

**Written by: Tammy Black**

**Unit: What Tensions Did America Face During the American Revolution?**

**Title of lesson: The American Revolution: The Declaration and Beyond**

**Timeframe:** 3 days (1 extra day may be needed for student argument presentations)

**Standards addressed:**

National Standards:

2C – Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses and the purpose, perspective or point of view from which it has been constructed.

3C – Challenge arguments of historical inevitability by formulating examples of historical contingency, of how different choices could have led to different contingency.

5E – Formulate a position or course of action on an issue by identifying the nature of the problem, analyzing the underlying factors contributing to the problem.

Alaska Standards:

D3 – Define a personal position on issues while understanding the historical aspects of the positions and roles assumed by others.

B2 – understand the people and the political, geographic, economic, cultural, social, and environmental events that have shaped the history of the state, the United States, and the world.

**Social Studies Knowledge, Skills, Dispositions:**

Knowledge:

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* as a representation of the different point of views

The use of persuasive writing as a political tool

Skills:

Combine critical concepts into a statement of conclusions based on information, form opinion based on critical examination of relevant information, communicate orally and in writing.

Dispositions:

Tolerance of others' opinions

Confidence in communicating orally

**Learning objectives:** At the completion of this lesson, students will know & be able to:

As the American Revolution approached, writers created highly persuasive documents calling for separation from England.

**Cooperative skills addressed:**

Listening skills, work to influence those in positions of social power to strive for extensions of freedom, social justice, and human rights, express personal convictions, serve as a leader.

**Technology inclusion:**

N/A

**Materials needed:**

Excerpt from Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (see Procedures)

Paper

Writing Utensil

**Lesson Plan/Lesson Design**

**Prior assignment/preparation –**

The students will have the experience from writing class to write their own arguments or persuasive essays.

**Opening activity**

The teacher will engage the students by asking them have they ever argued for or persuaded someone to change their minds about an event. Students give examples.

**Specific lesson design—**

Day 1:

1. Tell students that they will (1) use a part of Thomas Paine's 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense* as a jumping off points for learning about argumentation, or persuasive writing, and (2) writes their own arguments, or persuasive essays.
2. Distribute to each student a copy of the excerpt, reprinted here, from the third part of *Common Sense*, preferably a copy that students can annotate and otherwise mark up.

Excerpt from the text of *Common Sense*:

*THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS*

*In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense...Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms, as the last resource, decide this contest; the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent hath accepted the challenge... The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent – of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe.*

*'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith, and*

*honour. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters.*

*By referring the matter from argument to arms, a new era for politics is struck; a new method of thinking hath arisen. All plans, proposals, and c. prior to the nineteenth of April, i.e. to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacs of last year; which though proper are then superseded and useless now.*

*Whatever was advanced by the advocated on either side of the question then, terminated in one and the same point, viz. a uniform with Great Britain: the only difference between the parties was the method of effecting it; the one proposing force, the other friendship; but it hath so far happened that the first hath failed, and the second hath withdrawn her influence. As much hath been said of the advantages of reconciliation which, like an agreeable dream, hath passed away and left us as we were, it is but right, that we should examine the contrary side of the argument, and inquire into some of many materials injuries which these colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected with, and dependent on Great Britain: To examine that connection and dependence, on the principles of nature and common sense, to see what we have to trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect, if dependant. I have heard it asserted by some, That as American hath flourished under her former connection with Great Britain that the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument.*

*We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true, for I answer roundly, that American would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had any thing to do with her.*

*The commerce, by which she hath enriched herself, are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe. But she protected us, say some. That she has engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expense as well as her own is admitted and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz. the sake of trade and dominion. Alas, we have been long led away by ancient prejudices, and made large sacrifices to superstition.*

*We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was INTEREST not ATTACHMENT; that she did not protect us from OUR ENEMIES on OUR ACCOUNT, but from HER ENEMIES on HER OWN*

*ACCOUNT, from those who had no quarrel with us on any OTHER ACCOUNT, and who will always be our enemies on the SAME ACCOUNT.*

3. Discuss with students what Paine's overall argument is in the foregoing. Ask where in the excerpt Paine states opinions and where he states facts. Discuss where he appeals to his reader's logic and where he appeals to his reader's heart. Ask why both appeals are important.

Have the students rewrite *Common Sense* in today's language. What does it mean?

4. Make sure students understand the difference between argument used as the everyday meaning "disagreement or quarrel" and *argument* as it is used in this project – a written statement of opinion supported by various kinds of appeals.

5. Give students the following advice during the prewriting stage of presenting arguments of their own:

- Once a writer has in mind something that he or she wants to persuade readers of, the writer puts it in the form of a thesis statement: a statement made in one or sometimes two sentences that announces what will follow in the essay. You may want to fine-tune the definition of thesis statement to include not only the announcement of a topic but also the claim that the writer is making about that topic.
- The writer should gather all manner of support, or evidence, for the position he or she gives in the thesis statement: reasons, examples, facts, statistics, quotations.
- The writer should determine in which order he or she will present the evidence. Two approaches are to go from most important to least important or vice versa.
- The writer should figure out what he or she wants readers not only to think about but also to do.
- The writer should anticipate what critics will say to undermine his or her argument. The writer should come up with responses to criticism.

### Day 2

6. Pick up the Paine theme again by reminding students that *Common Sense* had an electrifying effect on the American population. Challenge students to write an essay that will ignite people in your class to accept a point of view. Students will be editing their work on this day.

### Discussing Questions:

7. Benjamin Franklin and his son William took different sides in the American Revolution. They did not speak to each other after the war began. How do

you think your relationship would be affected if you disagreed with a member of your family about politics?

8. George Washington, Benedict Arnold, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were rebels. Discuss the correctness of their cause.
9. The American population was divided about participating in a revolution. One third supported the revolution; one third was loyal to the British, and one third was indifferent. Discuss and analyze each of these positions.
10. To preserve his army, George Washington used the tactic of retreating from the battlefield. Analyze this military tactic.
11. Nathan Hale spied on British defenses and is considered a national hero. Discuss the concept of national loyalty and the responsibilities a citizen has to his country.

### Day 3 - Conclusion

The students will conduct a town meeting to demonstrate their persuasive points of view of *Common Sense*. The class will be divided into supporters of Paine's arguments and those who oppose his point of view.

### Extensions

Leaving Paine, alert your students to all the modern day issues that they may want to tackle in an argument.

List the following topics that may engage students, and add others that students

themselves suggest as candidates for written arguments:

- Too much traffic in the community
- Endangered animals or natural resources in the region.
- Inequities in education – that haves and have-nots.

### Assessment –

You may evaluate your students' arguments, or persuasive essays, using the following three-point rubric:

**Three points:** Exceptionally clearly expressed thesis statements; substantial and varied appeals in support of argument; well-articulated responses to anticipated objections to argument; error free grammar, usage, and mechanics.

**Two points:** Adequately expressed thesis statement; sufficient and varied appeals in support of argument; attempt to respond to anticipated objections to argument; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

**One point:** Inadequately expressed thesis statement; insufficient and unvaried appeals in support of argument; absence of responses to anticipated objections to argument; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

You can have students contribute to the assessment rubric by determining how many and what kinds of appeals the persuasive essays should include.

Students will also be evaluated on their oral presentation. As a class, the students will develop a rubric for their oral presentations.

On going assessment:

Students may write a brief summary of what they learned and how they did on their oral and written argument. This may be included in the interactive notebook.