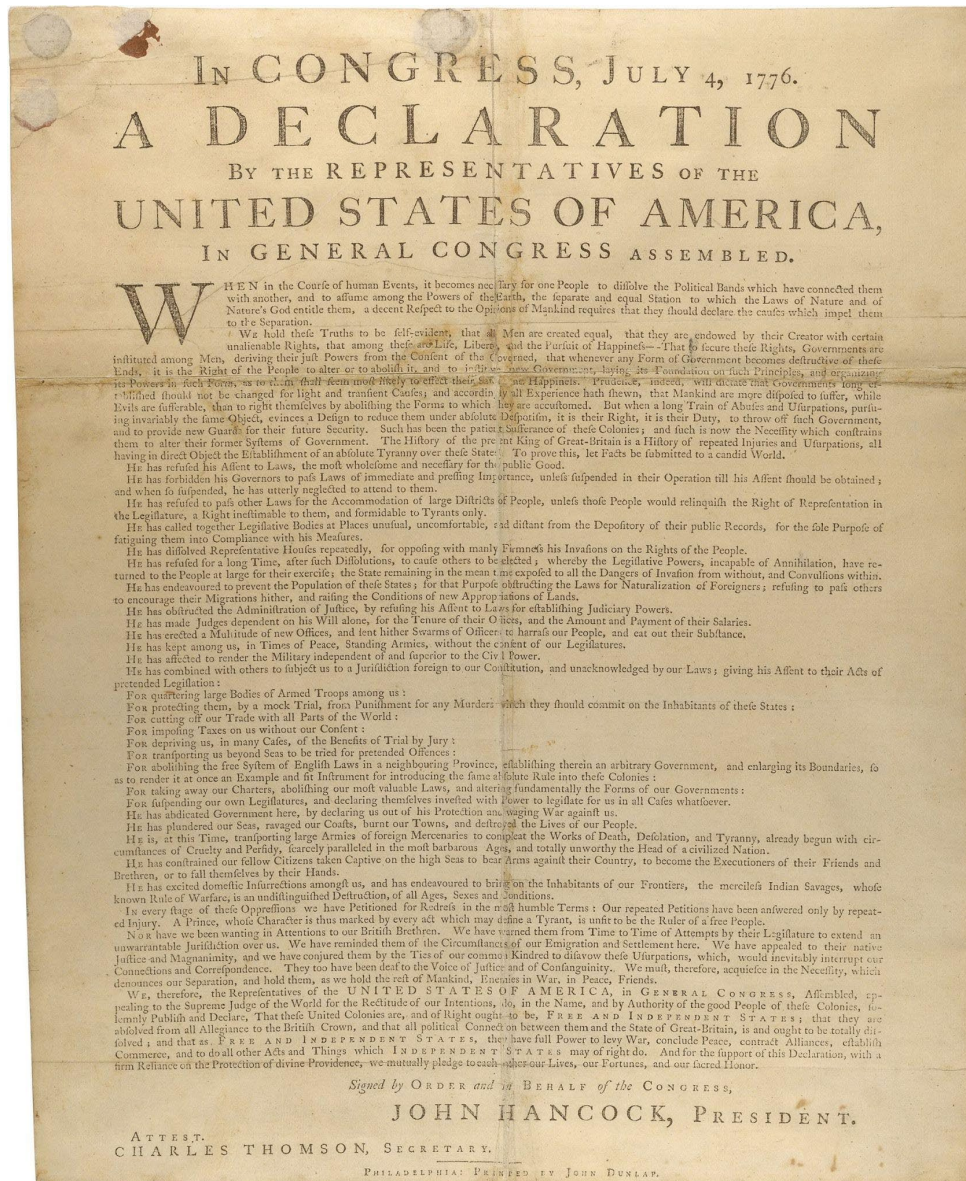


# Activity 1:

## Declaration of Independence Values and Principles



# Activity 1: Declaration of Independence Values and Principles

## Guiding Questions

- Why was the Declaration of Independence created?
- What fundamental values and principles does the Declaration of Independence promise?

