

Celebrate Freedom

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that all men are created equal

Thought Experiment: Equality in the Classroom

Imagine what would happen at your school if, from now on, *You, the Students*, were responsible for establishing classroom policies based on the self-evident truth that all students are created equal. What policies would you put in place?

- Would everyone receive the same homework assignments? Take the same tests?
- Would everyone get the same punishment for being tardy or disrupting class?
- Would everyone receive the same grade for each term? Or would grades be based on the quality of one's work?
- Would stronger students be encouraged to help weaker students? Would they be required to do so?
- Would a student who brought an apple to the teacher receive special privileges?

Think about how our nation's founders answered questions similar to these. Do you think they would want you to provide equal opportunities? To guarantee equal outcomes? To bend the rules for certain students? To reward those who curried favor with the teacher? And how do you think they would want you to account for the fact that even though all of us have equal worth and dignity, we aren't all equally capable in every subject or activity? Share your ideas with your classmates.

Next, look through the news section of the local newspaper. Find an article or a photograph about people living in another part of the world who do not have the same freedoms that Americans enjoy – or about someone who came to America to escape oppression elsewhere. What do you think they appreciate most about America? Why?



The first truth to which our founders pointed – “that all men are created equal” – was a very radical idea at the time of the Declaration of Independence. For example, soon after settling in New York in the 1700s, French colonist Jean de Crevecoeur marveled to a friend that America “is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords . . . Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings.”

In societies that deny that all human beings are created equal, the legal system often treats certain individuals as second-class citizens – and the social and economic systems make it impossible for a person of a certain class, or caste, to advance.

America's founders believed that everyone should be entitled to equal justice under the law and that the government should not favor one individual over another or one group over another. To put it in sports terms, the founders believed in a “level playing field” where the rules are the same for everyone – and everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

While our founders did a superb job of promoting ideas like equality, they sometimes failed to live up to their own lofty principles. As a result, our nation had to endure many years of slavery and of racial discrimination.

Yet, to their great credit, many of our nation's African-American leaders nevertheless embraced the self-evident truths found in the Declaration of Independence. They claimed the founders' ideals as their own.

For example, Booker T. Washington made a point of opening his Tuskegee Institute on the Fourth of July in 1881. And



Booker T. Washington

Source: Library of Congress

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. rooted his appeal for justice in the founders' own words by saying, “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”

Thankfully, these civil rights leaders understood that our nation's founding principles are greater than the men who first championed them – or the men and women who have since embraced them. Moreover, as we will see on pages 4-5, these leaders also understood that the self-evident truths cited by the founders are even higher and greater than the laws adopted by government authorities.

that they are endowed by their Creator



In addition to believing that all men are created equal, our nation's founders believed that every individual possesses certain rights that cannot be granted by government, nor taken away by government.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson described these rights as "unalienable," which means they are so much a part of our birthright as humans they cannot be denied us.

Once again, this was a radical idea at the time of the Declaration of Independence.

For most of human history up to the American Revolution, the concept of rights had been applied in a very limited and selective fashion. Typically, rights were considered special privileges, reserved only for certain groups or classes of people.

Drawing upon the writings of political philosopher John Locke, America's founders concluded that certain rights were universal – for all human beings – and could not be trampled upon by any government that wished to be considered legitimate.

As Alexander Hamilton wrote, "The sacred rights of mankind are written, as with a sun beam in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of Divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power."

By claiming that men had been endowed with rights by their Creator, the founders were asserting that no earthly government could be considered the ultimate authority over men.

This was significant at the time and would also prove significant later. For example, when subsequent generations

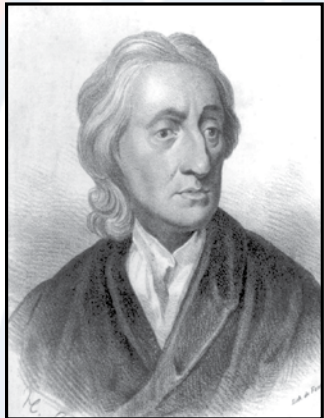
of Americans fought against the grievous evils of slavery and racial discrimination, they often made their case by appealing to a higher law and a higher authority – just as the founders justified their Declaration of Independence by citing "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

Thankfully, our nation's greatest political leaders have avoided the establishment of a state religion (like those found in many nations), while not hindering the free exercise of religion among the American people. And they have sought to respect religious differences that exist among Americans.

