

# SECTION 4 Moving Toward Independence

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

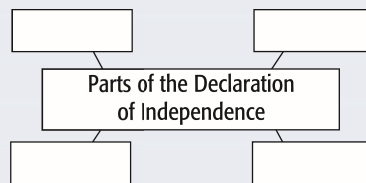
The Second Continental Congress voted to approve the Declaration of Independence.

### Key Terms

*petition, preamble*

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing Information** As you read the section, re-create the diagram below and describe the parts of the Declaration of Independence.



### Read to Learn

- what happened at the Second Continental Congress.
- why the colonists drafted the Declaration of Independence.

### Section Theme

**Government and Democracy** The Declaration of Independence declared the colonies free and independent.

### Preview of Events

♦ 1775

**May 10, 1775**  
Second Continental Congress meets

♦ 1776

**July 1775**  
The Congress sends Olive Branch Petition to George III

**March 1776**  
George Washington takes Boston from the British

♦ 1777

**July 4, 1776**  
Declaration of Independence is approved

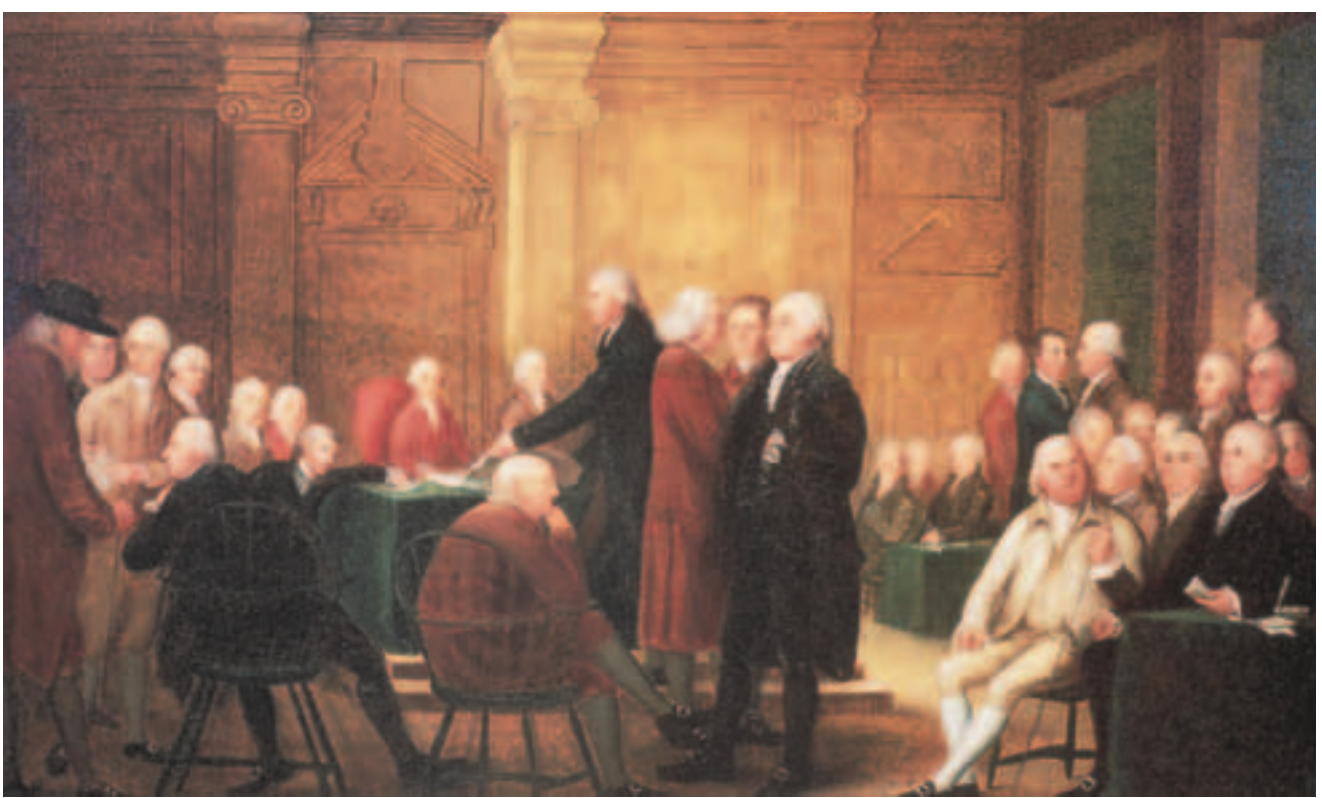
## AN American Story

In June 1776, delegates to the Second Continental Congress came to a momentous decision. They agreed to have a committee draw up a document declaring America's independence from Great Britain. The committee included Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, and Robert Livingston. Jefferson later recalled that "[the committee members] unanimously pressed on myself along to undertake [the writing]. I consented . . ." On July 4, 1776, one of the world's most important political documents was adopted. In it Americans made a commitment as Lincoln later stated in the Gettysburg Address, "to the proposition that all men are created equal." In the twentieth century, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, called the Declaration of Independence a "landmark in human freedom."

*Adams and Jefferson*

### Colonial Leaders Emerge

On May 10, 1775, the **Second Continental Congress** assembled for the first time. Despite the fighting at Lexington and Concord, many members of Congress were not yet prepared to break away from Great Britain.



*The Second Continental Congress acted as a central government for the colonies.*

The delegates to the Second Continental Congress included some of the greatest political leaders in America. Among those attending were John and Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, and George Washington—all delegates to the First Continental Congress held in 1774. Several distinguished new delegates came as well.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the most accomplished and respected men in the colonies, had been an influential member of the Pennsylvania legislature. In 1765, during the Stamp Act Crisis, he represented the colonies in London and helped secure the repeal of the act.

