

## The Mecklenburg Resolves

### Overview

Students will examine the Mecklenburg Resolves and work in small groups to teach their classmates about the key ideas posed in the document. Students will then demonstrate their understanding of this document by creating innovative infomercials on the important elements of the Resolves.

### Grade

8

### North Carolina Essential Standards for 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1.1 - Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues.
- 8.H.1.2 - Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 8.H.1.3 - Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 8.H.1.4 - Use historical inquiry to evaluate the validity of sources used to construct historical narratives (e.g. formulate historical questions, gather data from a variety of sources, evaluate and interpret data and support interpretations with historical evidence).
- 8.H.1.5 - Analyze the relationship between historical context and decision-making.
- 8.H.2.2 - Summarize how leadership and citizen actions (e.g. the founding fathers, the Regulators, the Greensboro Four, and participants of the Wilmington Race Riots, 1898) influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.3 - Summarize the role of debate, compromise, and negotiation during significant periods in the history of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.3 - Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.1.1 - Summarize democratic ideals expressed in local, state, and national government (e.g. limited government, popular sovereignty, separation of powers, republicanism, federalism and individual rights).
- 8.C&G.1.2 - Evaluate the degree to which democratic ideals are evident in historical documents from North Carolina and the United States (e.g. the Mecklenburg Resolves, the Halifax Resolves, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Bill of Rights and the principles outlined in the US Constitution and North Carolina Constitutions of 1776, 1868 and 1971).
- 8.C&G.1.3 - Analyze differing viewpoints on the scope and power of state and national governments (e.g. Federalists and anti-Federalists, education, immigration and healthcare).

### Materials

- Image of the NC State Flag, attached
- Excerpt from The Mecklenburg Resolves, attached
- Dictionaries or Internet access

### Essential Questions:

- What was the purpose of the Mecklenburg Resolves?
- What was the purpose of the Halifax Resolves?
- Why are the dates of these documents commemorated on North Carolina's state flag?
- What effect did the Mecklenburg Resolves, the Halifax Resolves, and the Declaration of Independence have on colonists in regards to the Revolutionary War?

## Duration

1-2 class periods

## Student Preparation

Students should have a basic understanding of pre-Revolutionary tensions between the British and colonists, as well as the causes of the battles of Lexington and Concord.

## Procedure

### The North Carolina State Flag

1. As a warm-up, project an image of the North Carolina state flag (attached). Ask students to share what they know about the flag. Particularly, ask students if they can explain the significance of the two dates on the flag. (*May 20, 1775 notes the date of the **Mecklenburg Resolves** and April 12, 1776 notes the date of the **Halifax Resolves.***)
2. Ask students to raise their hand if they have ever heard of the Mecklenburg Resolves. Then ask students who has heard of Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. Chances are, more students have heard of our national declaration over Mecklenburg's. Ask students why they think this is. Further discuss:
  - If you have heard of the Mecklenburg Resolves, what do you already know about it?
  - Why do you think the date of the Mecklenburg Resolves is included on our state's flag? (May 20, 1775)
  - If you know nothing about the Mecklenburg Resolves, think about the date – May 20, 1775. What else was taking place during this time? (The Battle of Lexington and Concord took place on April 19, 1775.)

### The Mecklenburg Resolves

3. Explain to students:
  - The news of Lexington and Concord arrived in Charlotte Town (present-day Charlotte) sometime in May 1775. On May 31, the Mecklenburg County Committee of Safety adopted these "resolves," or resolutions, which declared all royal authority to be suspended. All acts of king and Parliament had no force in the colonies, and the only legitimate governments in America were the Continental Congress and the provincial congresses. Royal officials were to be arrested. The resolves then laid out a plan for a local government that could keep order.  
  
