



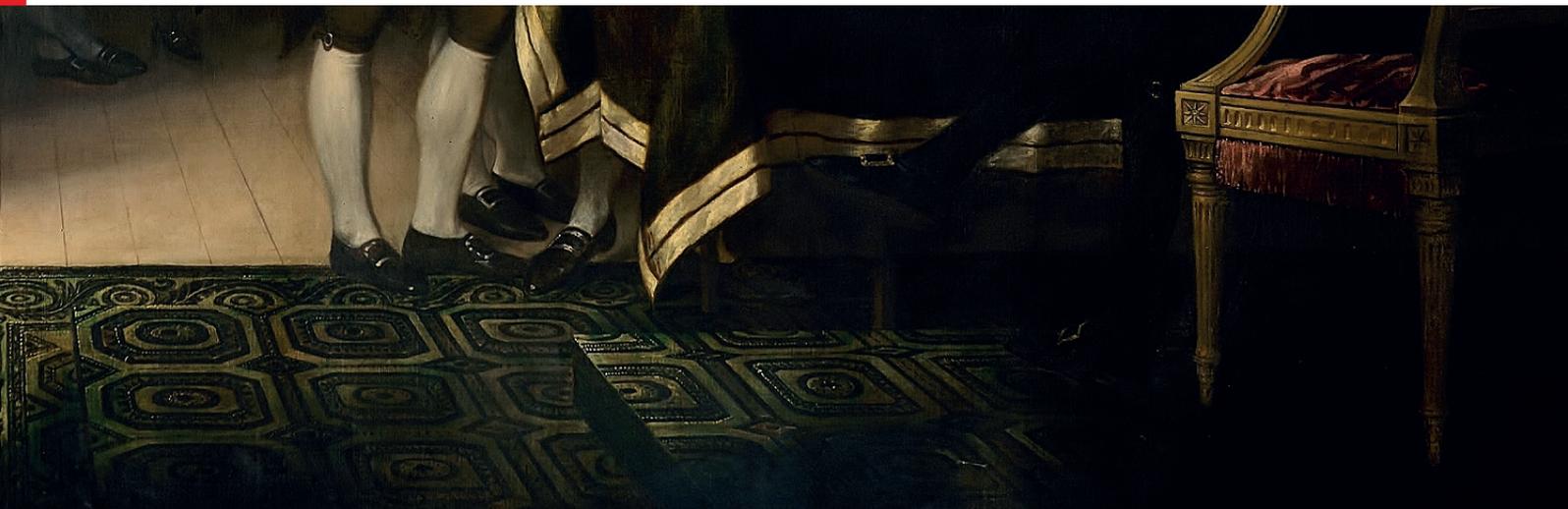
# THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## STUDY GUIDE



## **JUL. 4, 1776: THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

*Biographies, discussion questions, suggested activities and more*



# INDEPENDENCE

## Setting the Stage

Even after the initial battles of what would become the Revolutionary War broke out, few colonists desired complete independence from Great Britain, and those who did—like John Adams—were considered radical. Things changed over the course of the next year, however, as Britain attempted to crush the rebels with all the force of its great army. In his message to Parliament in October 1775, King George III railed against the rebellious colonies and ordered the enlargement of the royal army and navy. News of this reached America in January 1776, strengthening the radicals' cause and leading many conservatives to abandon their hopes of reconciliation. That same month, the recent British immigrant Thomas Paine published "Common Sense," in which he argued that independence was a "natural right" and the only possible course for the colonies; the pamphlet sold more than 150,000 copies in its first few weeks in publication.

