

Lesson 7: Independence

☐ Getting Started

As colonists resisted new taxes, restrictions on self-government, and the quartering of British troops in their communities, the Continental Congress met to address these concerns and manage the military conflict that had already begun. In fact, many began to think that the American colonies ought to break away from the British Crown altogether. It's important to remember that revolution was treason, punishable by the death. Breaking away from the British Crown was not something that the delegates to the Continental Congress undertook lightly, and the document that shares their reasons for breaking away from Britain would become one of the most widely read political documents in the world.

In this lesson, you'll explore some of the influences that culture may have had on independence, read the Declaration of Independence itself, and add a few more cards to your timeline.

Stuff You Need

- *Great Colonial America Projects You Can Build Yourself!* by Kris Bordessa
- *The Declaration of Independence and Other Great Documents of American History, 1775-1865* by John Grafton, ed.
- *We Were There, Too!: Young People in U.S. History* by Phillip Hoose
- highlighter pen or a red marker, crayon, or colored pencil
- scissors
- tape or glue
- timeline and timeline cards

Ideas to Think About

- Under what circumstances can one segment of a society legitimately separate itself from and become independent of the rest of that society?
- What kinds of changes might make the idea of independence appealing or advantageous?
- What challenges would the leaders of a movement toward independence face? What about the leaders of any newly independent society?

Things to Know

- Colonial religion at the time of the Revolution was influenced by the First Great Awakening, a religious movement that emphasized emotional revival meetings and fiery preaching that focused on personal conversion experiences and the spiritual rebirth of individuals. Many people abandoned traditional denominations like the Anglican Church for growing denominations like the Methodists or Baptists that were less hierarchical and more in line with the ideas of the First Great Awakening.
- Organized resistance to British policies and armed conflict began long before the colonies declared independence from Britain.
- Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, and the document was then edited by other members of Congress before it was finally approved.
- The Continental Congress formally declared independence from Britain in July of 1775.

☐ Reading and Questions

Read "Ann Green Winslow and Charity Clark: Spinning for Liberty" (starting on page 48) and "Christopher Seider and Samuel Maverick: Martyrs of the Revolution" (starting on page 50) in *We Were There, Too!: Young People in U.S. History* by Phillip Hoose. Read Chapter 7 of *Great Colonial Projects You Can Build Yourself!* by Kris Bordessa. Next, answer the following questions.

1. Why did the girls in Providence, Rhode Island, gather to spin and weave in 1766?

2. Why do you think apprentices like Edward Garrick and Samuel Maverick got involved in the cause for independence?

3. How would colonial people have sent letters to friends, family members, or business associates?

4. What was Thomas Jefferson's background before he wrote the Declaration of Independence?

Activities

☐ Activity 1: Moving Toward Independence

As resistance to British taxation and authority grew and violence erupted, the idea of American independence gained popularity. This idea did not appear in a vacuum, however. There were numerous cultural currents that helped pave the way for widespread acceptance of the radical notion that the colonies could reject British rule and become their own nation. Both religious and secular speakers had strong influence over the people who heard their speeches or read printed versions of them in broadsides or newspapers. In this activity, you'll explore the impact of either religious revival sermons or secular speakers in greater detail. Ask a parent which option you should complete.

Option 1: Religion and Independence

The First Great Awakening in American religion took place in the early to mid 1700s. Ministers inspired by George Whitfield and others emphasized a personal conversion experience among Christian believers in revivals in which families and communities came together to hear traveling preachers give fiery and emotional sermons. These ministers focused on the potential wrath of an all-powerful God and the personal experience of religious conversion and suggested, in opposition to Catholic teachings, that church authorities had limited power to condemn or save individual sinners.

Such speakers had a tremendous impact on religion in America. This emphasis on all Christians who had undergone a rebirth of the spirit being equal in the eyes of God, and on the personal, individual experience of faith instead of powerful

institutions and old hierarchies (organized systems of church officials) were two important cultural shifts that took place in the generation prior to the Revolution. Many scholars believe that changing religious ideas brought about by the First Great Awakening may have influenced political ideas as well — believers who were willing to cast aside the traditions of powerful church hierarchies may have been prepared to also cast aside the tradition of having a powerful king. Those who were inspired by the idea of a personal conversion in which all Christians had equal access to salvation may have also been inspired by the idea of a country in which all men were believed to be created equal.

**Religion and the Founding of the American Republic**

www.beyondthepage.com/link/1732/

In this activity, you'll learn more about the First Great Awakening. First, visit this site from the Library of Congress:

Focus on the section toward the middle of the page called "The Emergence of American Evangelicalism: The Great Awakening."

**Religion and the Revolution**

www.beyondthepage.com/link/1733/

You may also find the introduction to this page about religion and the Revolution interesting.

On both of these pages, feel free to click on any of the links or images to learn more about specific documents, works of art, and individuals.

Now, imagine that you are a young person living in one of the colonies in the 1760s or early 1770s. Your family has attended many revival meetings, and your parents have abandoned the Anglican Church to join one of the new denominations that emphasizes a personal conversion experience. Your minister focuses on the experience of the heart and on the personal nature of one's faith. He frequently criticizes the leaders of other local churches as being without sufficient religious feeling and being too focused on the power of the church instead of on the power of God. How do you think your religious views and the kinds of things you hear in church influence your views on the British government's taxation and the growing opposition to British authority?