## National Standards

### National Center for History in the Schools History Standards

- *Topic 3: The History of the United States*
  - *Standard 4: How democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events, and symbols*
    - *Standard 4A. Demonstrate understanding of how the United States government was formed and of the nation's basic democratic principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.*

### National Standards for Civics and Government

- *NSCG.K-4.2.A.1: What are the basic values and principles of American democracy?*
  - Students should be able to explain the importance of the fundamental values and principles of American democracy.
- *NSCG.K-4.2.B.1: Students should be able to explain the importance of the fundamental values and principles of American democracy.*

### Common Core State Standards

- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.2: Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.*
- *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.*

### College, Career, & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- *D2.Civ.7.3-5. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school settings*
- *D2.Civ.8.3-5. Identify core civic virtues and democratic principles that guide government, society, and communities.*

### Educating for American Democracy Roadmap

- *HDQ1.2A: Why and how do people take action in order to solve problems that affect them and others?*
- *HSGQ4.2A: What were different reasons the colonists had for separating from Great Britain?*

# Historical Context

## The Declaration of Independence: How Did it Happen?<sup>1</sup>

### The Revolution Begins

In the early 1770s, more and more colonists became convinced that Parliament intended to take away their freedom. In fact, the Americans saw a pattern of increasing oppression and corruption happening all around the world. Parliament was determined to bring its unruly American subjects to heel. Britain began to prepare for war in early 1775. The first fighting broke out in April in Massachusetts. In August, the King declared the colonists “in a state of open and avowed rebellion.” For the first time, many colonists began to seriously consider cutting ties with Britain. The publication of Thomas Paine’s stirring pamphlet *Common Sense* in early 1776 lit a fire under this previously unthinkable idea. The movement for independence was now in full swing.

### Choosing Independence

The colonists elected delegates to attend a Continental Congress that eventually became the governing body of the union during the Revolution. Its second meeting convened in Philadelphia in 1775. The delegates to Congress adopted strict rules of secrecy to protect the cause of American liberty and their own lives. In less than a year, most of the delegates abandoned hope of reconciliation with Britain. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution “that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states.” They appointed a Committee of Five to write an announcement explaining the reasons for independence. Thomas Jefferson, who chaired the committee and had established himself as a bold and talented political writer, wrote the first draft.

### Writing the Declaration

On June 11, 1776, Jefferson holed up in his Philadelphia boarding house and began to write. He borrowed freely from existing documents like the Virginia Declaration of Rights and incorporated accepted ideals of the Enlightenment. Jefferson later explained that “he was not striving for originality of principal or sentiment.” Instead, he hoped his words served as an “expression of the American mind.” Less than three weeks after he’d begun, he presented his draft to Congress. He was not pleased when Congress “mangled” his composition by cutting and changing much of his carefully chosen wording. He was especially sorry they removed the part blaming King George III for the slave trade, although he knew the time wasn’t right to deal with the issue.

### Declaring Independence

On July 2, 1776, Congress voted to declare independence. Two days later, it ratified the text of the Declaration. John Dunlap, official printer to Congress, worked through the night to set the Declaration in type and print approximately 200 copies. These copies, known as the Dunlap Broadides, were sent to various committees, assemblies, and commanders of the Continental troops. The Dunlap Broadides weren’t signed, but John Hancock’s name appears in large type at the bottom. One copy crossed the Atlantic, reaching King George III months later. The official British response scolded the “misguided Americans” and “their extravagant and inadmissible Claim of Independency.”

