

Project American Life

“Where America’s Founding Principles Come to Life!”

In bringing American History to life, students develop a rich and personal connection with the ideals of our Republic. Experiential discoveries into these Founding Principles kindle heartfelt gratitude for the many sacrifices made in the shaping of our unique nation. In turn, students begin seizing their own sense of civic responsibility, as they seek to serve a cause greater than self.

“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.” ~ The Declaration of Independence, 1776

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” ~ The Constitution, 1787

“An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight. It is therefore imperative that the nation see to it that a suitable education be provided for all its citizens.” ~ Thomas Jefferson

*“It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us... that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”
~ Abraham Lincoln, from his Gettysburg Address*

*“We’ve got to teach history based not on what’s in fashion but what’s important. If we forget what we did, we won’t know who we are. I’m warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let’s start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual.”
~ Ronald Reagan, from the Oval Office on his last night as President*

“You are part of the world and you must participate in these days of our years in the solution of the problems that pour upon us, requiring the most sophisticated and technical judgment; and as we work in consonance to meet the authentic problems of our times, we will generate a vision and an energy which will demonstrate anew to the world the superior vitality and the strength of the free society.” ~ John F. Kennedy, Yale University Commencement Address

American Treasure: Rediscovering the Spirit of 1776 ©

On the Cover

From the very beginning, *Project American Life* has been about the business of implementing our All-American mission: Engaging rising generations with the History, Heritage and Founding Principles of our most exceptional nation: The United States of America.

At the time of this latest printing of the *Project American Life* text, the sad truth stands before us: Fewer than one in six eighth graders have proficient knowledge of American History and Civics (*Nation's Report Card*). *PAL's* charge is to dramatically change this appalling reality. Since our remarkable birth in 1776, scores of brave patriots have risen to declare, defend, protect and proclaim the Great Causes of America. Today, we must do no less.

Our Founders provided the noble ideas and durable framework for future generations to discover (and seize!) the highest aspirations of humanity. Since those glorious days of the *Revolution of Liberty*, there have been many beacons of illumination, ingenuity, innovation, and inspiration. This embodiment of America's Founding Principles has been an enduring tradition.

The portraits on the cover are archetypes of this Exceptional Spirit:

George Washington: Revolutionary General, *the Indispensable Man, the Father of our Country*.

Thomas Jefferson: Intellectual and political giant, writer of *The Declaration of Independence*.

Benjamin Franklin: All-around genius, scientist, ambassador, political Reconciler-in-Chief.

Abraham Lincoln: Personification of wisdom and humility, sacrificial resolve to serve the Truth.

Thomas Edison: Inventor extraordinaire, embodying the 1776 spirit of unrelenting perseverance.

Susan B. Anthony: Warrior for freedom and dignity, serving the demands of the "self-evident."

Booker T. Washington: University founder, entrepreneur, writer, leader and Presidential adviser.

John F. Kennedy: Inspirational leader, championing Liberty, capitalism, service and exploration.

Martin Luther King: Patriotic martyr, master orator, faithful defender our Founding Principles.

Jane C. Wright: Visionary oncologist, compassionate physician, mild-mannered trailblazer.

Ronald Reagan: Communicator-in-Chief, ever-optimistic proclaimer of the American Dream.

Lady Liberty: Our greatest gift from France (and the early Naval support 😊!) *Viva la Liberte'!*

Birthrights

“Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” ~ James Madison

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Just as we strive to preserve, protect and promote *Project American Life*, we must continually preserve, protect and promote *America’s Founding Principles* ~ God-inspired charters of Liberty. As *PAL* spreads across our nation, our core purposes must shine ever brighter! *We the People* must be engaged in our founding project: *“Building the City on a Hill... One Child at a Time.”* In this, we must work diligently, as if America herself is depending on it. In truth, she may be.

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Three Formats towards One Purpose

“Project American Life was the greatest experience of my life!” ~ Laura, 6th Grade

“Project American Life is the best place. It’s better than Disneyworld!” ~ Katie, 5th Grade

These United States comprise the most free, just and exceptional nation the world has known. In turn, American classrooms must become vibrant learning centers wherein this unique history and heritage is continually examined, celebrated and applied. During turbulent times, national unity and civic restoration require proven means and methods. *Project American Life* accomplishes the essential mission at hand by experientially illuminating the Founding Principles that have long provided the necessary tools: A pristine lens to see ever more clearly and a resolute compass to guide us towards the shining “City on a Hill.”

Project American Life is now available in three formats:

- 1.) ***Ultimate Educational Adventures (UEA):*** These four-day residential adventures take place at camp, conference and retreat facilities from sea to shining sea: *“The Place Where America’s Founding Principles Come to Life!”* *Ultimate Educational Adventures* are led by highly-trained facilitators wherein each facet of the program is meticulously scripted and flawlessly delivered. This textbook is laid out in this long-standing, well-rehearsed order.
- 2.) ***PAL in the Classroom:*** This five-day experience takes place at the respective schools and is led by schoolteachers. The *PAL in the Classroom* format varies with each participating school and the individual teachers therein.
- 3.) ***Virtual PAL:*** This completely adaptable format is packaged such that schools and the students therein may learn at their own pace. Teachers may use particular parts of the curriculum throughout the school-year to expand upon topics and lessons at hand.



