



AMERICA'S 250th ANNIVERSARY

EDUCATOR GUIDE

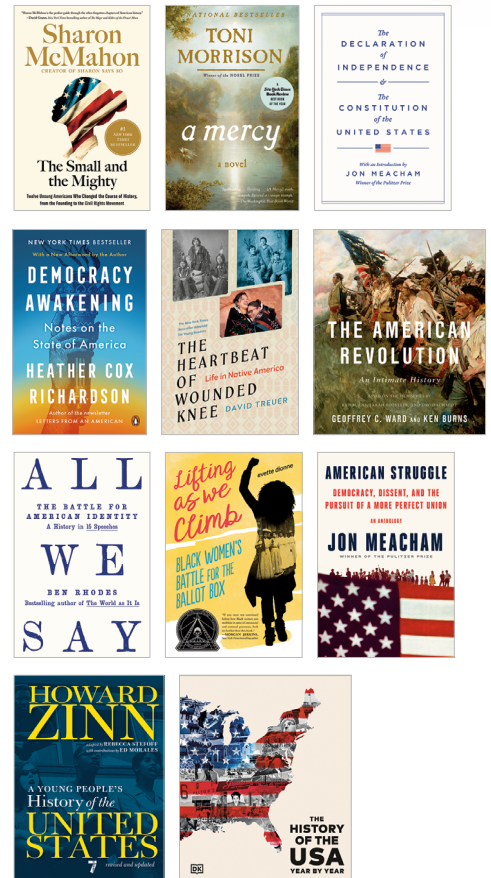
Introduction

Two hundred and fifty years after delegates from all thirteen colonies signed the Declaration of Independence, America's semiquincentennial is a birthday celebration one quarter millennium in the making. According to the mission statement of the U.S. semiquincentennial, "the journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond." Middle and high school students can join in the celebration by researching foundational documents, reflecting on historic people and places, and resolving to take action. This guide provides opportunities to research, reflect, and respond with high-impact practices that integrate critical reading, writing, thinking, and speaking. Suggested texts are provided that correspond to the guide's essential themes and questions. Teachers can select the titles and ideas that best align with classroom goals while inspiring students to learn from history, see themselves as change agents, and take their place as advocates for a more perfect union.

About the Author of this Guide

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Suggested texts to use with this guide



We Be People

Big Idea #1: *Aspiration*

By examining America's founding documents, people, and places, students build knowledge, celebrate history, and aspire for advancement.

Essential Questions:

1. What are the promises inherent in the Declaration of Independence?
2. What does it mean to be a patriot?
3. How have persistence, protest, and civil disobedience shaped American democracy?
4. How do historically significant places define or challenge American identity and values?

Activities:

Interactive Declaration of Independence

Students can take a deep dive into the Declaration of Independence courtesy of the National Constitution Center (prhlink.com/ccdeclaration). Challenge partners



to read the text of the Declaration

and explore media links related to the document's ideas, values, and promises. Invite individual students to select one of the signers and explore provided text and video in order to discover his history and impact. Provide small groups different historical documents that draw on the Declaration of Independence to frame a diversity of visions for America. After students have explored the interactive tools, discuss: What are the values and promises inherent in the Declaration of Independence? What political, economic, and social conditions led to the American Revolution, and to what extent do those conditions exist in the United States today?

Explore Board

Invite students to explore the places that helped shape America. Using a 3x3 digital explore board template, students select a tile and click links taking them to images and texts (prhlink.com/ditchtextbook). The board should include a mix of well-known sites, iconic landmarks, and less familiar locations. It should reflect the diversity of background and cultures that have contributed to our nation's history. Example tiles might include the Freedom Trail in Boston, the Alamo in Texas, the Crazy Horse memorial in South Dakota, the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, and the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Once students have explored, they can present short presentations or share their learning via a digital bulletin board. Discuss: What is the role of place in providing connections and insights across time? As an extension, students can create their own explore boards with links, images, and text.