Your parent will have some questions to discuss with you.

Option 2: Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death

The speeches of powerful orators could have a tremendous impact on those who heard them. Patrick Henry, a lawyer and member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, gave a stirring speech in favor of arming the Virginia militia in March of 1775, before shots were fired at Lexington and Concord. This speech is credited as influencing not only the Virginia Revolutionary Committee but also colonists who heard about or read a printed version of Henry's emotional speech.

In this activity, you will read Henry's speech, the first document in *The Declaration of Independence and Other Great Documents of American History, 1775-1865* (John Grafton, ed.). As you read, think about the impact Henry's words might have had on people listening. Choose the paragraph that you think is the most powerful from it and practice reading the paragraph with emotion. After you feel comfortable delivering the text as a speech, perform a dramatic reading for a parent.

☐ **Activity 2: Revising the Declaration of Independence**

Like any important piece of writing, the Declaration of Independence was revised and edited during the writing process. In this activity, you'll have the chance to see how Jefferson originally drafted the text and what changes Congress made to the document.

Visit the following website and use the print command in your browser to print out the webpage (you do not need to print the first page, which just has the title and an image). The printout includes a blank white margin that you can use to take notes as you read.

Text with a strikethrough line indicates parts that Jefferson originally wrote but Congress deleted. Text in italics enclosed in brackets show parts that Congress later added. Choose 3-5 sections that contain some of the biggest revisions and suggest 2-3 edits that you would have made (such as adding deleted text back in or removing text that Congress added). You can use highlighters or colored pencils to mark your preferences or take notes in the white margin. Then complete the "Editing the Declaration of Independence" activity page.

NOTE: As you work, it may be helpful to refer to the final version of the document in *The Declaration of Independence and Other Great Documents of American History, 1775-1865*.

**Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence**

www.beyondthepage.com/link/2964/

Visit this website, and then use the print command in your browser to print out the document (you do not need to print out the first page).

☐ **Activity 3: Timeline of U.S. History**

In this activity, you'll add cards #30-31 to your timeline.

Wrapping Up

Decisions about independence were being made against the backdrop of military conflict. In the next lesson, you will learn more about the experience of soldiers in the American Revolution.

Editing the Declaration of Independence

Instructions: First, use a highlighter pen to highlight, on your printout, any parts of your draft that are different from the finished text of the Declaration of Independence. (If you do not have a highlighter, you can underline the different text in red marker, crayon, or pencil.) Then answer the following questions:

1. Choose one of the changes you made to the document and put a star next to it on your printout. Explain why you made the change that you did to the text.
2. Choose another change that you made and draw two stars next to it on your printout. Explain the reasons behind your decision to change the text in this part of the document.
3. Why do you think the people considering the Declaration of Independence took so much care in the precise wording of the document?
4. Does knowing that the Declaration of Independence was an edited document change the way you think about it or about its author, Thomas Jefferson?

Lesson 7: Independence

Getting Started

✿ Ideas to Think About

- Under what circumstances can one segment of a society legitimately separate itself from and become independent of the rest of that society?
- What kinds of changes might make the idea of independence appealing or advantageous?
- What challenges would the leaders of a movement toward independence face? What about the leaders of any newly independent society?



Things to Know

- Colonial religion at the time of the Revolution was influenced by the First Great Awakening, a religious movement that emphasized emotional revival meetings and fiery preaching that focused on personal conversion experiences and the spiritual rebirth of individuals. Many people abandoned traditional denominations like the Anglican Church for growing denominations like the Methodists or Baptists that were less hierarchical and more in line with the ideas of the First Great Awakening.
- Organized resistance to British policies and armed conflict began long before the colonies declared independence from Britain.
- Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, and the document was then edited by other members of Congress before it was finally approved.
- The Continental Congress formally declared independence from Britain in July of 1775.

⦿ Skills

- Trace the causes and effects of the Revolutionary War, and assess the impact of major events, problems, and personalities during the Constitutional Period in individual states and the new nation. (SS)
- Understand significant political and economic issues of the revolutionary era. (SS)
- Describe the relationship between the moral and political ideas of the Great Awakening and the development of revolutionary fervor. Describe how religion and virtue contributed to the growth of representative government in the American colonies. (SS)
- Describe the contributions of key personalities from the Revolutionary War era and assess their influence on the outcome of the war -- including Abigail Adams, John Adams, Wentworth Cheswell, Samuel Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, James Armistead, Benjamin Franklin, Bernardo de Gálvez, Crispus Attucks, King George III, Haym Salomon, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, the Marquis de Lafayette, Thomas Paine, and George Washington. (SS)
- Explain the issues surrounding important events of the American Revolution, including declaring independence; writing the Articles of Confederation; fighting the battles of Lexington, Concord, Saratoga, and Yorktown; enduring the winter at Valley Forge; and signing the Treaty of Paris of 1783. (SS)

Introducing the Lesson

In this lesson, your child will explore some of the influences that culture may have had on independence, read the Declaration of Independence itself, and add a few more cards to his timeline.