Educators can evaluate the options and choose the format that best suits their needs. Though *Ultimate Educational Adventures* are able to provide profound heartfelt experiences, the inherent costs of such programming makes this option difficult for many. *PAL in the Classroom* provides the opportunity for classroom teachers to be directly connected to the learning experience... enabling them to repeat learning elements throughout the year. And, of course, *Virtual PAL* is 100% flexible in all aspects. ***Three Formats towards One Purpose... Cheers!***

Ultimate Educational Adventures (UEA)

“I wish I could have stayed longer so I would be able to learn without being stuck inside a classroom ~ learning from letters instead of voice and heart. I will remember virtually everything from this trip as if my mind had been a video camera taping, and now looking back on a TV. I’ve learned so much that I feel that a gift has been granted to me, something I cannot lose or forget. I have new meaning to my life: I know that I should live life to the fullest and not waste such a precious thing. Thank you for this experience. Thank you for my gift. With love and compassion...” ~ Isabel, 6th Grader

Project American Life is Where America’s Founding Principles Come to Life! In bringing American History to life, students develop a rich and personal connection with the ideals of our Republic. Experiential discoveries into these Founding Principles kindle heartfelt gratitude for the many sacrifices made in the shaping of our unique nation. In turn, students begin seizing their own sense of civic responsibility, as they seek to serve a cause greater than self.

This four-day residential model vividly engages young hearts and minds using the “self-evident truths” of 1776. Each day begins with paradigmatic questions along with corresponding virtues: *“Who, What, Where, and Why am I?”* The virtues have an easy mechanism for remembrance: *“The Four C’s of Clarity, Compassion, Courage, and Commitment.”*

The activities for each day revolve around these themes so that all pieces of information fit into a larger puzzle. Philosophically, such examinations can be generalized. Specifically, the personal answers are multi-faceted and complex ~ for each student has distinct experiences that have colored his or her world. Also, each student has unique abilities and unique disabilities that can help or hurt his or her travels along the path. Within a host of realtime simulations, students become emotionally connected with history, civics and citizenship.

For 25 years, *PAL* has inspired tens of thousands of students through this Ultimate Educational Adventure. In illuminating the moral vision of America’s Founders and the virtues they embodied, students yearn to walk in their shoes! With the wisdom of *The Declaration of Independence* as a starting point, students begin reaching for their own hopes and dreams ~ stretching beyond the smallness of immediate self-gratification towards striving to build that long-imagined *Shining City on Hill!* Though COVID-19 has clearly put this format on hold, the *Ultimate Educational Adventure* remains most viable for the future. The impact of these experiences is powerfully “self-evident,” and the business prospectus is likewise impressive.

Though the word “Liberty” is often tossed about nonchalantly, the term remains an essential element of *America’s Founding Principles*. During *Ultimate Educational Adventures*, the “Blessings of Liberty” are realized...

- ... Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion ~ the right to be one’s own person
- ... Freedom of Speech ~ the right to express one’s beliefs without coercion or intimidation
- ... Freedom to Prosper ~ the right to use personal investment and ingenuity to build success
- ... Freedom to Claim “unalienable” ~ the right to “*Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of happiness*”
- ... Freedom from Invasion ~ the right to empower the government to safeguard our nation
- ... Freedom from Tyranny ~ the right of citizens to defend themselves against oppression

UEA Schedule

(25 years of excellence – serving over 50,000 students)

“This is the most valuable experience that can be provided to middle school students. We’ll see some short-term effects at school immediately. It is the long term “standards” for personal growth that I value most about Project American Life for my kids.”

~ Major Gary Leopold, Teacher

“Project American Life has given our kids a look at our nation, not as a bunch of facts and dates in a history book, but at the ideals and values that our nation was founded upon. PAL has made our kids think and given them the tools to think with!” ~ Shannon Fields, Parent

“Before I came to Project American Life, I thought I was nothing. Now I know that I am somebody special and that I live in a great country.” ~ Austin, 6th Grade

Day One ~ Clarity: *Who Am I?*

The Caste System
The Clarifying Snack
Standardized Testing
Wall Street (in castes)
Royal Games of Privilege
Standard Procedure
Quest
Revolutionary Meal
In Search of a Better Idea
Independence Hall
Sing / Journaling

Day Two ~ Compassion: *What Am I?*

Morning Remembrance
Wall Street (Post Caste)
Laws of Nature
Mind Music
Quiz I
Humans Being
Brainiac I
Discovery
The Compassion Meal
Either / Or
Sing / Journaling

Day Three ~ Courage: *Where Am I?*

Morning Remembrance
Citizenship Rules
Quiz II
Riddle of the Ages
Brainiac II
Hold these Truths
Discovery
Profiles in Courage
Courageous Dining
In Search of America
Sing / Journaling

Day Four ~ Commitment: *Why Am I?*

Morning Remembrance
Q and A
Rag-Tag Patriots
Discovery
Greatest of Dreams
Ceremony of Lights
Journaling
The Commitment Lunch
The Declaration of Dependence

PAL in the Classroom

"I learned that I can do anything. I can accomplish my dreams, and I am starting now. I will remember the songs we sang, the games we played, and the things we talked about, which will always, always stay with me. This PAL Adventure has changed my life!" ~ Ashley, 6th Grade

Though *Project American Life* provides a suggested schedule of activities within a five-day window, each school is at liberty to modify the lessons to best serve their specific needs. There are sound rationales for spreading the activities out over a two week period or even up to a month. A more stretched out implementation may limit the intensity of the experience; however, the extended length lends itself to repetitions of key elements and further reflections upon the lessons learned. Clearly, teachers, principals and local administrators know best how to serve the needs of their students.