John Hancock of Massachusetts, 38 years old, was a wealthy merchant. He funded many Patriot groups, including the Sons of Liberty. The delegates chose Hancock as president of the Second Continental Congress.

Thomas Jefferson, only 32 when the Congress began, had already acquired a reputation as a brilliant thinker and writer. As a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, Jefferson had become associated with the movement toward independence.

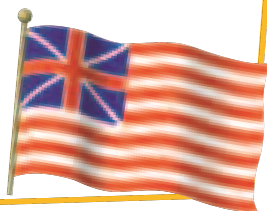
The Second Continental Congress began to govern the colonies. It authorized the printing of money and set up a post office with Franklin in charge. It established committees to communicate with Native Americans and with other countries. Most important, the Congress created the **Continental Army** to fight against Britain in a more organized way than the colonial militias could. On John Adams's recommendation, the Congress unanimously chose George Washington to be the army's commander.

After Washington left to take charge of the colonial forces in Boston, the delegates offered Britain one last chance to avoid all-out war. In July the Congress sent a **petition**, or formal request, to George III. Called the **Olive Branch Petition**, it assured the king of the colonists' desire for peace. It asked the king to protect the

Fact Fiction Folklore

### America's Flags

**Continental Colors, 1775–1777** The Continental Colors, or Grand Union flag, was the first to represent all the colonies. Its 13 stripes stood for the thirteen colonies. The crosses represented the British flag and symbolized the colonists' loyalty to Great Britain at that time.



colonists' rights, which Parliament seemed determined to destroy. George III refused to receive the Olive Branch Petition. Instead he prepared for war, hiring more than 30,000 German troops to send to America and fight beside British troops.

### The Colonies Take the Offensive

Meanwhile the Congress learned that British troops stationed in what is now Canada were planning to invade New York. The Americans decided to strike first. Marching north from Fort Ticonderoga, a Patriot force captured Montreal in November. An American attack on Quebec led by Benedict Arnold failed, however. The American forces stayed outside the city of Quebec through the long winter and returned to Fort Ticonderoga in 1776.

Washington reached Boston in July 1775, a few weeks after the Battle of Bunker Hill. He found the members of the militia growing in number every day, but he realized they lacked discipline, organization, and leadership. He began the hard work of shaping these armed civilians into an army.