Reading and Questions

1. Why did the girls in Providence, Rhode Island, gather to spin and weave in 1766?

They were protesting British taxes by making their own homespun cloth instead of having to buy cloth imported from England. This kind of boycott was very common in the 1760s and 1770s.

2. Why do you think apprentices like Edward Garrick and Samuel Maverick got involved in the cause for independence?

Answers will vary. Your child may realize that these were teenaged boys who were unpaid and often treated poorly or made to work very hard by the terms of their contracts, so they were already discontented. They also looked up to Revolutionary leaders, some of whom had been apprentices when they were young and who had run away from their masters. Apprentices may have also thought that they would have a better situation if the colonies gained independence.

3. How would colonial people have sent letters to friends, family members, or business associates?

At first, letters were passed from person to person as travelers moved between towns and colonies. Even after more formal networks for mail delivery were established, it could still take months for a letter to be delivered.

4. What was Thomas Jefferson's background before he wrote the Declaration of Independence?

Jefferson was born in Virginia and was a lawyer, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, and a plantation owner.

Activities

Activity 1: Moving Toward Independence

In this activity, your child will consider the impact of either religious revivals or secular speeches on colonists' ideas about their relationships to the Crown and the possibility of independence. In the first option, your child will read online content from the Library of Congress about the First Great Awakening and consider the impact of that religious movement on people's ideas about independence. He will then discuss these connections between religious and political views with you. This option may be of interest to students with a strong interest in religion or for students who enjoy discussing content rather than writing about it. In Option 2, your child will read Patrick Henry's famous speech "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!" and choose a section of the speech to reenact.

Option 1: Religion and Independence

In this activity, your child will read a bit about the First Great Awakening and then have a discussion with you. Because religion and politics are both highly personal topics and each family is likely to have different views on those issues, we've chosen to organize this particular activity option as a discussion with a parent instead of a written activity. Talk through the following questions with your child — you may find this information about the influence of the First Great Awakening on the Revolution helpful to read before your discussion:

**Religion and the American Revolution**

www.beyondthepage.com/link/1734/

Questions to Discuss

- What was the First Great Awakening? (Your child should understand that the First Great Awakening was a revival of religious feeling that emphasized the personal conversion experience. It often involved revivals with traveling preachers and focused on the individual and God as opposed to powerful church structures.)
- Why do you think people were drawn to the First Great Awakening? (Answers will vary, but your child may point to the emotionally powerful sermons that were given or the social nature of revival meetings or the idea that individuals could be saved through a personal experience of conversion.)
- How do you think these religious ideas might have influenced people's decisions to support the Revolution? (As the article by Christine Heyrman [see link above] indicates, people who had undergone religious conversion had already had to cast aside older ideas and institutions in favor of new ones. Doing this in a faith setting may have made it easier to do something similar politically. Many people had rejected their previous churches, religious leaders, and doctrines to follow the newer ideas about religion that they heard at revival meetings and were following their hearts about their faith. This, too, may have prepared people to stand up to political institutions and support a new form of government.)
- Do you see evidence of people's ideas about religion emphasizing their political views today? How so? (Answers will vary.)
- Do your own religious views inform your political views in important ways? (Answers will vary. This may be a useful opportunity to talk about your own views about politics and religion with your child or to share your own thoughts on the proper relationship [if any] between faith and government.)

Option 2: Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death

In this activity, your child will read Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech, select the paragraph he finds most powerful, and deliver it as a dramatic reading. Talk to your child about why he chose that particular paragraph and what he thought was powerful or important about it. Also ask him what he thinks people hearing the whole speech might have thought afterward.

Activity 2: Revising the Declaration of Independence

In this activity, your child will use an online resource to view editorial changes made to the Declaration of Independence. He will print out the document and choose 3-5 sections that were significantly revised from Jefferson's original draft and suggest 2-3 edits that he would have made (such as adding deleted text back in or removing text that Congress added). He will then complete an activity page describing the reasons for some of the changes he made to the text and his thoughts on the importance of the editing process for this document. Answers will vary.

Activity 3: Timeline of U.S. History

In this activity, your child will add cards #30-31 to his timeline.

Wrapping Up

Questions to Discuss

- How did people get information and access to new ideas in colonial times? (Mail delivery was very slow and often haphazard, but people did have access to newspapers and broadsides that printed news and the text of speeches and sermons. People also attended speeches and sermons in person and shared information by word of mouth.)
- What was interesting to you or what surprised you about the Declaration of Independence?
- If you were an apprentice living in colonial Boston, why might you support independence? (Answers will vary, but your child may mention the hope for a better life in an independent nation or looking up to Revolutionary leaders who were runaway apprentices in their youth, or the desire to do something exciting with their lives by going to war.)

Things to Review

- Review your child's answers to the reading questions.
- Either discuss the First Great Awakening with your child or listen to his dramatic reading of a portion of Patrick Henry's speech.
- Review your child's responses on the "Editing the Declaration of Independence" activity page.
- Review your child's timeline for accuracy.