

Declaration Detectives (K-3)

Lesson Plan: K – 3

Overview

In this lesson, elementary students will use the OPTIC strategy to describe and interpret the painting Congress Voting the Declaration of Independence which hangs in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. This strategy helps students “read” a visual beyond basic observations and begin to understand the deeper meaning behind the artifact. This lesson can also be used with upper elementary students to introduce primary source analysis before proceeding to Declaration Detectives (Grades 3-5).

Suggested Time Needed

30 -40 minutes

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students will:

- Apply the OPTIC strategy to gather clues about a primary source and develop a “big idea” about the artifact
- Identify a social studies question that can be investigated by additional inquiry

Guiding Questions

- How can we “read” a photograph or painting to understand something about history?

Missouri Grade Level and Course Level Expectations

- K-3.TS.7.A – With guidance and support, analyze different social studies sources to create a product of inquiry

Materials Needed

- Image of [Congress Voting Independence](#) by Robert Edge Pine/Edward Savage
- Magnifying Class Conclusions Page

Procedure:



Introduction – The Declaration Detective Tool

1. Explain to students that they are going to be “Declaration Detective” today and investigate a famous painting. Good detectives rely on a careful routine to make sure that they don’t miss any clues. Our routine is called OPTIC. Each letter represents a step in your investigation.
2. Display the image on a large screen. Ask students to look without talking for 30 seconds.
3. Tell students that good detectives also work in pairs. “You are going to begin with one partner and as our investigation expands, we will talk to more people. Remember – detectives listen carefully for clues and they stay focused on the investigation.” Divide students into pairs for Step 1 – O is for Overview.

Step 1 – O is for Overview

1. An overview is the Big Picture. Tell your partner one simple sentence to describe what is happening in this painting.
 - a. Example: “A large of group of men is meeting in a room to look at a special paper.”

Step 2 – P is for Parts

1. This time we are going to zoom in on details like colors, people, and objects. With your partner, notice the things that you see in the painting.
 - a. Prompt: What do you see? Look at their clothes, the chairs, and the big paper on the table.
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 detective team see?

Step 3 – T is for Title

1. Tell the students that the title of this painting is “Congress Voting the Declaration of Independence.”
 - a. Explain that “Congress” is a group of people elected to make decisions for the whole country.
2. With your group, talk about how knowing the title help us understand what these men are doing.

Step 4 – I is for Interrelationships

1. Step 4 is a tricky one so we are going to join a squad. *Combine two groups of 4 to make a group of 8.*
2. 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. Why are all the men looking at that one piece of paper in the middle?
 - b. Why are those five men standing together in front of the man sitting at the desk?
 - c. Why are the men in the middle handing the paper to the man sitting down?
 - d. What feelings do you see on their faces? Does this seem like a serious meeting or a noisy party?



Step 5 – C is for Conclusion

1. It's time to solve the case! By now, each of you has a big idea of the meaning behind this painting. With your squad, take turns sharing your big idea. It is ok to change your mind if you hear a big idea that you hadn't thought about.
 - a. *Example:* The artist wanted to show that these men had made a very serious decision for our country.

Assessment – The Magnifying Glass

Provide the Declaration Detectives page to each student.

Ask students to draw a picture or write about the most interesting thing about the painting inside the magnifying glass. Next ask them to write a sentence that summarizes their “Big Idea” about the painting. Finally, invite students to share with the class one question that they still have about what is happening in the painting.



Congress Voting the Declaration of Independence by Edward Savage and/or Robert Edge Pine



Name: _____

Declaration Detectives

In the magnifying glass,
draw or write about the part
of the painting that is most
interesting



My Big Idea