Project American Life is the proven instrument for restoring the solid foundation for healthy, productive, and virtuous lives. *PAL in the Classroom* graduates not only possess an intellectual understanding of the principles and applications that have made their country free and prosperous, they also yearn to embody these well-reasoned core standards: *The Four C's of Citizenship* ~ Clarity, Compassion, Courage and Commitment. With these tools in hand, America's young people are rightly empowered to continue the good work... to strive for the kind of nation long envisioned: the "*Shining City on a Hill!*"

The comprehensive curriculum vividly engages young people with the facts of our nation's heritage, including the moral vision and sacred honor that are vital prerequisites of our Republic. *PAL* has the unique ability to accomplish what many have deemed no longer possible. 50,000 graduates bear witness to the powerful inspiration within *The Declaration's* still "*self-evident truths.*" Their newfound knowledge base and subsequent life choices speak loudly. As always, teaching is a living link between teachers and their students ~ where both parties are accountable to the *requirements* of the *Laws of Nature and Nature's God*. After all, teachers have surely struggled, and continue to struggle, with the very same challenges of the *PAL* experience.

As I walk through the hills...and the spring daffodils

I recall the days of my youth

Of a life meant to be... full of spirit set free

In the presence of living the truth

How I have yearned for your gentle return...

...reaching for innocence

© Jamie Aiken, from *Spirit*

Today, because of *PAL in the Classroom*, the program costs are but a fraction of the residential experience. And thus, the proven instrument for inspiring young lives and building lifelong character traits is now available to every student in America regardless of their zip code. With these tools in hand, the school's social studies mission does not have to remain merely striving for some kind of "core competence;" the new goal is inculcating "enduring excellence!" Today, may we restore the American heart, mind and soul within all of nation's young people!

PAL in the Classroom Schedule

“As I think back over the past week, I could cite example after example when I, as a parent, was thinking, “I sure hope my child is getting this!” What a powerful week! These children will have memories from this experience that will last a lifetime and I only pray that they will become better people because of this week. I, too, gained so much! Wouldn't it be great to have Congress come to a week of PAL? Maybe then our country wouldn't be so confused / deceived about our main objectives as Americans. From the bottom of my heart, I say THANK YOU! Thank you for your hard work, caring spirit, willingness to serve others, and especially for making an impact on others' lives.” ~ Louisa Marchant, Teacher

“IT WAS REAL! You didn't teach us facts for a test, but facts for LIFE! We need to have a motivation. We need to know how fortunate we really are. This experience will last us all our lives. It refreshed our souls, or that's what it felt like. I feel new!” - Natalia, 6th Grade

*“I learned that I can do anything! I can accomplish my dreams and I am starting now!”
~ Ashley, 6th Grade*

Day One ~ Clarity: *Who Am I?*

The Caste System
The Clarifying Snack
Standardized Testing
Wall Street (in castes)
Royal Games of Privilege
Standard Procedure
Quest
Revolutionary Meal
In Search of a Better Idea
Independence Hall
Discovery / Sing / Journaling

Day Two ~ Compassion: *What Am I?*

Morning Remembrance
Wall Street (Post Caste)
Laws of Nature
Hold These Truths
The Compassion Meal
Brainiac I
Discovery
Humans Being
Either / Or
Discovery / Sing / Journaling

Day Three ~ Courage: *Where Am I?*

Morning Remembrance
Wall Street
Citizenship Rules
Profiles in Courage
Courageous Dining
Quiz I
Brainiac II
Discovery / Sing / Journaling

Day Four ~ Commitment: *Why Am I?*

Morning Remembrance
Wall Street
Mind Music
Riddle of the Ages
Quiz II
In Search of America
Discovery / Sing / Journaling

Day Five ~ Remembrance

Morning Remembrance
Q and A
Rag-Tag Patriots / Greatest of Dreams
Ceremony of Lights
Commitment Lunch
The Declaration of Dependence

Virtual PAL

“PAL embodies all of the principles that America was founded upon. As teachers, we have to be so mindful as to how trips of any kind fit the National and State standards. This program fits so many of these standards: character education, problem-solving, life skills, critical thinking skills, etc. All realms of education are covered: ~ history, writing, the arts, and science. All students throughout our land should have an opportunity to be a participant in this ultimate hands-on, minds-on program!” ~ Biddie Banks, Teacher

With the arrival of the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Project American Life* was suddenly unable to offer its four-day residential experiential adventure to any school... anywhere. And so, to continue to serve, we began seeking to create other ways wherein students could still receive the vital information *PAL* so vividly provides... core knowledge of American History, Civics and the blessings and duties of Citizenship. Even after making it possible for *Project American Life* to be offered by classroom teachers in their respective schools, there remained unanswered questions: How can the factual substance of this inspirational adventure be provided to America’s children in an even more accessible and universal format... in a way that is not financially prohibitive whatsoever? More directly, how can the vital mission be accomplished such that every single 6th grader in these United States would be able to discover the great *American Treasure*... the still “self-evident truths” of 1776? *Virtual PAL* is the answer!