Why Mecklenburg? You might wonder why residents of Mecklenburg County were the first to claim their independence from Britain. It may be in part because of religion: Until 1800, all churches established in Mecklenburg County were Presbyterian, and the county's residents were mostly Scotch-Irish. But only ministers of the Church of England could legally perform marriages, which created problems for people of other faiths. Mecklenburgers may have been as eager to declare themselves independent of the English church as they were to get rid of its government. (*Source:* <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4263>)
4. Place students in small groups (at least 6 if possible) and hand out the attached abridged copy of the Mecklenburg Resolves, as printed in the *Raleigh Register*. (The entire document can be accessed at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4263>.) First, read the document out loud as a class, calling for a student volunteer to read each paragraph. Tell students to highlight words that they do not know as the document is read.
5. After completing the reading, draw a six-column chart on the board, or post 6 pieces of chart paper in front of the class. Title the columns or papers as Preamble, Resolve 1, Resolve 2, Resolve 3, Resolve 4, and Resolve 5. Paragraph by paragraph, ask students to call out the words that they are unfamiliar with, and write them in the appropriate list. (Place a check beside words that are repeated.)

6. Next, assign each group one of the six paragraphs of the Mecklenburg Resolves to focus on (if you have more than six groups, assign more than one group the same paragraph). Give students the following instructions:
  - You have the prestigious job of working for “All About the Documents,” a firm of top-notch historians who specialize in teaching citizens about America’s founding documents. Your group has been hired to present at a conference on the Mecklenburg Resolves, since many North Carolinians do not know about this important document. To prepare for presenting at the conference, you must:
    - Carefully reread the excerpt assigned to your group.
    - Figure out the meaning to each of the words in your section that confused your classmates (refer students to the list created up front).
    - Summarize the meaning of the paragraph. What is being stated by the colonists? Why do you think they are noting this? Why is this excerpt important?
    - Be prepared to teach conference attendees (your classmates) the answers to these questions, as well answer any questions posed regarding your excerpt.
7. Teachers should review their expectations for group work then allow students to get started. The amount of time required for students to prepare their presentation will vary class to class, but teachers should plan for at least 10-15 minutes. (If possible, provide access to dictionaries or computers for defining unknown words.)
8. Once students have finalized their presentation, review class expectations for being a respectful audience member, and have each group teach classmates about their excerpt. Instruct students to take interpretive notes on their copy of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence as they listen to one another’s presentations. Also, allow students to pose questions of the presenters.

#### **Create an Infomercial**

9. Next, tell the groups that you have good news for them and project/explain the following:
  - WUNC-TV has hired your group to create an infomercial with the purpose of educating North Carolinians on the Mecklenburg Resolves. As a group, discuss what you feel are the key ideas and themes posed in the Resolves and create an infomercial that will educate the public about this seldom discussed document.
    - As a group, discuss what you feel is most important about the document. What are the key ideas and themes? Why are these ideas and themes important?
    - Brainstorm an infomercial that will educate North Carolinians about the Mecklenburg Resolves, convince them it is an important piece of history, and grab their attention.
    - Your final infomercial...
      - Must be at least 2 minutes in length when aired on television
      - Should contain accurate facts regarding the Resolves
      - Must discuss the key ideas and themes of the Resolves, and why the document is important to our state’s history
      - Should be creative! (your infomercial can contain music, props, costumes, etc.)
      - Will be performed in front of the class, with all group members taking active, committed roles in the presentation.

*\*Additional preparation time and/or presentations may need to take place the following day of class, depending on student progress.*

10. Once students are ready to present, again review performance and respectful audience expectations. After each infomercial, encourage students to clap loudly and offer feedback:
  - What did you like and/or learn from that infomercial?

- What key ideas and themes did this group point out?
- Do you have any questions for this group?

### **Controversy and the Resolves**

11. As a side note, you might want to share with students that like most everything in history, there is some controversy related to the Mecklenburg Resolves:

- In 1819, a document called the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was published, with the claim that it had been written on May 20, 1775. It included the statement that “we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people, are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing Association, under the control of no power other than that of our God and the General Government of the Congress.” In celebration, the date of May 20, 1775, appears on North Carolina’s state flag.

But no earlier reference to that document has ever been found, and most historians doubt that it ever existed. Most likely, the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was what someone remembered the Mecklenburg Resolves to have been, borrowing phrases from the Declaration of 1776. The Mecklenburg Resolves, after all, did set up a government “independent of Great-Britain.” In any case, citizens of Mecklenburg County were deliberately beginning to govern themselves more than a year before the Continental Congress finally severed ties with Britain. (*Source:*

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4263>)

Discuss:

- Why is history often controversial, with people arguing what actually happened and didn’t happen and the details of events (such as time, place, people involved, etc.)?
- How do you think it is decided what is “legitimate history,” and what is printed in textbooks and other records?
- What role does perspective play in interpreting and documenting history?
- In the case with the Mecklenburg Declaration, it is believed people likely remembered things wrong years later. What role does memory play in history?

