

# Declaration Detectives (3-5)

Lesson Plan: 3 – 5

## Overview

In this lesson, elementary students will use the OPTIC strategy to describe and interpret Thomas Jefferson’s mark-up of the Declaration of Independence. This strategy is a framework used to help students deconstruct and understand visual and graphic texts. By breaking down complex images into manageable components, students can bridge the gap between basic observation and more sophisticated inferential reasoning. If your students are new to primary source analysis, the image suggested in Declaration Detectives (K-3) provides a more accessible starting point for introducing the OPTIC strategy.

## Suggested Time Needed

60 - 90 minutes

## Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students will:

- Apply the OPTIC strategy to evaluate an early draft of the Declaration of Independence
- Identify important principles contained in the Declaration of Independence and consider how those principles apply to current events
- Evaluate an early draft of the Declaration of Independence and reach conclusions about the writing process.

## Guiding Questions

- What principles are contained within the Declaration of Independence?
- How do those principles continue today?

## Missouri Grade Level and Course Level Expectations

- 4-5.PC.1.A – With assistance, read, analyze and apply the principles of the Declaration of Independence
- 4-5.TS.7.A – Select and analyze primary sources and evaluate use of artifacts

## Materials Needed

- Image of [Thomas Jefferson’s Draft of the Declaration of Independence](#)



- OPTIC Analysis Graphic Organizer – The Art of the Draft

## Procedure:

### *Introduction – Think-Pair-Share*

1. Ask students to think about a time they wrote a rough draft for a story or essay. Ask “Why do we cross out words and change them before we turn in our final work?”
2. Explain that reading is not just for books. “We can read images, paintings, and even old handwritten documents to understand their deeper meaning. Today, we are going to “read” an old document. At first, this document is going to seem complicated, but we are going to work with a special recipe for reading this document.”
3. *Provide students with the graphic organizer.* We are going to use these steps as we work through this image:
  - a. O – is for Overview
  - b. P – is for Parts
  - c. T – is for Title/Text
  - d. I – is for Interrelationships
  - e. C – is for Conclusions

### *Step 1 – O is for Overview*

1. Display the image on a large screen and/or provide a copy or link to the copy to each student. Ask students to conduct an overview while they are looking at the image. “With your Think-Pair-Share partner describe what you see at first glance.”
  - a. Example: “It is a handwritten document with many scribbles, crossed out lines, and notes in the margins.”
2. Record your “Overview” sentence in the box on your graphic organizer. “It’s ok if your discussion with your partner helped you think of your sentence.”

### *Step 2 – P is for Parts*

1. Now I want you to zoom in on details like colors, people, and objects. With your partner, list ten concrete things that you see (no guessing!). Each of you should list 5 things on your graphic organizer, but you and your partner should have 5 different things on your page.
  - a. Sample: Dark ink, cursive writing, the large words “United States of America,” specific crossed out words – and the words that replace them.
  - b. Pick out words that you can read but don’t know the meaning of. How can we learn what those words mean? During this discussion, circulate to help students identify letters if they are struggling with the handwriting.
2. Now it’s time to expand your team. *Combine the teams of two into a group of four.*



3. Compare notes with your whole group. What new things did the other team see? Write down two more specific parts that the other group observed.

### *Step 3 – T is for Title*

1. Read the words at the top: “A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.”
  - a. This is the title of the document. With your group, talk about how knowing the title helps us understand the main idea of the document.
2. What main idea do you think this title suggests? Before we move on to the next step, write down the main idea that your group identified.
  - a. Example: A group of people making an important announcement.

### *Step 4 – I is for Interrelationships*

1. This next step is difficult, so we are going to make our groups a bit bigger. *Combine two groups of 4 to make a group of 8.*
2. This is the “detective” phase of the process. It’s time to think about how all of the parts connect. Here are some questions I want you to discuss with your squad:
  - a. Find a sentence that has a crossed-out word. How do the crossed-out words change the feeling of a sentence? How do the crossed-out words relate to the rest of the sentence?
  - b. Focus on the sentence that begins “We hold these truths”. Why would the authors edit this area so much? These are Thomas Jefferson’s notes, but there were four others helping him draft this document. How do the markups show the struggle to find just the right words?
  - c. How do the edits come together to change the “mood” of the document?
  - d. Remind students that an inference requires evidence. Example: “I see many edits” is an observation that provides evidence for the inference/statement, “So I think the authors were very careful and maybe even argued about which words to use.”
  - e. What can you infer about the authors’ feelings based on the number of changes that they made?

### *Step 5 – C is for Conclusion*

1. It’s time to reach some conclusions about the message of the document. Based on all the edits and the title, what was the creator’s main goal?
  - a. *Example:* They wanted to make sure their message of independence was perfectly clear, so they worked hard to edit and improve their draft.
  - b. Think about the 5Ws as you draw a conclusion – who, what, when, where, why?
2. What else are you wondering about this document? Discuss with your squad what questions you would still like answered as you reach a conclusion.



### *Assessment – The Narrative Paragraph*

A strong narrative paragraph should go beyond a simple summary. You can assess whether the student:

- Identifies the core message and determines the overall theme or the argument the creator is trying to make.
- Explains how the specific parts and text (like the edits) come together to convey a particular idea.
- Summarizes the visual’s meaning concisely in one or two sentences.
- Assess growth in understanding using the “I used to think... but now I know...” reflection



A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for <sup>one</sup> people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the <sup>separate and equal</sup> station to which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to ~~the~~ <sup>self-evident</sup> separation.

We hold these truths to be ~~self-evident~~ <sup>self-evident</sup>, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with ~~unalienable~~ <sup>unalienable</sup> rights, that among ~~these~~ <sup>these</sup> are life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ~~rights~~ <sup>rights</sup>, 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, & to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles & organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness. prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. but when a long train of abuses & usurpations [begin at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them <sup>under absolute Despotism</sup> ~~to absolute Despotism~~, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such

government, & to provide new guards for their future security: such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to ~~alter~~ <sup>alter</sup> their former systems of government. the history of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> present ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> a history of ~~unremitting~~ <sup>unremitting</sup> injuries and usurpations, [among which, ~~appears no solitary fact~~ <sup>appears no solitary fact</sup> to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, ~~all of which~~ <sup>all of which</sup> have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, for the truth of which we pledge a faith not unswerving by falsehood.]

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Art of the Draft

Instructions: Use this graphic organizer to record your thinking as you analyze the image. You will use these notes to write a reflective paragraph on the back.

Before starting, write 1 - 2 sentences about what you think this document is and what is happening in it:

	<b>The Optic Analysis</b>
<b>O</b> Overview	What is the image showing. Describe it briefly.
<b>P</b> Parts	List at least 10 concrete things you see. Do not guess!
<b>T</b> Title	How does the title relate to the messy markup?
<b>I</b> Interrelationships	How do the parts you noticed work together to show a struggle or a goal?
<b>C</b> Conclusions	What is happening? Think of the 5 Ws.