Each part of *Virtual PAL* is self-contained and total flexibility is given to the authorized user such that students cannot proceed beyond the parameters set by parents, teachers or schools. *Virtual PAL* is packaged under the most apt title, “*American Treasure: Rediscovering the Spirit of 1776.*” These interactive modules consist of broad themed mosaics in the vital fields of American history, civics and citizenship. Our goal is making this character building program available to every 6th grader in America... such that millions of students each year are encouraged, even empowered, to join America’s mighty chorus of heroes!

Virtual PAL is an organic and exponential proposition... beginning with schools that have attended over the past 25 years. Simultaneously, two larger campaigns are underway: On the State level, mandates for this essential curriculum are sought by State Departments of Education in all 50 states. On the National level, partnership with the Department of Education will ensure that all students can receive this heart stirring, mind awakening and soul inspiring instructional programming... endlessly. Herein, a key component of Martin Luther King’s Dream will have tangible possibility: “*The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character ~ that is the goal of true education.*”

The Department of Education is able to fund *Virtual PAL* annually by making only slight adjustments to line items far down a budget approaching 100 BILLION dollars! Though the Department of Education expenditures are massive, they are hardly a blip on the radar of our national investments into K-12 education... nearly FIVE TRILLION DOLLARS... annually! Tragically, at the end of this gargantuan spending spree, few of the supposed beneficiaries are rightly affected... certainly not to the standards such an exceptional nation should require, even demand: With *Virtual PAL*, the horrific reality of historical illiteracy and civic malaise can be changed forever... in short order. Patrick Henry is shouting loudly, “*Why stand we here idle?!*”

Virtual PAL Anytime Anywhere

“I will remember virtually everything from this trip as if my mind had been a video camera taping, and now looking back on a TV. I’ve learned so much that I feel that a gift has been granted to me, something I cannot lose or forget. I have new meaning to my life: I know that I should live life to the fullest and not waste such a precious thing. Thank you for this experience. Thank you for my gift. With love and compassion...” ~ Isabel, 6th Grade

“I loved seeing history come alive right before the children's eyes. It was so real to them. Students will look at the world differently as they figure out how they will contribute to society in a positive way.” ~ Annie Jewell Cheatham, Teacher

“The content will have a profound and lasting effect on our local communities and our nation! Thank you; please continue in this great work! How refreshing to know that such a program exists... one that so effectively reaches kids before they’ve had a chance to make too many bad choices... one that inspires young people to make a positive difference in their world.” ~ Eddie Sturgis, Parent

Menu of Interactive History, Civics and Citizenship Modules:

The Declaration of Dependence

The Caste System

The Clarifying Snack

Standardized Testing

Wall Street

Royal Games of Privilege

Standard Procedure

Revolutionary Meal

In Search of a Better Idea

Independence Hall

Discovery

Sing

Journaling

Either / Or

Quiz

Morning Remembrance

Laws of Nature

Humans Being

Brainiac I

Brainiac II

The Compassion Meal

Quest

Citizenship Rules

Riddle of the Ages

Hold these Truths

Profiles in Courage

Courageous Dining

Mind Music

Rag-Tag Patriots

Greatest of Dreams

Ceremony of Lights

The Commitment Lunch

Bonus Classes:

Mystical Numbers

Music of the Spheres

Math’s Crystal Ball

Brainiac III

Brainiac IV

Onomatopoeia Olympics

We Hold These Truths

“America was once the hope of the world. But what kind of hope? More than the hope of material prosperity, although that was part of it; and more than the promise of equality and liberty, although that, too, was an important part of it. And more than safety and security, precious as these things are. The deeper hope of America was its vision of what humanity is and can become ~ individually and in community. It was through that vision that all the material and social promise of America took its fire and light and its voice that called to men and women within its own borders and throughout the world. America was once a great idea, and it is such ideas that move the world, that open the possibility of meaning in human life.”

~ Jacob Needleman

“Before this country came on the scene, for thousands of years people did things the same way. Within 200 years of the advent of this nation, men were walking on the moon, and I want us to recognize this is the kind of people that we are. We’re creative with a lot of ingenuity and a lot of energy.” ~ Dr. Ben Carson

“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” ~ John Adams

“Education is not a thing apart from life — not a system, nor a philosophy; it is direct teaching how to live and how to work.” ~ Booker T. Washington

“There are generally three kinds of people in the world. People who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who say, what in the heck happened.” ~ Herman Cain

The Problem

“When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; a culture-death is a clear possibility.”

~ Neil Postman, Author of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Where are America’s schoolchildren when it comes to knowledge of American History and subsequent civic responsibility? National testing results are continually evermore shocking... and though these data points are detailed herein (see Appendix), consider this sole summation: Less than 20% of high school graduates are competent in the fields of American History and Civics. More bluntly, more than 80% are “incompetent” in the essential fields of citizenship! As sobering as the nationwide statistics are, they still reflect only surface issues. The more paralyzing crisis is in the lack of a greater meta-narrative about our world and our place in it: a *worldview*. “Government by the people, for the people, and of the people” is only tenable when “We the people” are able to meet the core requirements of Liberty.