Indeed, soon after he took office as our nation's first president, George Washington responded to a letter from a Hebrew congregation in Rhode Island by assuring them their religious liberty would be protected in America. "[E]veryone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid," Washington wrote, quoting the book of Micah.

In sum, then, our nation's greatest political leaders have affirmed America's ongoing commitment to this self-evident truth: Our fundamental rights have been given to us as a divine birthright; no legitimate government can ever take them away.

Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote and starred in the Broadway musical "Hamilton." In it, an all-minority cast tells the story of our nation's founding, showing that America's ideals are for all people.



Source: Library of Congress

John Locke



Arnold Friberg's painting of George Washington is entitled "The Prayer at Valley Forge."

Photo by Evan Agostini
Invision/AP

with certain unalienable Rights,



Thought Experiment: Persuasion v. Intimidation?"

In 1960, some college students at Florida A & M organized non-violent protests outside several lunch counters in Tallahassee that refused to provide seating to African-American customers.

- What do you think of the students' signs?
- Do you think it was wise for them to refer to the "golden rule?" Or to ask "What is Christian about racial discrimination?"
- Why do you think they made a point of assuring people they were non-violent? Did this make them seem weak? Strong? Confident? Sheepish?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the students' methods?

During one demonstration, a young hooligan who opposed their efforts ran through their line, grabbed several signs, and ripped them up.

- Do you think that preventing others from expressing views you hate is appropriate? Is it effective? Mature?
- Do you think the hooligan's aggressive actions made him seem strong? Weak? Confident? What words would you use to describe his actions?

- Which is more in keeping with America's founding principles – using persuasion to build public consensus or using intimidation to silence those you oppose?

Scan the headlines in the news sections of your newspaper. Find an article, with news photos, about a public protest of some kind. Evaluate the messages on the signs. Do you find any of them persuasive? Do you think any are designed to intimidate? How do you think someone who disagrees with this protest would react to these signs? How about someone who hasn't yet made up his mind about this cause?

Now look for an article about someone being shouted down or denied the opportunity to speak on a college campus. Why do you suppose that some people try to "cancel" others with whom they disagree? Should anyone fear the free exchange of ideas? Should any individuals – or any media outlets – be told what views they must express?

About Celebrate Freedom:

Each year during Celebrate Freedom Week, students in Florida, Texas, and a number of other states are expected to recite a key passage from the Declaration of Independence and to spend time studying this important document. **Celebrate Freedom** carefully examines this key passage, helping students better understand its meaning and why it is still important today.

This booklet is sponsored by The James Madison Institute (JMI), a non-profit organization which conducts civics education programs through its Center for American Ideals. Written by JMI's William Mattox, **Celebrate Freedom** is made possible thanks to the generosity of the Lillian S. Wells Foundation, the Sumners Foundation, the Roe Foundation, Publix Super Markets Charities, and other donors. Guidance for this supplemental curriculum has been provided by the Florida Department of Education, a number of leading scholars and K-12 teachers, and the Newspaper in Education staff at the *Tampa Bay Times*.



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that among these are Life, Liberty,

As colonial America bristled under England's rule, our nation's early leaders spent many hours discussing the appropriateness of declaring their independence from the British. And they spent many hours debating how best to foster liberty in America.

To the colonists, liberty was not a foreign concept. They knew that many of America's early settlers had come to our shores seeking the freedom to live and work and worship as they pleased. Moreover, the colonists had once enjoyed a fair amount of freedom under British rule. This made them all the more distressed when King George began to strip away many of these freedoms.

To the founders, liberty was an unalienable right, an essential part of our human birthright. But the founders did not view liberty as complete and utter lawlessness.

Ironically, the leaders of the

American Revolution were not "revolutionaries" in the sense that they wanted simply to overthrow a political establishment. They were instead people who wanted to form "a more perfect union" in which "ordered liberty" not only flourished, but also supported and reinforced other unalienable rights.

"The revolution in

the United States was produced by a mature and reflective taste for freedom, and not by a vague and indefinite instinct of independence," observed Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who visited and studied America in the early 1800s. "It was not supported by passions of disorder; but, on the contrary, it advanced with a love of order and of legality."

Source: Library of Congress



Peter F. Rothermel's 1851 painting depicts Patrick Henry speaking before the Virginia House of Burgesses. Patrick Henry loved liberty more than his own life. Do you think the American Revolution would have been successful if its leaders had been unwilling to die for freedom?