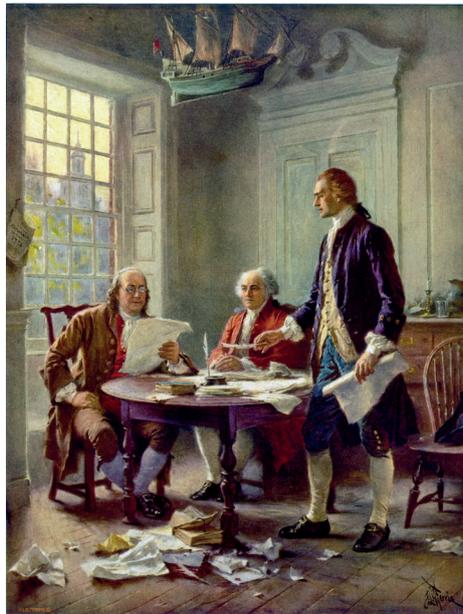
In March 1776, North Carolina's revolutionary convention became the first to vote in favor of independence; seven other colonies had followed suit by mid-May. On June 7, the Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee introduced a motion calling for the colonies' independence before the Continental Congress when it met at the Pennsylvania State House (later Independence Hall) in Philadelphia. Amid heated debate, Congress postponed the vote on Lee's resolution and called a recess for several weeks. Before departing, however, the delegates also appointed a five-man committee—including Thomas Jefferson of Virginia; John Adams of Massachusetts; Roger Sherman of Connecticut; Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania; and Robert R. Livingston of New York—to draft a formal statement justifying the break with Great Britain. That document would become known as the Declaration of Independence.

Cover photo: Declaration of Independence, by John Trumbull, 1819

# JUL. 4, 1776

# THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

**O**n July 4, 1776, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Continental Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims the independence of the United States of America from Great Britain and its king. The declaration came 442 days after the first volleys of the American Revolution were fired at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts and marked an ideological expansion of the conflict that would eventually encourage France's intervention on behalf of the Patriots.



The first major American opposition to British policy came in 1765 after Parliament passed the Stamp Act, a taxation measure to raise revenues for a standing British army in America. Under the banner of “no taxation without representation,” colonists convened the Stamp Act Congress in October 1765 to vocalize their opposition to the tax. With its enactment in November, most colonists called for a boycott of British goods, and some organized attacks on the custom houses and homes of tax collectors. After months of protest in the colonies, Parliament voted to repeal the Stamp Act in March 1766.

Most colonists continued to quietly accept British rule until Parliament's enactment of the Tea Act in 1773, a bill designed to save the faltering East India Company by greatly lowering its tea tax and granting it a monopoly on the American tea trade. The low tax allowed the East India Company to undercut even tea smuggled into America by Dutch traders, and many colonists viewed the act as another example of taxation tyranny. In response, militant Patriots in Massachusetts organized the “Boston Tea Party,” which saw British tea valued at some 18,000 pounds dumped into Boston Harbor.

Parliament, outraged by the Boston Tea Party and other blatant acts of destruction of British property, enacted the Coercive Acts, also known as the Intolerable Acts, in 1774. The Coercive Acts closed Boston to merchant shipping, established formal British military rule in Massachusetts, made British officials immune to criminal prosecution in America and required colonists to quarter British troops. The colonists subsequently called the first Continental Congress to consider a

Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776, by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris

united American resistance to the British.

With the other colonies watching intently, Massachusetts led the resistance to the British, forming a shadow revolutionary government and establishing militias to resist the increasing British military presence across the colony. In April 1775, Thomas Gage, the British governor of Massachusetts, ordered British troops to march to Concord, Massachusetts, where a Patriot arsenal was known to be located. On April 19, 1775, the British regulars encountered a group of American militiamen at Lexington, and the first shots of the American Revolution were fired.

Initially, both the Americans and the British saw the conflict as a kind of civil war within the British Empire: To King George III it was a colonial rebellion, and to the Americans it was a struggle for their rights as British citizens. However, Parliament remained unwilling to negotiate with the American rebels and instead purchased German mercenaries to help the British army crush the rebellion. In response to Britain's continued opposition to reform, the Continental Congress began to pass measures abolishing British authority in the colonies.

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, an influential political pamphlet that convincingly argued for American independence and sold more than 500,000 copies in a few months. In the spring of 1776, support for independence swept the colonies, the Continental Congress

called for states to form their own governments, and a five-man committee was assigned to draft a declaration.

The Declaration of Independence was largely the work of Virginian Thomas Jefferson. In justifying American independence, Jefferson drew generously from the political philosophy of John Locke, an advocate of natural rights, and from the work of other English theorists. The first section features the famous lines, "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 second part presents a long list of grievances that provided the rationale for rebellion.