The moral timbre of America has also changed greatly over the past fifty years: There is now a prevailing philosophy espousing soft and malleable standards, particularly regarding primary education. Such notions rob children of their innate capacity and moral responsibility for choosing right over wrong. Instead of exhortations towards traditional virtue and academic excellence, many have chosen to lower the bar ~ offering only excuses for the ever-expanding egocentric behavior within recent and coming generations. Such a worldview neither grasps the human condition, nor does it possess essential understandings of the past. Past generations cultivated the greater culture by living and breathing time-honored virtues... days of hard work, earnestness, caring for family, friends and neighbors. Truth was not a personal inclination, but rather a universal demand. *PAL* simply returns to these fertile fields and healthy roots... our Founding Principles! We’ve read what Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were achieving when they were boys. We’ve heard about the responsibilities our grandparents assumed when they were young. Lastly, we remember our own dreams as children ~ seeking to soar like eagles!

Though the national ethos presently suffers many devastating effects from the decades of postmodern indoctrination, our Founding Principles have not changed. In fact, they remain rock solid... their fruits are still “self-evident!” In tenuous times such as these, we need more patriots like George Washington ~ people with the courage to see, hear, and act with all of their being. Like the British Army of 1776, the challenge before us may seem overwhelming, but we must not surrender to fear and doubt. The road ahead will be hard, perhaps even agonizing, but if we choose to rise to this pressing need, we can have calm assurance: good and right will prevail.

“When 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.” ~ The Declaration of Independence

The Solution

“I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.” ~ George Washington

Though the ideas of *The Declaration of Independence* stirred many hearts and minds, these noble ideas would have been but the fading poetry of history if not for the courage of true believers ~ people who would risk their lives to defend these principles. Jefferson, and the rest of the Signers, gave an intellectual and moral basis to *The Great Cause*, but it was George Washington and his *Rag-Tag Patriots* who transformed the transcendent vision into tangible reality for future generations, including us. An ancient text instructs us to love not only with heart and mind, but also with soul and strength. We should be thankful that George Washington studied and followed this counsel.

Though the prevailing cultural landscape can seem a barren desert, *PAL* is evidence that fertile fields remain. In fact, *PAL*'s results are incontrovertible proof! Thankfully, the comprehensive curriculum is available in the initial four-day residential format, the five-day classroom experience, and the latest model, *Virtual PAL!* So now, from sea to shining sea, every school can be *“Where America’s Founding Principles Come to Life!”* Like in the case of the rationale for *The Declaration of Independence*, pervasive falsity *requires* action: a return to the foundational bedrock of truth. In this All-American quest, *Project American Life* was born!

The *PAL* curriculum was written for students in grades five through eight, and this remains the key demographic group. However, its principles and pedagogies have demonstrated far broader applications. This should not be surprising, as America’s Founding Principles are obviously not just efficacious for middle schoolers. These still *“self-evident truths”* are meant for all human beings! As a point of fact, many *PAL* teachers (and visiting parents) have experienced dramatic transformations in their own thinking... in their own lives... simply because of their immersion into ideas in the curriculum. These acts of discovery have yielded most refreshing summations, like *“The program helped me feel fully alive again!”* Indeed, it is hard to imagine a population that wouldn’t benefit from experiencing the dynamics of *PAL*. There is much that must be accomplished; *Project American Life* stands ready to meet the need!

Yes, there is much to make us feel hopeless and even cynical these days... for so many distressing changes have occurred during the past few decades... and many challenges now stand before us. In fact, in taking inventory of our national deficiencies in heart, mind, and soul we might amass a body of evidence so great that any jury would convict without a trial. What rationale can then overcome such a mountain of substantiation? In the proverbial *Balm in Gilead* is the reminder that we must not be overcome by dry facts alone. There is more to the story.

The writer of this text is nowhere close to figuring out how a hummingbird flies, but it does so all the same. Likewise, the miracles of *PAL* are hard to describe in precise conceptual terms. Nonetheless, the fruit of the *PAL* experience is always... how should we put it? Aha! It is *“self-evident”*... and most abundant! At this very moment, *PAL*'s blueprint is in your hands ~ ready to serve. While the inherent wisdom of children may be waning within the culture, be encouraged. The priceless gems of *“self-evident truths”* are absolutely still within our grasp!

Foundations

“Winston Churchill said that ‘the destiny of man is not measured by material computation. When great forces are on the move in the world, we learn we are spirits, not animals.’ And he said, ‘There is something going on in time and space, and beyond time and space, which, whether we like it or not, spells duty.’ You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on Earth, or we will sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.” ~ Ronald Reagan

*“It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into.”
~ Jonathan Swift*

Every tenet of *Project American Life* is anchored steadfastly and resolutely to the Founding Principles of our American Republic... straight from the everlasting Ideals of The Declaration of Independence. Here we find the source of continual inspiration and the strong foundation for building the long envisioned *City on a Hill*. America’s Founders understood that Liberty is not mere subjective preference; but rather, it is a Divinely ordained condition for which human beings are designed. Although many quote Jefferson’s words, *“I swear eternal enmity against every form of tyranny,”* many do not realize that the quote continues: *“...over the mind of man.”* Jefferson knew this kind of oppression was the root of human bondage. Therefore, it is vital, even essential, to keep minds active, thoughts keen and souls inspired... if they are to recognize the blinding veils that tyrants seek to pull over our eyes.

Young people are well-steeped in the cauldron of their “rights.” They lay claim to a cornucopia of rights... and yet, they are woefully unable to substantiate such rights... as in “How do they have them?” or “Where did they get them?” Their mindset is the by-product of a culture fixated on individual autonomy and the elevation of self. However, “rights” such as these are not found in The Declaration. In Jefferson’s treatise, there are two precise prerequisites to the existence of our “unalienable rights.” Firstly, there must be a Source for such claims. Secondly, this Source must have ultimate authority... must be Sovereign. Otherwise, any claim would be just more conjecture in a sea of competing ideas. According to The Declaration, “rights” do not come from the opinions of other mortals. Rather, our “rights” depend solely upon the durable will and transcendent design of our “Creator.”