SWIFTT Song Analysis

Provide the lyrics and video to two songs: Charlie Puth's 2026 Super Bowl performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (prhlink.com/charlieputhssp) and Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Minneapolis" (prhlink.com/brucestreets). As they view the performances, students take individual notes applying the SWIFTT protocol: Symbols, Word Choice (Diction), Images, Figurative Language, Tone, and Theme. Afterward, discuss how each song uses "dawn's early light" to reflect two very different tones, and how the use of flags, military, smoke, and crowds in both performances reflect contrasting themes. Ask: How does each song address the notion of patriotism? How do these two performances, taken together, reflect our national identity?



Big Idea #2: *Agency*

By reflecting on their own and others' part in America's story, students are able to realize their individual and collective capabilities and identities.

Essential Questions:

1. How have Americans both upheld and fallen short of our founding ideals?
2. Who has been historically entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?
3. Who decides which American stories are celebrated and which are ignored or erased?
4. What is "civil disagreement"? Why should we listen to Americans with diverse views?

Activities:

Our American Story

Using "Our American Story" as inspiration, ask students to record and edit an interview with a relative, community member, or other individual whose story reflects the varied and unique identities of those living in America. Students can use the America 250 prompts and video recorder (prhlink.com/america250org), or they might record with Screencastify or Loom and archive their work on a digital platform such as Google Classroom or Canva. Alternatively, students might record their own American story in the form of a podcast or TED Talk, or select an unsung, historic American and dramatize an interview complete with costumes and script.



"Stories" Thinking Routine

Use the "Stories" thinking routine in order to consider the complexities in historical narratives (prhlink.com/harvardcomplexity). In this protocol, students reflect on and respond to three questions around historical texts or accounts:

1. What is the story that is presented? (What is the account that is told or emphasized?)
2. What is the untold story? (What other angles are missing in the account?)
3. What is your story? (What is the account you think should be told?)

If the narrative or material presents more than one perspective, students can pair up or form groups, each assigned to a different perspective. The goal is for readers to consider multiple points of view as well as their own lived experiences when presented with our national stories.

Beyond the Hashtag

Build awareness of political ideologies and their polarizing effects. Choose several current advocacy hashtags and post them on the whiteboard. Hashtags might include #BLM, #ClimateAction, #GenderEquality, and #LoveWins. Ask students to jot down words or feelings associated with these ideologies, as well as words and feelings illustrating the opposing viewpoints. Discuss the concept of "affective polarization," where the more polar our political and social views become, the less we trust or respect the opposing viewpoint and each other. Ask: How can we maintain civility in an often uncivil America? Why listen to diverse views?





Big Idea #3: *Action*

By embracing the role of service leaders who wish to benefit those beyond themselves, students become change agents ready to define their role in advancing America.

Essential Questions:

1. What are my responsibilities in becoming an informed and engaged citizen?
2. What values should we respect and expect in our fellow citizens? What attitudes and actions should we challenge?
3. How can I balance the pursuit of individual liberties with ensuring the rights of all?
4. What makes America great? Where do we still need work?

Activities:

Snippet Lesson

Show students the *National Treasure* snippet where Nicholas Cage references the Declaration of Independence: "Of all the ideas that became the United States, there's a line here that's at the heart of all the others ... 'When a long train of abuses and usurpations ... evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such government'" (prhlink.com/NationalTreasure). Afterward, ask students: Do you agree that Americans who have the ability to take action also have the responsibility to take action? What is an abuse, usurpation, issue, or cause that you feel strongly about? Students might respond in a journal entry, a blog post, a small-group discussion, or a more formal essay.

Service Learning Project

Ask students to take the America Gives challenge (prhlink.com/americagivesorg) and volunteer to make their community even better. Students can research local organizations and agencies and pursue service opportunities aligned to their interests. Focus areas can include community health, disaster relief, voting efforts, food security, and more. Students can highlight their service in digital portfolios and share with classmates, school, and community members.

ESCAPE News Analysis

Distribute two news stories: one from a credible source and one from a questionable or unknown source. Have students evaluate each using the ESCAPE method (Evidence, Source, Context, Audience, Purpose, Execution). Discuss findings to decide which is trustworthy and which may be "fake" news. Encourage students to apply this method regularly to truly be informed citizens confident in defending their point of view. For more on the ESCAPE method, see this from Newseum Ed (prhlink.com/newseumedposter).

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