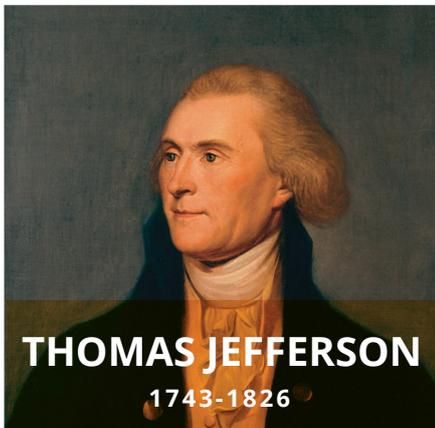
On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress voted to approve a Virginia motion calling for separation from Britain. The dramatic words of this resolution were added to the closing of the Declaration of Independence. Two days later, on July 4, the declaration was formally adopted by 12 colonies after minor revision. New York approved it on July 19. On August 2, the declaration was signed.

The American War for Independence would last for five more years. Yet to come were the Patriot triumphs at Saratoga, the bitter winter at Valley Forge, the intervention of the French and the final victory at Yorktown in 1781. In 1783, with the signing of the Treaty of Paris with Britain, the United States formally became a free and independent nation. □

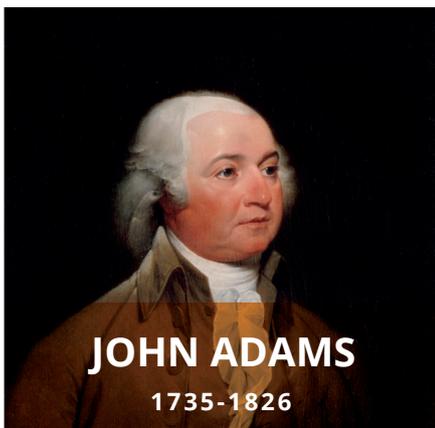
## **DID YOU KNOW?**

**It wasn't widely known that Thomas Jefferson wrote most of the Declaration of Independence until the 1790s. Before that, it was believed to have been the collective effort of the entire Continental Congress.**

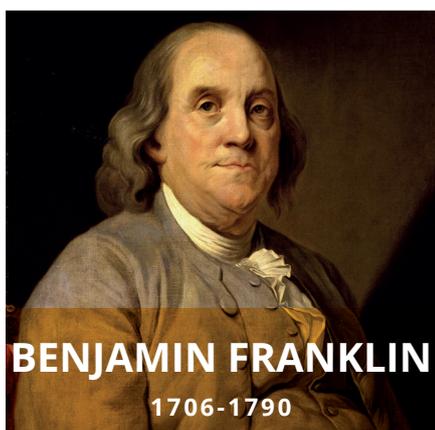
# PEOPLE TO KNOW



Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third U.S. president, was a leading figure in America's early development. During the American Revolution, Jefferson served in the Virginia legislature and the Continental Congress and was governor of Virginia. He later served as U.S. minister to France and U.S. secretary of state, and was vice president under the second U.S. president, John Adams. During his two terms as president (1801-1809), the U.S. purchased the Louisiana Territory and Lewis and Clark explored the vast new acquisition. Although Jefferson promoted individual liberty, he was also a slaveowner. After leaving office, he retired to his Virginia plantation, Monticello, and helped found the University of Virginia.



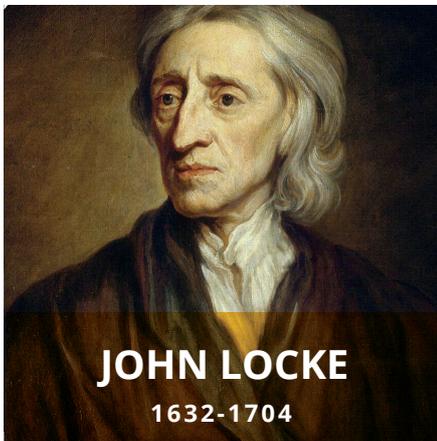
Adams was a leader of the American Revolution, and served as the second U.S. president from 1797 to 1801. The Massachusetts-born, Harvard-educated Adams began his career as a lawyer. Intelligent, patriotic, opinionated and blunt, Adams became a critic of Great Britain's authority in colonial America and viewed the British imposition of high taxes and tariffs as a tool of oppression. During the 1770s, he was a delegate to the Continental Congress and part of the five-man committee assembled to draft the Declaration of Independence. In the 1780s, Adams served as a diplomat in Europe and helped negotiate the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the American Revolution. From 1789 to 1797, Adams was America's first vice president under George Washington. He then was elected the nation's second president and served one term before being defeated by Thomas Jefferson in his bid for a second term.



