caroline, when the founders included the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence, what were they most likely referring to?
2. How does Caroline make a distinction between the *public happiness* and *private happiness*?
3. Caroline lists four reasons why the founders believed it was important to include the "pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence. What were some of those reasons?
4. Why is democracy vulnerable or fragile? How do we guard against its demise?