Yet in today’s America, there is a prevailing sentiment insisting there is something dreadfully wrong with informing students of these Founding Principles. The Constitutional phrase regarding the *“establishment of religion”* is often misappropriated as a means of intimidating anyone challenging the secular status quo. However, precisely what **religion** is **established** in the term “Creator?” Not only is a **religion** not **established**; one is not even identified. It is indeed astounding to note how such logic has taken the field. Words like “rights” are thrown around as if such foundational ideas have always triumphed in human affairs. This is only possible because of the overwhelming presence of historical illiteracy, intellectual incoherence and moral cowardice among the citizenry. For the history of man has repeatedly demonstrated the exact opposite of these prevailing assumptions. Thus, we must be comprehensive and precise when considering *America’s Founding Principles*... the solid ground upon which all of us are now standing. *Viva Liberte’!*

Possibilities

“I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.”

~ Thomas Jefferson

For the past decades, there has been continuous astonishment regarding *PAL*'s ability to engage children on highly elevated cognitive and developmental levels. Our enduring response is simple and straightforward: Engaging hearts, minds, and souls requires a dynamic approach to the human condition... vivid and holistic consideration of why we are here in the first place. For children, this inner hunger remains strong despite the prevailing cultural factors constantly enticing them to abandon this *still small voice*... this persistent moral calling. *PAL* realizes that “what is right” holds far greater magic than “what I want.” Thus, *PAL* takes students to the mountaintop. In so doing, students have greater perspective of the terrain below; they feel the empowerment of ascending by means of their own strength; they experience the wonderment found only at the summit. This is not new; this is the American Story.

In contrast to shifting sentiments, there are absolute standards at hand. Who would fly on a plane if the engineers just relied upon their personal inclinations and preferences? Finding and living out “the good life” requires solid and unshakable assurances for pressing forward. For life's journey always has challenges... rocky, uphill roads as well as potentially perilous pitfalls. Learning how to best navigate these tedious paths is what transforms virtuous intent into the virtuous person. This purpose-filled vision compelled America's Founders to press onward... despite the strong reasons to simply give up. Let us be resoundingly clear: Absolute standards are not tools for judging our neighbors when they fall. In stark contrast, these principles are the ever-present tools to help all of us stand... even in a fallen world.

Though the specific activities of *PAL* are complex and highly nuanced, the basic paradigm is simple: *Project American Life* creates dramatic and vivid encounters with core realities of life ~ leaving lasting impressions of still “*self-evident truths*.” In these vivid learning encounters, students wrestle with the same mysteries that have challenged mankind since the dawn of time. From these front lines, there are strong reasons to be encouraged: Formerly confounding questions (even completely unknown subject matter) yield improved recognition... deeper understanding... and a passion for further discoveries.

The long history of *PAL* is shouting from the rooftops: Middle school students choose *Clarity* over blindness... *Compassion* over apathy... *Courage* over cowardice... and *Commitment* over the tyranny of ever-present distractions. Suddenly, the map to the lost treasure is in their hands! Of course, *PAL* cannot coerce anyone to become virtuous... or even informed. However, *PAL* does ensure students cannot honestly make the cynical claim, “I never knew”... or “I never had a choice.” The verdict is clear, decisive and plentiful: Despite all efforts to silence, contain, or make them out-of-bounds, the “*self-evident truths*” of *The Declaration* still liberate hearts and minds! *PAL* is present, tangible potential! *PAL* is a vibrant hope and an abiding promise for engaging... inspiring... and uplifting each of our students!

Strategies

"I never let schooling interfere with my education." ~ Mark Twain

America is in crisis... one of heart, mind, and soul, particularly among the young. Why are today's students lagging far behind their predecessors despite more educational funding than ever? How did they become so woefully ignorant of our history, our civic duty, our unique heritage? More to the point, what happened to the intrinsic elements of being a child: innocence, curiosity and dreams? In today's America, pop culture incessantly engenders chasms in coherent thinking and voids in applied reason. So, why are we surprised when chaos is normative... when long-standing institutions have become ineffectual? For educators, how do we now teach? What can we employ to bridge chasms... fill voids... and restore tranquility?

Learning, if it is to be lasting and real, must first engage! Only then are we able to assist in the development of requisite understandings... and integrated thought processes. As always, it is the larger meta-narrative that generates the essential hunger... the animating zeal towards discovery. Herein, learners begin honing their own skills... consciously choosing the lenses through which they see the world. C.S. Lewis clarifies, *"To see through everything is the same as seeing nothing."* Rather than unfocused meanderings, meaningful education must touch the heart, invigorate the mind, and inspire the soul. *PAL's* experiential method provides spirited opportunities to discover core truths as well as organize a framework of thinking.

As teachers, our charge is to educate in a way that recognizes and respects our inherent state of being: Free men and women. Here, *PAL* rekindles the cognitive process using Socratic inquiry. Students critically evaluate presumptions in search of solid answers. Fortunately, this is not a laborious task. Little children naturally pick up every foreign object, study every previously unknown face, and ask every conceivable question. Reinvigorating this "passion to know" must be our perpetual aim; thus, each day revolves around questions that are both personal and profound: *Who am I? What am I? Where am I? Why am I?* These questions and the corresponding activities come together to awaken the curiosity with which we are born.

