Lesson Plan for the Texas Declaration of Independence
Experiential Exercise
created by Dawn Bishop

Materials: directions, blank scroll, graphically organized notes, “Reading of the Texas Declaration of Independence” painting transparency.

Overview: This Experiential Exercise is designed to recreate the situation the Texans experienced when they wrote their Declaration of Independence. The purpose of this activity is for students to understand the challenges faced by the Texans in forming a government. First, the teacher informs the class they are delegates from different towns in Texas. They are currently in Washington-on-the-Brazos in an attempt to form a government. Their first goal is to write a Declaration of Independence. Students will be given the challenge of drafting the document without help from their teacher. Afterward, the class discusses the experience, and the teacher asks the students what difficulties they encountered. The teacher will then compare the activity to the actual historic experience.

Procedures at a Glance: Before class, arrange the desks in the classroom in one large circle. Pass out one copy of the scroll to one student in the classroom. Explain to the students that they are going to write a Declaration of Independence similar to the one the Texans wrote. The only difference is that they will be declaring their independence from something that affects them today instead of the Mexican Government.

Preview: There is no preview for this activity. The Experiential Exercise serves as a preview.

Activities:
1. This activity is designed to introduce students to the challenges that arise when people attempt to form a government. Once students have experienced the successes and failures of creating their own Declaration of Independence, they will better understand the advantages and disadvantages of democracy. Before class, move the desks in the classroom into a large circle so that every student faces the center.
2. Announce to students that they are to create their own Declaration of Independence. They need to work together as a class to create their declaration of independence from something in their own lives.
(parents, homework, etc.). This document must be approved and signed by all members of the class. Pass out the blank scroll (Handout A) and directions for creating a declaration of independence (Handout B). Review the guidelines for creating their own declaration. The directions are minimal for a purpose. You want to allow the students to experience as much as possible the frustrations felt by the delegates at the Convention.

3. Once you have reviewed the directions, tell students they must create their declaration without your help. It is important that you remain an observer and not intervene at any time. Observe their discussion silently, and take notes of what they do and say. This will allow you to help students draw direct connections between their behavior and the actual historical event of writing the Declaration of Independence. Even as they struggle, resist the temptation to help them.

4. As the exercise unfolds, expect varied reactions from students. Some students will become frustrated or bored as they try to make all the decisions on their own, while others may demand that you intervene. Occasionally, some classes discuss the tasks quietly and efficiently, voting methodically on every issue. But in general, expect that students will react to their newfound classroom freedom by either failing to complete the task or by allowing a few students to make all the decisions.

5. With at least 20 minutes remaining in the period, stop the activity and have students return to their seats.

**Connecting the Experience with History**

1. Tell students this activity was designed to have them experience the challenges of forming a government. Hold a class discussion centering on these questions:
   a. How did you feel during the course of this activity? Why?
   b. How did you feel when I stopped the activity and told you to go back to your desks? Why?
   c. Give an example during the activity when a majority of the class agreed upon a decision. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?
   d. How do you think your declaration compared to the actual Declaration of Independence?

2. Project the primary source image of the writing of the Declaration of Independence on **Transparency A**. Ask the students these questions:
What do you see in this painting?
What is in the foreground? The background?
Who do you think these people are?
How do you think these men are feeling?
What does it look like they are doing?
How did your experience compare to the image you are seeing?

Graphically Organized Notes
1. Share the notes you took during the activity with the students. Tell students that the actual Declaration of Independence was most likely written by one person, George Childress, and was not written by a group. However, the Texas government was created by a group of 52 delegates at Washington-on-the-Brazos in 1836 by borrowing heavily from the U.S. government.

2. Direct students to their textbook pages on the Declaration of Independence and the formation of the Texas government. Once the students have read the information, have them create a Venn diagram comparing the Texas Declaration of Independence to the experiential exercise. A sample would look like this:

![Venn Diagram]

Processing Assignment
Have the students imagine they actually attended the convention and participated in both the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the formation of the Texas Government. They will write a letter home to their spouse sharing their experience. Their letter will need to include four of the following words: Declaration of Independence, Washington-on-the-Brazos, George Childress, Preamble, Grievances, or Mexican Government.