One of the leading figures of early American history, Benjamin Franklin was a statesman, author, publisher, scientist, inventor and diplomat. Born into a Boston family of modest means, Franklin had little formal education. He went on to start a successful printing business in Philadelphia. Franklin was deeply active in public affairs in his adopted city, where he helped launch a lending library, hospital and college, and garnered acclaim for his experiments with electricity, among other projects. During the American Revolution, he served in the Second Continental Congress and helped draft the Declaration of Independence in 1776. He also negotiated the 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution. In 1787, he was a delegate to the convention that produced the U.S. Constitution.



England's longest-ruling monarch before Queen Victoria, King George III ascended the British throne in 1760. During his 59-year reign, he presided over a British victory in the Seven Years' War; England's successful resistance to Revolutionary and Napoleonic France; and the loss of the American Revolution. In the Declaration of Independence, George III was portrayed as an inflexible tyrant who had squandered his right to govern the colonies. In reality the situation was more complex: Parliamentary ministers, not the crown, were responsible for colonial policies, though George still had influence over colonial affairs. The king was reluctant to come to terms with his army's defeat at Yorktown in 1781. He drafted an abdication speech but in the end deferred to Parliament's peace negotiations. After suffering intermittent bouts of acute mental illness, he spent his last decade in a fog of insanity and blindness.



The English philosopher and political theorist John Locke laid much of the groundwork for the Enlightenment. Trained in medicine, he was a key advocate of the empirical approaches of the Scientific Revolution. His political theory of government by the consent of the governed as a means to protect "life, liberty and estate" deeply influenced the writing of the Declaration of Independence. In addition, his essays on religious tolerance provided an early model for the separation of church and state.

# SEE IT

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.  
A DECLARATION  
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

**W**HEN 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.

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—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shewn, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security. Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.  
He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing Importance, unless suspended in their Operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the Accommodation of large Districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a Right inestimable to them, and formidable to Tyrants only.

He has called together legislative Bodies at Places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Depository of their public Records, for the sole Purpose of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly Firmness his Invasions on the Rights of the People.  
He has refused for a long Time, after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.  
He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries.

He has erected a Multitude of new Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance.  
He has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the Consent of our Legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.  
He has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

FOR quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us;  
FOR protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States;

FOR cutting off our Trade with all Parts of the World;  
FOR imposing Taxes on us without our Consent;

FOR depriving us, in many Cases, of the Benefits of Trial by Jury;  
FOR transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended Offences;

FOR abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary Government, and enlarging its Boundaries, so as to render it at once an Example and fit Instrument for introducing the same absolute Rule into these Colonies;

FOR taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments;  
FOR suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all Cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.  
He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our People.

He is, at this Time, transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the Executioners of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.

NOR have we been wanting in Attentions to our British Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the Necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

WE, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. 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.

*Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS,*

JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST.  
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

Declaration of Independence



Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was debated and adopted.



Declaration of Independence, by John Trumbull, 1819.

# CONCURRENT EVENTS



## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Beginning in 1760 in Great Britain, and continuing through the mid-1800s, the Industrial Revolution fundamentally changed life in Europe and America. Industrialization marked a major shift in which predominantly agrarian, rural societies became industrial and urban. Manufacturing changed from a system in which production was done in people's homes, using handtools or basic machines, to one done in factories utilizing powered, special-purpose machinery and mass production. The iron and textile industries, along with the development of the steam engine in 1765, played central roles in the Industrial Revolution, which also saw improved systems of transportation, communication and banking. While industrialization brought about an increased volume and variety of manufactured goods and an improved standard of living for some, it also resulted in often grim employment and living conditions for the poor and working classes.



## MOZART'S MUSIC

In 1762, 6-year-old musical prodigy Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart embarked on his first European concert tour. Although he died at just 35 years of age in 1791, Mozart is one of history's most revered composers and had a profound impact on the development of classical music. He wrote dozens of symphonies, concertos, sonatas, chamber works, masses and operas, including Serenade No. 13 (Eine Kleine Nacht-musik); Symphony No. 40; Don Giovanni; The Marriage of Figaro; and The Magic Flute, among many others.