### **The Halifax Resolves**

12. Let students know that not only did North Carolina produce the Mecklenburg Resolves before the more popular national Declaration of Independence, but our state also produced the **Halifax Resolves**. Ask students if any of them know anything about the Halifax Resolves, and share information regarding this document, such as:

- The first battle of the American Revolution that took place in North Carolina was the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge on February 27, 1776. Six weeks after the Patriot victory there, a committee of Patriots met in Halifax, NC and on April 12, 1776 adopted the Halifax Resolves. The resolves (formal statements of purpose) called for independence from Britain. The Resolves not only recommended that North Carolina declare independence, but urged all of the colonies to do so as well. Virginia followed with its own recommendations soon after the adoption of the Halifax Resolution, and eventually the final draft of the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, and John Penn were the delegates from North Carolina who signed the Declaration of Independence.

Discuss:

- Why do you think the Declaration of Independence is so widely known, whereas the Mecklenburg and Halifax Resolves are lesser known in our state?

- Imagine you have been tasked with teaching at least one person or group about the Mecklenburg Resolves and the Halifax Resolves. Who would you teach and why? Who needs to know about this piece of North Carolina history?
- How would you characterize the citizens that drafted the Mecklenburg Resolves and the Halifax Resolves?
- How do you think citizen involvement in politics and government today compares to citizen involvement during colonial times? Explain.
- How do you imagine these documents affected the Revolutionary War in North Carolina? How do you imagine the Declaration of Independence affected the Revolutionary War across all colonies?

**Additional Activities**

- Assume the role of an active colonial citizen living in either Charlotte Town or Halifax and write a letter to the editor of *The Colonial Times* in which you express your personal feelings about independence. You may choose whether to have Loyalist or Patriot attitudes.

North Carolina State Flag



## The Mecklenburg Resolves

WHEREAS, By an Address presented to His Majesty by both Houses of Parliament, in February last, the American colonies are declared to be in a state of actual rebellion, we conceive, that all laws and commissions confirmed by, or derived from the authority of the King or Parliament, are annulled and vacated, and the former civil constitution of these colonies, for the present, wholly suspended. To provide, in some degree, for the exigencies of these colonies, in the present alarming period, we deem it proper and necessary to pass the following Resolves,

1. Resolved, That whosoever directly or indirectly abetted, or in any way, form, or manner, countenanced the unchartered and dangerous invasion of our rights, as claimed by Great Britain, is an enemy to this County, to America, and to the inherent and inalienable rights of man.
2. Resolved, That we the citizens of Mecklenburg County, do hereby dissolve the political bands which have connected us to the Mother Country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British Crown, and abjure all political connection, contract, or association, with that Nation, who have wantonly trampled on our rights and liberties and inhumanly shed the innocent blood of American patriots at Lexington.
3. Resolved, That we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people, are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing Association, under the control of no power other than that of our God and the General Government of the Congress; to the maintenance of which independence, we solemnly pledge to each other, our mutual cooperation, our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor.
4. Resolved, That as we now acknowledge the existence and control of no law or legal officer, civil or military, within this County, we do hereby ordain and adopt, as a rule of life, all, each and every of our former laws - where, nevertheless, the Crown of Great Britain never can be considered as holding rights, privileges, immunities, or authority therein.
5. Resolved, That it is also further decreed, that all, each and every military officer in this County, is hereby reinstated to his former command and authority, he acting conformably to these regulations, and that every member present of this delegation shall henceforth be a civil officer, viz. a Justice of the Peace, in the character of a 'Committee-man,' to issue process, hear and determine all matters of controversy, according to said adopted laws, and to preserve peace, and union, and harmony, in said County, and to use every exertion to spread the love of country and fire of freedom throughout America, until a more general and organized government be established in this province.