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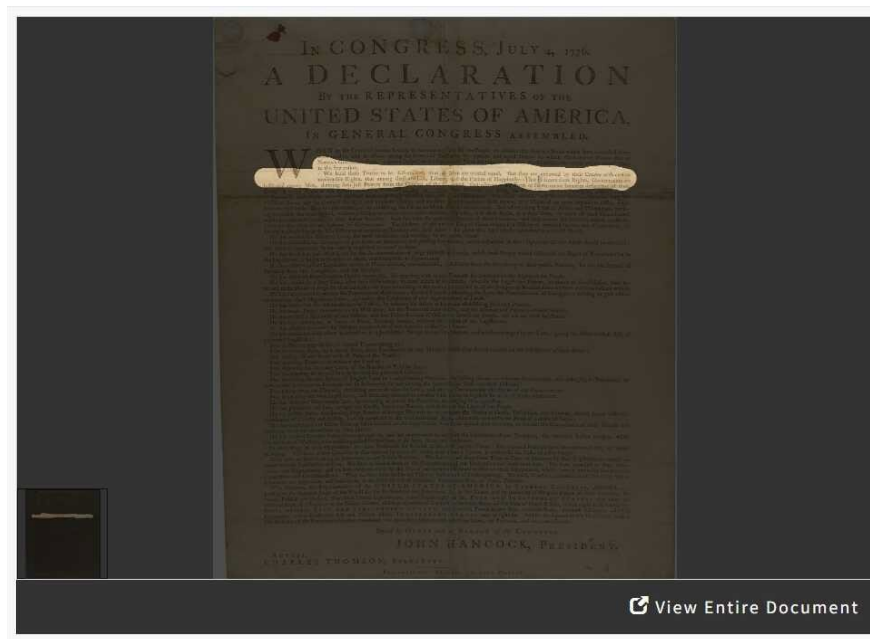
<sup>1</sup> Available online at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/how-did-it-happen>

# Educational Activity

## Declaration of Independence Values and Principles

*In this activity, elementary school students will discover the fundamental principles and values of American democracy by examining and analyzing the first printed and distributed copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Dunlap Broadside. Estimated time: 40-45 minutes.*

A digital version of this activity is available on DocsTeach, the online tool for teaching with documents from the National Archives. The [teacher page](#) provides an overview of the activity and suggested teaching instructions. Students can access the [student page](#) on their devices or you can project or screen share the activity with the whole class.



## Teaching Instructions

This activity can be used during a unit on the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, or while exploring key American ideals and values from our Founding documents. For grades 3-5. Approximate time needed is 45 minutes. Students can complete the activity as a whole class, in small groups, or in pairs.

Begin the activity by asking students to identify what details they notice about the document. Give students a minute or two to brainstorm details they notice about the document.

- Is the document handwritten or typed?
- Are there any special markings on the document?

After discussing the details they notice, introduce the activity. Inform students that they will become Document Detectives to uncover key ideas from the Declaration of Independence.

Ask students the following questions and give them time to brainstorm their response to each question:

- Who wrote the document?
- When was it written?
- Where is it from?

After sharing their observations, tell students they are now going to take a closer look at the main idea and purpose of the Declaration of Independence, and discover the fundamental values and principles promised by this Founding Document.

Students will examine excerpts from the document to discover the main idea and purpose. Model analyzing the Declaration of Independence by focusing attention on excerpts from the Dunlap Broadside that will help students answer the following questions. Consider walking students through unfamiliar vocabulary as you answer the questions together:

- What is the main idea of the Declaration of Independence?
- What does the Declaration of Independence do?
  - What words explain why the colonies want to separate from Great Britain?
  - Why do they think they have the right to be independent from Great Britain?

Following the whole class discussion about the main idea and purpose of the document, direct students to the preamble to the Declaration of Independence. Students will use their graphic organizers to examine and analyze the principles on which our government and our identities as Americans are based. Using the preamble of the Declaration, students should answer the following questions about the key promises made by this document in their graphic organizer. Students can work in pairs or in small groups.

- What does the text say?
- What does the text mean?
- Why does the text matter?