Put another way, the founders believed in liberty, but they believed in more than just liberty. They considered freedom a divine right, but they did not believe it trumped all other rights. They did not believe, for example, that one man's freedom gave him the right to take another's life or another's property.

Since the British government was trampling upon the colonists' rights, the founders believed they were justified in declaring America's independence. They regarded liberty as absolutely essential to the American way of life. As Patrick Henry famously cried, "Give me liberty or give me death."

Throughout our nation's history, liberty has remained a hallmark of the United States of America. This is why France presented our nation with the iconic Statue of Liberty on the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. And it is why the First Amendment freedoms found in the U.S. Constitution – such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion – are so cherished today.

America, then, is a land of ordered liberty. It is a place where everyone enjoys the freedom to pursue happiness, while respecting the rights of others. As the Pledge of Allegiance says, America believes in "liberty, and justice, for all."

and the pursuit of Happiness.

Source: OldPine, WikiTravel

AP Photo/Darron Cummings



During the COVID-19 pandemic, NASCAR driver Bubba Wallace wore a mask displaying the American flag to a race in Indianapolis.



A replica of the *Mayflower* is docked at the State Pier in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Thought Experiment: Blame the Umpire?

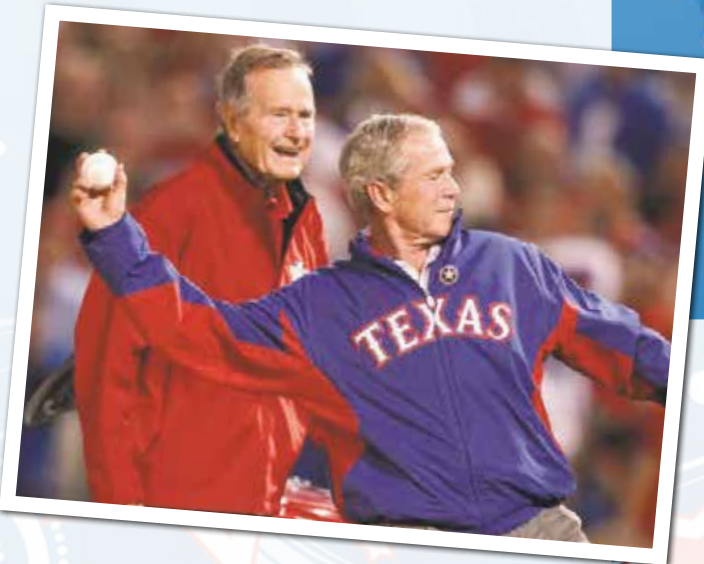
U.S. Presidents love to throw out the first pitch at baseball games, but some people think the role of government is actually a lot more like that of an umpire than that of a player.

Governments, like umpires, have a responsibility to ensure that people have the freedom to pursue happiness (or to pursue victory). But governments, like umpires, cannot guarantee that anyone will always succeed in this pursuit.

Nevertheless, many people complain about the government, just as some complain about the umpire at baseball games. Usually, these complaints arise when the government is making too many calls, too few calls, or calls that unfairly favor one side over another.

Think about the American Revolution. What were the colonists' complaints with the British "umpire" at that time? Did the colonists perceive that the British government was being unfair? Meddlesome? Negligent? Were the colonists' complaints valid?

Look for an editorial or letter to the editor in the newspaper that expresses a complaint. Analyze the writer's points and write a response to the article agreeing or disagreeing with the writer's thoughts. Be sure to back up your points with specific examples.