By March 1776, Washington judged the Continental Army ready to fight. He positioned the army in a semicircle around Boston and gave the order for its cannons to bombard the British forces. The redcoats, under Sir William Howe, hurriedly withdrew from the city and boarded their ships. On March 17 Washington led his jubilant troops into Boston. The British troops sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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### Moving Toward Independence

Throughout the colonies in late 1775 and early 1776, some Americans still hoped to avoid a complete break with Britain. Support for the position of absolute independence was growing, however.

In January 1776, **Thomas Paine** published a pamphlet called *Common Sense* that captured the attention of the American colonists. In bold language, Paine called for complete independence from Britain. He argued that it was simply

## People In History

Abigail Adams 1744–1818



Born into a comfortable Massachusetts household, Abigail Smith spent her youth reading and studying. At age 19 she married 28-year-old lawyer John Adams, who became a leader in the independence movement. Through her letters to family and friends, Abigail left us a record of her thoughts about the

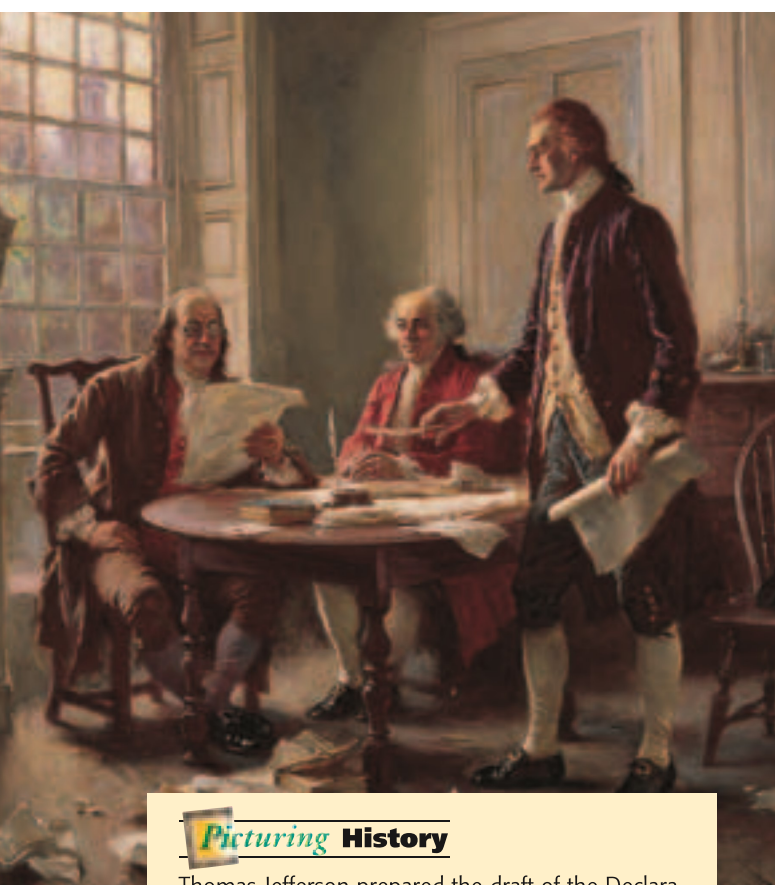
revolution as it developed. She also shared her hopes for the new nation.

As Congress considered a declaration of independence, she teasingly—but seriously—wrote to her husband:

*“I long to hear that you have declared an independency . . . I desire you would Remember the*


*Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.”*

Their correspondence during the times they spent apart showed a thoughtful exchange of ideas and a strong respect for one another. Abigail Adams would later become the second of the new nation's first ladies.



### Picturing History

Thomas Jefferson prepared the draft of the Declaration, while Benjamin Franklin and John Adams made suggestions. **Why is July 2, 1776, a historic day?**

“common sense” to stop following the “royal brute,” King George III. Paine told the colonists their cause was not just a squabble over taxes but a struggle for freedom—“in a great measure the cause of all mankind.” *Common Sense* inspired thousands of Americans.  (See page 596 of the Primary Sources Library for another excerpt from *Common Sense*.)

 **Reading Check** **Explaining** Why was Thomas Paine important to the independence movement?

## The Colonies Declare Independence

At the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, the meeting hall was filled with spirited debate. One central issue occupied the delegates: Should the colonies declare themselves an independent nation, or should they stay under British rule?

