

The Teacher's Guide to 1776 Interactive

About the show:

1776 Interactive celebrates the Declaration of Independence through songs and scenes from the musical 1776 written by Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards. Students will learn the history of the Declaration of Independence told by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Mrs. Jefferson.

What students should prepare for: inventions by Benjamin Franklin, the original 13 colonies, a waltz with Mrs. Jefferson and any questions they have for the actors (can be about the show, the history of the Declaration, the musical or even about being an actor).

Songs in the Show

Sit Down John

The song "Sit Down John" created the perfect intensity of the continental congress as Mr. Adams cries out for independency on a hot sweltering day inside the chamber of the continental congress.

The Lees Of Old Virginia

Writers included a fun over the top character song with Virginian representative, Richard Henry Lee. His character was energetic, comical and full of energy and it was just what they needed to take a break from the intense and dramatic dialogue.

But Mr. Adams

Out of the Declaration committee someone had to write the declaration but whom? Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards wrote this song to be performed like a game of musical chairs or hot potato and by the end of the number we find out who exactly becomes the writer.

He Plays the Violin

With a cast of over twenty-five men and only two women, the show needed to add some romance and they did with Mrs. Jefferson paying a visit to her husband, Thomas Jefferson.

The Egg

This song was primarily written to showcase Benjamin Franklin but it also told about the birth of our symbol, the eagle. Stories say that the writers sat up all night thinking about this song and when they were about to give up, a glimpse of light came through the window hitting their show poster. The poster was a drawing of a cracked egg with a baby eagle peeking out of the shell holding the American flag. The song became known as simply, The Egg.

Is Anybody There?

This is John Adams's final plea for independence. Mr. Adams sees the glorious future of his country and wonders if anyone is listening.

Other songs from the musical 1776, not included in the interactive show:

Momma, Look Sharp

With this dramatic song, the writers showed us the battling world outside of the congress through the eyes of the courier. The young boy sings about mothers looking for their young sons after the war and fighting is over.

Cool, Cool Considerate Men

Delegates against independency take a dramatic and strong political stand in this lyrical song. When the movie version of 1776 was being made, this song was taken out of the film due to its strong political beliefs.

Molasses to Rum

This song commented on one of the most unspoken issues during its time; slavery. Mr. Jefferson and the writing committee wanted to end slavery but Mr. Rutledge did not. He thought if slavery would end, the economy would fail. The writers wrote the song, Molasses to Rum, to capture the ugly truth of slavery and for Mr. Rutledge to take the men of congress through their own state of guilt.

Terms and Definitions

Below is a list of terms and definitions used in the musical that the students can explore on their own.

Continental Congress

Courier

The House of Burgesses

Sedan

The Sugar Act

The Stamp Act

The Tea Act

Delegate

Class Discussion and Exercises:

After the Show

Discuss with the students what their favorite scene was, who was their favorite character and what were some of things they learned.

Independence

Every American citizen has their own interpretation of what Independence means to them. Assign the students to write a short or long paragraph of what Independence means to them.

Tally the Votes

Divide the students into small groups and come up with an idea to be put to vote. If it's possible, try to have the vote be unanimous. This will teach the students how to delegate and compromise with each

other. It will also show them how difficult it is to have everyone agree on the same thing and what the delegates had to go through to get a unanimous vote.

Example of ideas: Longer recesses, pepperoni or sausage pizza for lunch, cell phones or no cell phones in classrooms...

The 56 Signers

The interactive show and study guide only touched on a handful of delegates who signed the Declaration. Each signer has made significant impact or played a significant role for our country. Have the students choose a delegate and do some research on them. Once they have done the research have them present it to the class. This can be individually or as a group.

Recommended Links and Reading:

1776 by Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards

The Lees of Virginia: Biography of a Family by Burton Hendrick

The Story of the Declaration of Independence by Dumas Malone

1776 the DVD movie with commentary from the movie director and 1776 writer, Peter Stone.