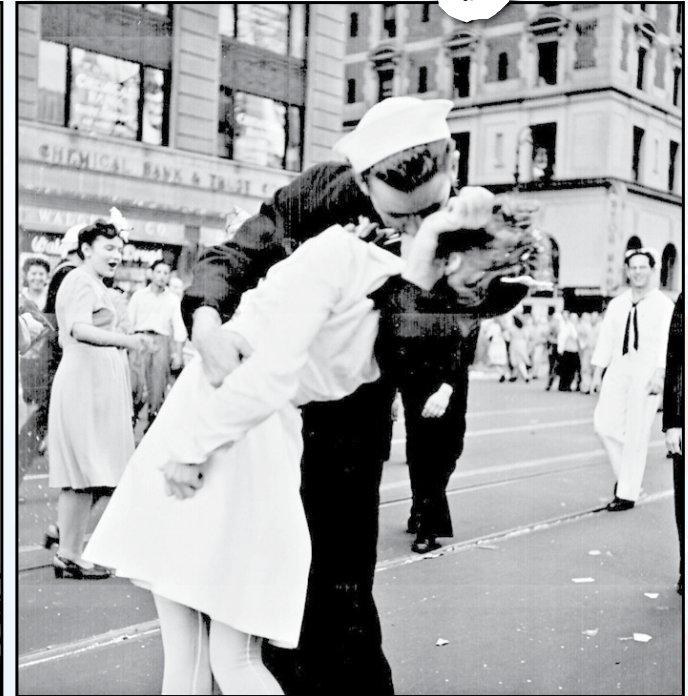


President No. 41, George H.W. Bush, and No. 43, George W. Bush, at a Texas Rangers game. The younger Bush was an owner of the team before being elected.



U.S. Liberty Bell

That to secure these rights,



Source: National Archives

Just as the colonists secured our independence in the American Revolution, the U.S. military fought to keep us free after Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. What emotions do you think you would have experienced if you had been among the Marines raising the U.S. flag at the Battle of Iwo Jima or if you had you been among the people in New York's Times Square on V-J Day?

Have you ever considered what life would be like without government? If people did as they pleased without anyone to rule over them? Would life be better without government? And if government is to exist, what should be its purpose?

The founders spent a lot of time pondering questions like these. They were lovers of liberty who had seen first-hand how governments can abuse their powers and hinder everyone's pursuit of happiness. Moreover, the founders believed that in a perfect world, governments would not have to exist. As James Madison, the architect of the U.S. Constitution once observed, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

Still, the founders knew that men are not angels – that we are all prone to mistreat or take advantage of others in certain circumstances. In addition, the founders knew that if government did not secure our individual rights, we would live in a chaotic world where bullies and thugs constantly ran roughshod over others.

So, in the years following the Declaration of Independence, the founders spent a great deal of time fashioning a new government. They wanted this government to be strong enough to protect individual rights, yet not so strong that government leaders could themselves become tyrants who bully and badger the American people.

As George Mason once said, "From the nature of man, we may be sure that those who have power in their hands . . . will always, when they can . . . increase it."

Under the leadership of James Madison, the founders wrote a Constitution that established a federal system of government that

divided powers between national, state, and local authorities. In addition, they separated the national government into three different branches (legislative, executive, judicial) so that there would be checks and balances to prevent any individual, group, or branch of government from wielding too much authority.

The founders also went to great lengths to maximize the liberties of the American people. As Thomas Jefferson said, "[A] wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned."

When you stop and think about it, it is quite remarkable that the founders did what they did. After directing a successful revolt against an oppressive power, many leaders would have sought to grab considerable power for themselves.

Yet, the founders, to their great credit, did not do this. They did not perceive themselves to be all-wise and all-noble. So, when they adopted the U.S. Constitution in 1787, the founders limited the federal government's powers to those they specifically enumerated.

In addition, they established a system for amending that Constitution so that any imperfections in their work could be corrected by the people's representatives. Over the last 200+ years, the U.S. Constitution has been amended in a number of important ways. But thanks to the founders' vision and foresight, this document lives on, "securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

Governments are instituted among Men



Source: Library of Congress

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution extended the right to vote to women.

Thought Experiment:

Do You Know the Way to San Jose?

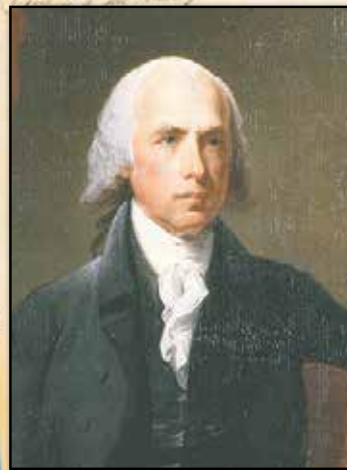
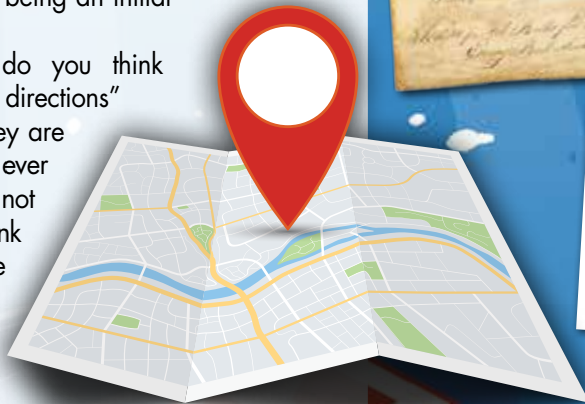
Suppose you were taking a cross-country road trip from one coast to the other and wanted to see a bunch of sights along the way. To ensure that you made it to every place you wanted to go, you would probably use a global positioning system (GPS) with built-in road maps.