After analyzing the key promises made, ask students to volunteer to share their explanations for what the text means and why the text is important with the class. Facilitate a conversation about the significance of these principles. Ask students to reflect on how the ideas in the Declaration of Independence are still relevant today. Give students the opportunity to discuss this question in pairs or in small groups and to write their response on their graphic organizer.

- How are the ideas in the Declaration of Independence still relevant today?

After exploring the values and principles presented in the Declaration of Independence, encourage students to get creative and to come up with their own “declaration” that represents something that is important to them. Consider focusing on something that is important in their community, school, or classroom. Students can develop their declaration individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Invite students to share their ideas with the rest of the class.



## Educational Activity Resources

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.  
A DECLARATION  
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

**W**HEN in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and 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 Separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and 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 and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security. Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing Importance, unless suspended in their Operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the Accommodation of large Districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a Right inestimable to them, and formidable to Tyrants only.

He has called together Legislative Bodies at Places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Depository of their public Records, for the sole Purpose of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly Firmness his Invasions on the Rights of the People.

He has refused for a long Time, after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries.

He has erected a Multitude of new Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance.

He has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the Consent of our Legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

- For quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us;
- For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States;
- For cutting off our Trade with all Parts of the World;
- For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent;
- For depriving us, in many Cases, of the Benefits of Trial by Jury;
- For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended Offences;
- For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary Government, and enlarging its Boundaries, so as to render it at once an Example and fit Instrument for introducing the same absolute Rule into these Colonies;
- For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments;
- For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all Cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our People.

He is, at this Time, transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the Executioners of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.

Nor have we been wanting in Attention to our British Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the Necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connect on between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS,

JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST.  
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

### Declaration of Independence

<https://docsteach.org/documents/document/dunlap-broadside>

## Graphic Organizer - Declaration of Independence Preamble

| What does the text say?  | What does the text mean?     | Why is the text important? |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal"  |                              |                            |
| "And that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" | <b>Life:</b>                 |                            |
|  | <b>Liberty:</b>              |                            |
|  | <b>Pursuit of Happiness:</b> |                            |
| <b>Reflection</b>  |                              |                            |
| How are the ideas in the Declaration of Independence still relevant today?   |                              |                            |
| If you could write your own "declaration" about something important to you, what would that be and why?  |                              |                            |

## Supplemental Educational Resources

The following educational activities are designed to support student learning. These activities are not required. Feel free to facilitate only the activities that you think would be most helpful for your students.

### 1. Join the Signers of the Declaration of Independence

*Add your name and become a signer of the Declaration of Independence! In 1776, the Declaration of Independence declared that American colonists were breaking free from British rule.*

Visit <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/join-the-signers> for more details.

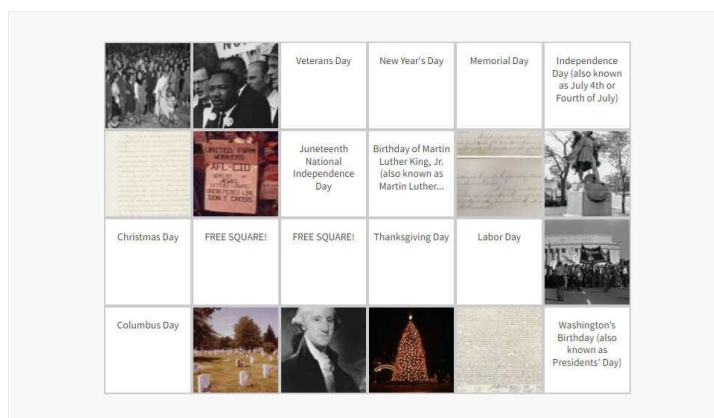


### 2. National Holidays Matching DocsTeach Activity

*In this activity, students will match a variety of primary source documents to specific Federal holidays.*

Estimated time: 40 minutes

The [teacher page](#) provides an overview of the activity and suggested teaching instructions. Students can access the [student page](#) on their devices or you can project or screen share the activity with the whole class