To meet today's challenges, teachers must come to clear and impassioned agreement that knowledge of history is vital to Liberty's survival. In this, we must understand that there are many varied roads to be traveled... new discoveries to be made... and absolute facts to be found! Students may rightly think, "Okay, John Hancock was first to sign *The Declaration*. So what?! What difference does this make? Why should we care?" Bits and pieces of information are not meaningful if a student is unable to see their relationship to the bigger picture. How can she appreciate today's opportunities if she has no understanding of yesterday's struggles? Strong foundations of the intransigent past provide ever-present springboards for soaring imaginations!

Bricks are the facts and *Mortar* is the thinking process. Using *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution* as textual foundations, *PAL* addresses questions of meaning and purpose... how we relate to one another... how we fit into the greater historical context. Building upon this bedrock, we are able to illumine the Founding Principles of America. As in 1776, these truths become self-evident as students delve into the *Four Cs of Citizenship: Clarity • Compassion • Courage • Commitment*. Herein, they find an enduring blueprint for our most unique Democratic Republic. The starting point is quite revolutionary: *"We the people!"*

Pedagogies

“If you just set out to be liked, you would be prepared to compromise on anything at any time, and you would achieve nothing.” ~ Margaret Thatcher

“Success is never final; failure is never fatal. It’s courage that counts.” ~ John Wooden

Over half a century ago, C.S. Lewis wrote the classic series about the world of Narnia. Lewis only offered one sentence regarding how the Golden Age was governed: “And they made good laws and kept the peace... and liberated young dwarfs and young satyrs from being sent to school...” Wow, one of the top priorities was to keep the young from attending school! Since Lewis was a professor at Cambridge, it is not logical to assume he despised his own profession. Instead, what is clear is that he was well aware of what was generally being taught within the educational establishment. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when the other children do not believe Lucy's reports of a world beyond the wardrobe, Professor Kirk grumbles, “I wonder what they do teach them at these schools.” Lewis knew that modern education was focused upon instituting a new order of conformity rather than generating awe, wonder, logic, and the subsequent hunger for the truth that they inspire. Imagine what he would think today!

As in a healthy garden, growth requires two vital components ~ tilling and planting. Clearly, scattering the seed is the preferred job, as it is more easily accomplished. Also, sowing contains the confidence that the fruits will soon be at hand... that is, if someone has already done the hard job of tilling. For unless the ground is broken up and the rocks removed, planting is a near pointless exercise. Without proper preparations, the seeds have little chance to take root. Likewise, as long as a student is convinced of his own adequacy, even superiority, there is little room for new information. Hunger precedes the feast! There is a prerequisite to all education... *the desire to know*. When such desire is absent, teachers must be willing to serve as tillers... to open untapped regions of the mind... to remove the rocky debris of malignant hubris and blinding indoctrination. Tragically, this necessary tilling is often dismissed in favor of providing only predigested vegetables to students... a process of intellectual incapacitation... and a cauldron of bias. As teachers, our duty is to empower students with the skills to become proficient gardeners themselves... free men and women able to seize the American Dream!

Modern philosophies suggest children not be made to feel uncomfortable... or suffer any negative consequences. There are teachers who do not correct tests with red pens, as they believe such harsh ink might injure the students' self-esteem. Here, we must be clear about terms like “self-esteem,” “uncomfortable” or “negative.” If the goal is protecting students from distressing fears, painful embarrassments, and disabling requirements beyond their grasp, surely all sensible people concur. However, if students must now be shielded from realities of birth and death, good and evil, sacrifice and cruelty, and the tragic history of mankind, then students are being inherently robbed of opportunities to develop vital life skills: clarity... courage... wisdom. We all will face heartless enemies as well as bitter disappointments. Genuine teachers provide students efficacious tools for overcoming such potentially paralyzing wolves (in sheep's clothing or not). Isn't it imperative that students realize such wolves exist (since they do)? And more, such adversaries can be defeated! Here, clarity is found; courage is seized; wisdom is gained.

The Four Cs of Citizenship

“If you become a burning light of justice and peace in the world, then you will be true to what the founders of this country stood for.” ~ Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Clarity: What am I?

Socratic investigations put preconceived assumptions to the test...

Rigorous consideration reveals “self-evident” answers...

Are there concrete moral imperatives to guide us?

The Mind is Engaged!

Compassion: What am I?

Dramatic simulations provoke empathy and awareness...

Recognition of struggle and sacrifice yield gratitude...

What lenses empower us see more clearly?

The Heart is Engaged!

Courage: Where am I?

Historical archetypes of heroism are vividly experienced...

Founding Principles compel quests towards honor...

What kind of people will we choose to be?

The Soul is Engaged!

Commitment: Why am I?

Comprehensive understandings provoke virtuous actions...

Moral and civic duties unite the American Citizenry

Will we choose to build the *City on a Hill*?

The Will is Engaged!

“Restoring the Spirit of 1776... One Child at a Time!”