In April 1776, North Carolina instructed its delegates to support independence. On June 7 Virginia’s Richard Henry Lee proposed a bold resolution:

“That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States . . . and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”

The Congress debated the resolution. Some delegates still thought the colonies were not ready to form a separate nation. Others argued that war already had begun and a large portion of the American population wanted to separate from Great Britain. Still others feared Great Britain’s power to hold down the rebellion.

While the delegates debated the issue, the Congress chose a committee to draft a **Declaration of Independence**. Jefferson was selected to write the document. Jefferson drew on the ideas of thinkers such as English philosopher John Locke to set out the colonies’ reasons for proclaiming their freedom. Locke wrote that people were born with certain natural rights to life, liberty, and property; that people formed governments to protect these rights; and that a government interfering with these rights might rightfully be overthrown.

On July 2, 1776, the Congress finally voted on Lee’s resolution for independence. Twelve colonies voted for it. New York did not vote but later announced its support. Next the delegates took up Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence. After making some changes, they approved the document on July 4, 1776.

John Hancock, the president of the Congress, was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence. Hancock remarked that he wrote his name large enough for King George to read it without his glasses. Hancock’s bold signature stands out on the original document. Eventually 56 delegates signed the paper announcing the birth of the United States.

Copies of the Declaration went out to the newly declared states. Washington had it read to his troops on July 9. In New York American soldiers tore down a statue of George III in celebration. In Worcester, Massachusetts, the reading of the Declaration of Independence was followed by “repeated huzzas [cheers], firing of musketry and cannon, bonfires, and other demonstrations of joy.”

## The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration has four major sections. The **preamble**, or introduction, states that people who wish to form a new country should explain their reasons for doing so. The next two sections list the rights the colonists believed they should have and their complaints against Britain. The final section proclaims the existence of the new nation.

The Declaration of Independence states what Jefferson and many Americans thought were universal principles. It begins with a description of traditional English political rights.

“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 states that government exists to protect these rights. If it does not, it goes on to state that “it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it and to institute new Government.”

The Declaration goes on to list the many grievances Americans held against the king and Parliament. The crimes of George III included “cutting off our trade with all parts of the world” and “imposing taxes on us without our

**Congress voted for independence on July 4, 1776.** Actually, Congress voted for independence on July 2, 1776. Why, then, is Independence Day celebrated on the fourth? On that day the delegates voted to accept Jefferson’s statement, the Declaration of Independence, as the reason why they had voted for independence two days earlier.

consent.” Americans, the Declaration says, had “Petitioned for Redress” of these grievances. These petitions, however, were ignored or rejected by Britain.

The Declaration ends by announcing America’s new status. Now pledging “to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor,” the Americans declared themselves a new nation. The struggle for American independence—the American Revolution—had begun. (See pages 154–157 for the entire text of the Declaration of Independence.)

**Reading Check Summarizing** What grievances against King George III were included in the Declaration of Independence?

## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT



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### Checking for Understanding

- Key Terms** Connect the terms below with the proper document. Then write a sentence in which you use each term. Terms: **petition, preamble.** Documents: Declaration of Independence, Olive Branch Petition
- Reviewing Facts** What was King George III’s response to the Olive Branch Petition?

### Reviewing Themes

- Government and Democracy** Why was the Second Continental Congress more like a government than the First Continental Congress?



### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing Primary Sources** Based on the quote from the Declaration of Independence on this page, what are the “unalienable Rights” to which Jefferson referred? Give examples.
- Organizing Information** Re-create the diagram below and describe each individual’s role in the movement toward independence.

	Role
Thomas Jefferson	
Thomas Paine	
Samuel Adams	
Benjamin Franklin	

### Analyzing Visuals

- Picturing History** Compare the flag on page 148 with the flag on page 128. How are the two flags similar? How are they different? Which of the flags more closely resembles the American flag of today?

### Interdisciplinary Activity

**Expository Writing** Prepare a help-wanted ad to locate a person qualified to write the Declaration of Independence. Describe the responsibilities of the job as well as the experience and character traits that are needed.