## FRENCH REVOLUTION

A watershed event in modern European history, the French Revolution began in 1789 and ended in the late 1790s with the ascent of Napoleon Bonaparte. During this period, French citizens razed and redesigned their country's political landscape, uprooting centuries-old institutions such as absolute monarchy and the feudal system. Like the American Revolution before it, the French Revolution was influenced by Enlightenment ideals, particularly the concepts of popular sovereignty and inalienable rights. Although it failed to achieve all of its goals and at times degenerated into a chaotic bloodbath, the movement played a critical role in shaping modern nations by showing the world the power inherent in the will of the people.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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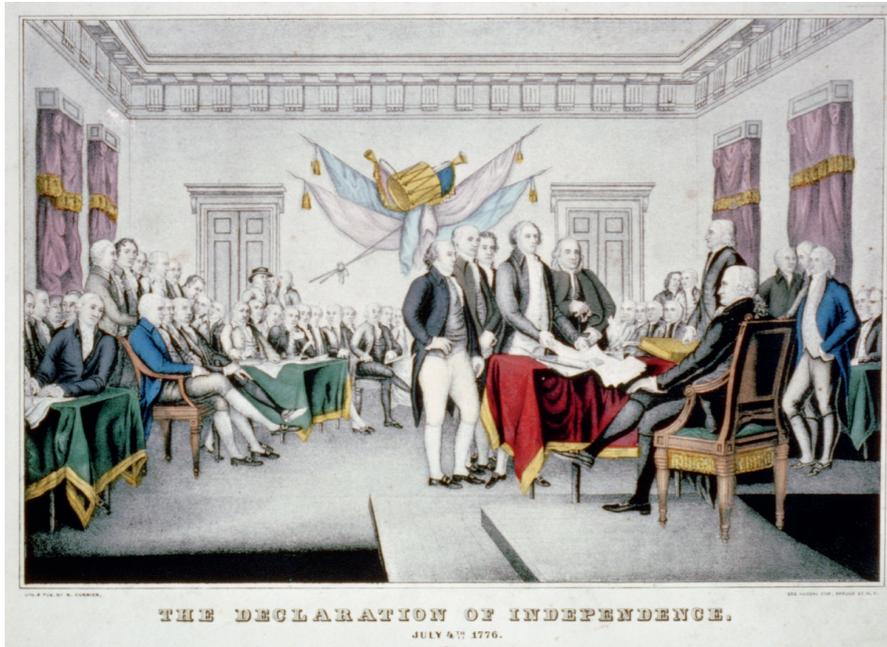
1 Signing the Declaration of Independence was an act of treason against the British crown, and treason was punishable by death. Why do you think the men who signed the Declaration of Independence felt strongly enough about it to risk their safety?

2 At the time America declared independence from Great Britain, there were many Americans who sided with the British and wanted to remain a part of the British empire. Why do you think this was? How do you think these “loyalists” felt about the Declaration of Independence?

3 What do you think John Locke meant when he described “government by the consent of the governed”?

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# SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES



Signing the Declaration of Independence, by N. Currier, 1835

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

It's easy to forget that communication between the American colonies and Great Britain was slow and cumbersome, as all messages had to be sent via ship over the Atlantic Ocean. But what if King George III and the colonists could have spoken face to face? Ask students to imagine this scenario and write a potential dialogue in which the colonists present 2-3 of their most pressing concerns and King George and his advisers respond. This could also be acted out.

## YOU'LL BE BACK

Ask students to listen to and read the lyrics of "You'll Be Back" from the Broadway musical *Hamilton*. Form small groups, and ask each group to analyze the lyrics, and then present an explanation what "King George" was referring to in the song. You may want to refer to the Genius.com annotations as you review. <https://genius.com/7862578>

## MAKE AN ARGUMENT

Ask students to think of a school, community, regional or national issue about which they feel strongly. Then, ask them to write a declaration of their opinions following a similar format to the Declaration of Independence, with an explanation of their stance followed by a point-by-point indictment of the current policy. Consider having partners take the opposite side.

# RESOURCES

**Text: Transcription of the Declaration of Independence**

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

**Text: Declaration of Independence: What Does It Say?**

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/what-does-it-say>

**Text: Creating the Declaration: A Timeline**

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/timeline>

**Text: Facts About the Signers**

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/signers-gallery>

**Video: Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence**

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/declaration-of-independence/videos/jefferson-and-the-continental-congress>

**Video: Bet You Didn't Know: Independence Day**

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/declaration-of-independence/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-independence-day>