Interestingly, a famous U.S. Senator from the 1800s once compared the U.S. Constitution to the maps and GPS systems of his day. "We may be tossed upon an ocean where we can see no land – nor perhaps the sun or stars," Daniel Webster observed. "But there is a chart and a compass for us to study, to consult, and to obey. That chart is the Constitution."

The U.S. Constitution is the authoritative guide to our form of government. It outlines the major roads or branches of government, where they intersect, and how ideas travel from being an initial proposal to being an enacted law.

Keeping this analogy in mind, do you think lawmakers are ever reluctant to "ask for directions" (or consult the Constitution) to be sure they are on the right path? Do you think they are ever tempted to take "short cuts" that are not found on the map? And why do you think the founders were so concerned about the dangers of a "driver" drunk with power?

Look for a current event in the newspaper that illustrates this idea. Share the article and your thoughts with your class in the form of an infographic, Power Point or Prezi presentation.



James Madison, who later became our fourth President, is often referred to as "The Father of Our Constitution."

We the People

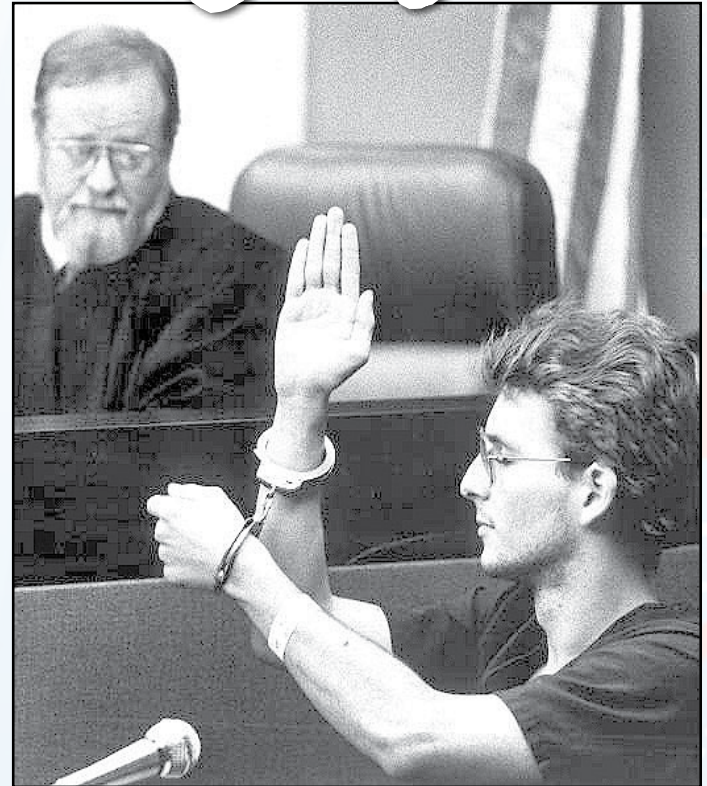
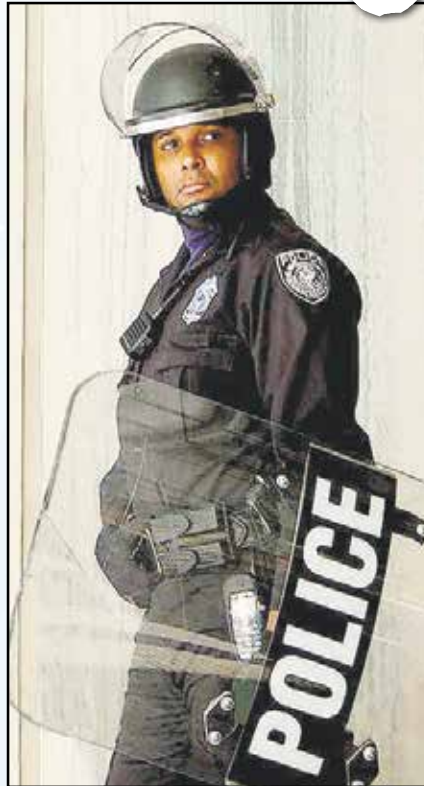
Article I



Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution outlines the structure of the legislative branch, which meets in the U.S. Capitol.



deriving their just powers



Source: Library of Congress, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, www.floridamemory.com

Governments have certain powers – like the authority to declare war and to arrest lawbreakers – that no other entity can rightly claim. Do you think it's reasonable for the U.S. Government to require all 18 year-old males to register with the Selective Service in case they are needed during wartime? Why or why not?

When the founders went to write the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they began with three rather extraordinary words: "We the people." These three words may not seem all that remarkable, but they capture an idea that is extremely powerful.

America is a nation that is governed, ultimately, by the citizens who pledge their allegiance to "the republic for which it [the flag of the United States of America] stands."

Americans do not believe in the "Divine Right of Kings," the notion that rulers are not subject to any earthly authority or accountable in any way to their subjects. In fact, the founders directly challenged this notion in the Declaration of Independence by saying that any government's legitimacy (or "just powers") come "from the consent of the governed."

Still, the founders did not establish a direct democracy in which every governmental decision was put to a vote of all the people. Instead, they set up a republic (or representative democracy) in which officials elected by the people make governmental decisions.

When Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the founders had given America, he replied, "A republic . . . if you can keep it." What Franklin meant was that for our system of government to work, ordinary Americans must take an active role in the civic life of our nation.

Citizens should register and vote. They should attend public meetings, stay informed on current issues, and seek to influence their elected officials with letters, phone calls, and petitions. They should organize rallies and protests. They should pay taxes and serve on juries. They should volunteer for military service and/or participate in a wide array of service projects organized by non-profit organizations, civic clubs, and community groups.

As Benjamin Franklin understood, for America's great experiment in self-government to continue, each new generation of Americans must embrace the ideals upon which our nation was founded and learn to govern themselves, leading honorable lives that show a concern for others. "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom," Franklin famously noted.

America truly is a unique nation. It is a country ruled not by kings or lords, but by ordinary citizens who have embraced the animating ideas behind our republic. As Abraham Lincoln once said, America is a land where freedom reigns because of our enduring commitment to government "of the people, by the people, and for the people."



from the consent of the governed.”

Thought Experiment: Following in the Footsteps of JFK's Sister?

In his often-quoted Inaugural Address, President John F. Kennedy exhorted the American people to “ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”

In so doing, Kennedy reminded his fellow Americans that each of us should seek to contribute voluntarily to the common good, helping to solve problems around us rather than expecting (or coercing) others to solve them for us.

Apparently, Kennedy's younger sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver took his words to heart.

Not long after Kennedy's speech, Eunice began a day camp in her backyard that helped people with special needs learn to swim and to participate in other athletic endeavors. In time, her backyard enterprise turned into the Special Olympics – and spread all over the world!

“Americans of all ages, conditions and all dispositions constantly unite together ... to hold fetes, found seminaries, build inns, construct churches, distribute books,” marveled Alexis de Tocqueville in his book, “Democracy in America.”

According to Tocqueville, these voluntary enterprises do more than just help those they directly serve. They also indirectly aid democratic society by bringing together people from all walks of life to rub shoulders in collaborative endeavors often focused on the needs of others. As such, they help participants become better neighbors and better citizens.

Look in the newspaper and around your neighborhood or community. What are some problems you and others nearby could work together to help solve? How might volunteering help you better understand – and appreciate – others in your community? Create a graphic depiction – infographic, photo collage, poster or video – to demonstrate what you see.