Our Sacred Honor

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” ~ Edmund Burke

“What is the state of man?” If man is naturally *good*, then it makes sense to simply give him plenty of room to flourish in his own natural juices... like a fine cut of beef. If man’s natural state is *bad* (the word “selfish” may be helpful), then corrective instruction is essential. Though the natural state of man should be *self-evident* in countless ways, the obvious is often missed these days. When considering today’s students, it is important to understand that innate goodness has never overflowed like milk and honey. For there will likely be lots of insulting, shoving for position, fighting over bunks, and even laughing at most inappropriate times. Yes, *good* is still present; however, even *good* seeds require much work in yielding abundant harvests.

From birth, a human being’s concern is first for himself. We cry when we are hungry, uncomfortable, or alone. We demand to be served, and thankfully, most of us are. As time advances, we begin to realize that the world does not actually revolve around us. The fortunate receive repetitious instruction on how to re-order their world. No child ever learns to say, “Thank you” by his processing alone. The words are learned primarily from parents taking the time to teach that such appreciation is right and good. Parents teach these lessons because they believe them to be true. Children recognize these truths because they harmonize with the good seeds within. This is how all people at all times have general consensus in what is virtuous. And thus, our Founders termed these truths *self-evident*. The child who does not (or will not) grasp the *Laws of Nature and Nature’s God* is desperately clinging to a lie: “*I will be God!*”

A follow-up question naturally arises, “What is man *meant* to be?” Each reader must reach his own conclusions... just like every student who participates in the *PAL* adventure. However, *meant* also requires a universality of truth. Every fragrant rose, every soaring eagle, every noble aspiration... all point to a prerequisite Source. Clearly, it takes an inspired composer to create a symphony, not a persistent chimpanzee randomly hitting keys. *Project American Life* calls to the souls of the students, “Nurture the good seeds within.” Those of us present will always remember an animated, mentally-challenged girl who swayed with the sounds of *Joy of Man’s Desiring* during the *Mind Music* class. When the students were asked why Bach would write such a song, she was first to raise her hand. She beamed a huge smile as she shouted, “To make us better!” She felt the answer... she yearned to become the person she was *meant* to be!

And so, “What are *PAL*’s results?” There are countless answers at hand; anyone can peruse testimonials from each and every week. More to the point, anyone observing the program can see with their own eyes the transformations taking place. Specifically, there is a vibrant reality that is brilliantly incontrovertible: At the program’s end, all students are yearning to sign the large parchment that declares our unifying creed: *The Declaration of Dependence*.

I, and countless others, have beheld the earnest, solemn faces seizing the pen ~ boldly and painstakingly inscribing their names. Not even John Hancock signed with more passion. These students yearn to be the *Rag-tag Patriots* of today. On the last day of *PAL*, thousands upon thousands have joined the *Great Cause* of our Founders ~ pledging their “*sacred honor*” to uphold *America’s Founding Principles*. Here, the ancient Bell of Liberty is ringing loudly!

The Declaration of Dependence ©

On July 4, 1776, our nation's Founders gave us the priceless gift of The Declaration of Independence: "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." We have heard these words before but have never understood their full meaning. These words uncovered a truth that had always been available, but no society had ever completely comprehended. The world has never been the same.

Our nation will never be perfect as it can only be made up of imperfect people. Thankfully, The Declaration remains a renewing wellspring of strength and inspiration. In a world that has known so much darkness, America has been a brilliant beacon of light. We have certainly had more than our share of heroes to guide us. Today, we choose to join this "shining city on a hill" that we might continue to declare these founding principles. Though many say that these ideals are merely matters of personal opinion, we resoundingly reject this cowardly notion. These truths are still self-evident to all who are willing to see!

Today, there is much in the world to make us feel hopeless and helpless: fear, ignorance, apathy, and a profound sense of meaninglessness. Today, we must choose, and our choice is clear; we will seize the timeless standard of The Declaration. Right now, we recognize the precious gifts we were given. We honor those who lived and even died for these principles. We reflect upon who our forefathers were so we can best become who we really are. We yearn to be the person we were meant to be. We shout for joy, as abiding hope is within our grasp!

As we are all Created equal, we must respect the sanctity of human life. We are neither a random accident nor a muddle of genetic traits; rather, each of us is an essential treasure. When something is created, it is done so for a purpose. We commit ourselves to seeking, and ultimately finding, this special purpose. Amidst the noise of the world, a still, small voice is calling our names. As our Founders understood, there will be consequences for genuine valor, but we will be brave. With an unwavering faith in our founding principles, we stand up!

In doing what is right, we will always have a majority of one. Together, we will fight the good fight with a host of warriors. Their names echo in the wind: Washington, Jefferson, Adams... and so many, many more. Hand-in-hand we feel the longing of many hearts: a mother hugging her son as he goes off to join other young patriots, a farmer steadfastly working his field as he hungers for amber waves of grain, a merchant risking all of his savings to open a small country store, a teacher taking extra time with her students so that their minds might be opened to the great ideas of literature. On July 8, 1776, a former slave heard a loud clanging of bells from the tower of Independence Hall. He ran to see what was taking place, arriving just in time to hear the first public reading of The Declaration. The words brought tears to his eyes, joy to his heart, and enduring resolve to his soul. He was, and is, the embodiment of the American Dream. That bell of liberty is now cracked and silent, but its message forever rings!

Our struggles are never in vain; goodness is never wasted. Truth will always prevail because we are not alone. In closing their majestic document, The Founders declared, "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." Today, we join the cause of our Founders. With faith and conviction, we solemnly sign our names.