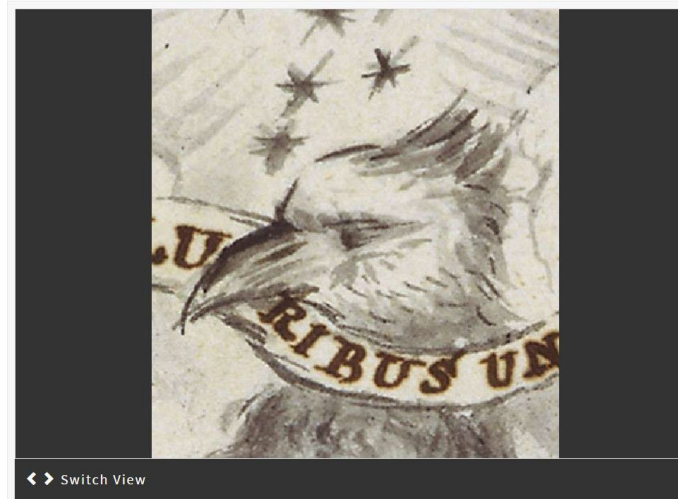




### 3. Finding American Symbols DocsTeach Activity

*Students identify symbols used in the original design of the Great Seal of the United States and assess how the symbols connect with important American ideas.* Estimated time: 20 minutes

The [teacher page](#) provides an overview of the activity and suggested teaching instructions. Students can access the [student page](#) on their devices or you can project or screen share the activity with the whole class.



### 4. Make Your Own Great Seal

*In this activity, students will be asked to consider how they can use pictures to represent themselves and their communities. Students will identify what types of things are important to them and then express what they stand for by creating a Great Seal for themselves. Finally, they will work together to create a Great Seal for the class.* Estimated time: 60 minutes

Background Information: Share the Design of the Great Seal with students.

In July 1776, the Continental Congress decided it needed a “national coat of arms” or seal to represent the new nation. Over the course of six years, there were several attempts at developing a successful design. Finally, a design created by Charles Thompson and revised by William Barton was submitted and approved on June 20, 1782.

The Great Seal of the United States is the symbol of our independence as a nation. Its obverse is used on official documents to authenticate the signature of the President, and it appears on proclamations, warrants, treaties, and commissions of high officials of the government. The Great Seal's design, used as our national coat of arms, is also used officially as decoration on military uniform buttons, on plaques above the entrances to U.S. embassies and consulates, and in other places. Both the obverse and the less familiar reverse, which is never used as a seal, are imprinted on the one-dollar bill.

Several symbols are incorporated into the Great Seal:

- There are 13 arrows, 13 stripes, 13 stars, and 13 letters in the motto all representing the original 13 colonies that became the first 13 states.
- The olive branch represents peace.
- The arrows represent war.
- The eagle faces to the side of peace.
- The constellation of stars represents a new nation taking its place among other nations.
- The motto E Pluribus Unum means “out of many, one”—in a word, “unity.”

Share the Design Your Own Seal template with students to create a seal that represents who they are and what they believe. Ask them to think about what is important to them. Their ideas do not have to be as lofty as those represented in the Great Seal of the United States (e.g., they may list a sports team, a favorite cartoon character, their pet, a favorite food). Anything appropriate is fair game for inclusion.

As students think about their design, you can use the following prompts:

- What symbols will you include?
- What colors will you use?
- What words might you include?
- What is your personal motto?
- What values are represented in your seal?

Next, invite students to brainstorm how they can represent their whole class in a classroom seal. Using the same template, you can work together to create this symbol.

As students brainstorm, you can use the following prompts:

- What values do we promote in our class?
- What should we expect from each other?
- How can we work together?
- What symbols can we use to represent these ideas?
- What should our class motto be?

You can also invite students to choose one part of their individual seal to include in the class seal.