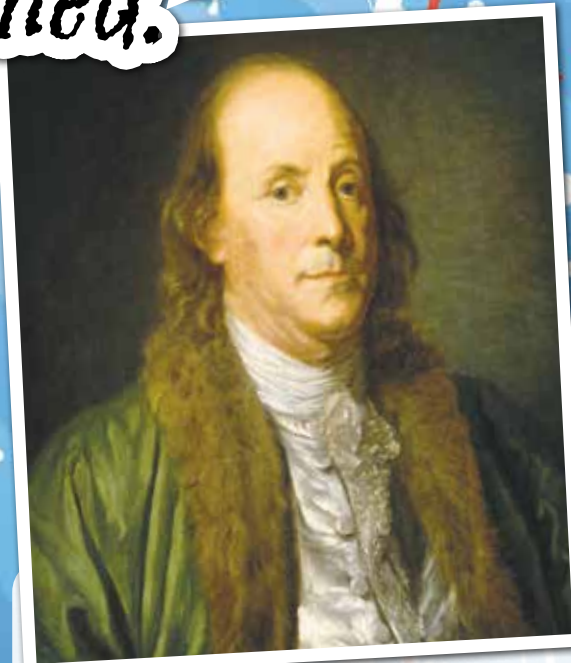
Eunice Kennedy Shriver, shown here awarding a medal to a participant in 2000, founded the Special Olympics.

Sources: (AP Photo/Lionel Cironneau, File)



John F. Kennedy

Photo by George Trabandt, St. Petersburg Times



Ben Franklin is one of only six founders to sign both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Sources: State Library and Archives of Florida



A Palm Beach County, Fla., election official examines a punch card ballot during the recount of the 2000 presidential election.

Florida Standards

Reading and interpreting the material in this publication and the *Tampa Bay Times* and completing the activities correlate to the following Florida Standards for high school students.

Social Studies: SS.912.A.1.1; SS.912.A.1.2; SS.912.A.1.4; SS.912.A.1.6; SS.912.A.3.12; SS.912.A.5.7; SS.912.A.5.10; SS.912.A.5.12; SS.912.A.7.4; SS.912.A.7.5; SS.912.A.7.6; SS.912.A.7.8; SS.912.C.1.3; SS.912.C.2.2; SS.912.C.2.6;

SS.912.C.2.9; SS.912.C.3.11; SS.912.C.3.15; SS.912.CG.1.1; SS.912.CG.1.2; SS.912.CG.1.5; SS.912.CG.2.2; SS.912.CG.2.3 **Language Arts:** ELA.912.C.1.2; ELA.912.C.1.4; ELA.912.C.1.5; ELA.912.C.2.1; ELA.912.C.3.1; ELA.912.C.4.1; ELA.912.C.5.1; ELA.912.C.5.2; ELA.912.R.2.1; ELA.912.R.2.2; ELA.912.R.2.3; ELA.912.R.2.4; ELA.912.R.3.1; ELA.912.R.3.2; ELA.912.R.3.3; ELA.912.R.3.4; ELA.912.V.1.1; ELA.912.V.1.3

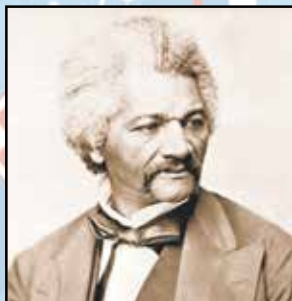
Reflections on the Declaration of Independence

It [Independence Day] ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.

— John Adams



from a 1776 letter to his wife, Abigail, who had remained in Massachusetts while he was in Philadelphia



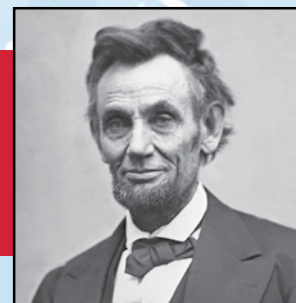
While drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age ... Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.

— Frederick Douglass

from his famous "4th of July" speech in 1852 which also contains a stinging denunciation of slavery

The expression of that principle ["Liberty to all"] in our Declaration of Independence, was most happy, and fortunate. Without this ... we could have declared our independence of Great Britain; but without it, we could not, I think, have secured our free government, and consequent prosperity.

— Abraham Lincoln



from presidential papers discovered after Lincoln's 1865 death in which he describes the U.S. Constitution as a "silver frame" meant to showcase the "gold apple" of the Declaration of Independence



We have fought to preserve one nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Yes, we have fought for America with all her imperfections, not so much for what she is, but for what we know she can be.

— Mary McLeod Bethune

from a radio address given by one of America's greatest educators, who founded in 1904 the school that would become Bethune-Cookman University

There is something beyond the establishment of a new nation ... in the Declaration of Independence which has ever since caused it to be regarded as one of the great charters, that not only was to liberate America but was everywhere to ennoble humanity.

— Calvin Coolidge



from a famous 1926 speech given on the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence



I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

from his famous speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial at the 1963 March on Washington