



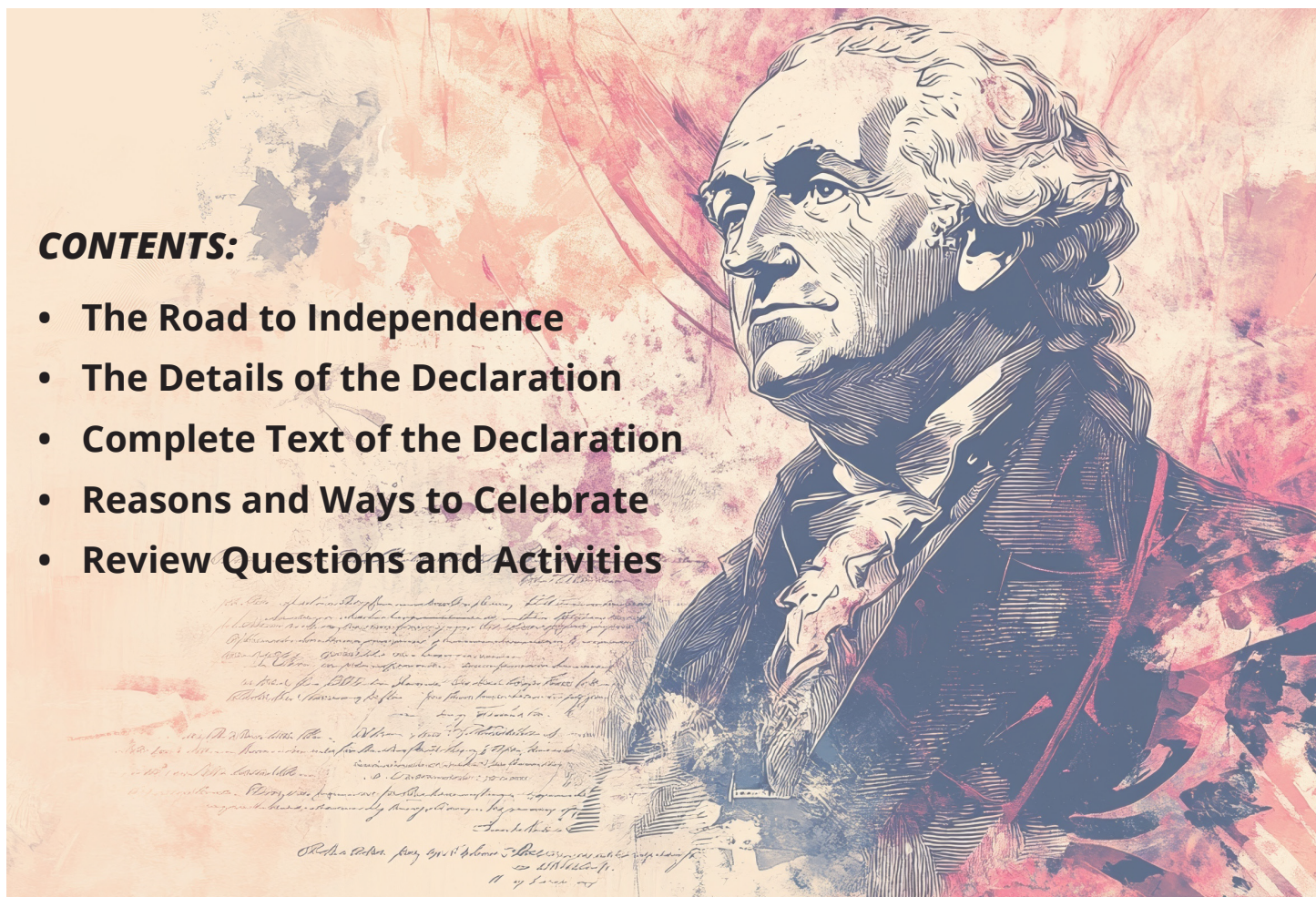
# America's 250th Anniversary

## A Student's Celebration of Independence

On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

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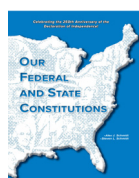


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On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This significant milestone, known as the *Semiquincentennial*, provides an opportunity for all citizens to come together and celebrate our shared values rather than our divisions. It encourages reflection on how our country was founded on the principles of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” as well as the ongoing work of our democracy.

### The Road to Independence

The Declaration of Independence, adopted on July 4, 1776, was the result of more than a decade of conflict between the American colonies and Great Britain. Most colonists began as loyal subjects of Britain, but after the French and Indian War (1754–1763), Britain’s new taxes and strict trade laws angered them. Acts like the Stamp Act (1765) and Townshend Acts (1767) taxed everyday goods. Colonists argued that these laws violated their rights because they had no representatives in Parliament, giving rise to the famous slogan: “No taxation without representation!” They began protesting, boycotting British goods, and forming groups like the Sons of Liberty. Violence erupted in events like the Boston Massacre (1770) and the Boston Tea Party (1773). Britain’s harsh response — the Intolerable Acts (1774) — united the colonies in opposition.

The journey to independence gained momentum when delegates from twelve colonies gathered in Philadelphia in the fall of 1774 for the First Continental Congress. This meeting aimed to repair relations with Great Britain in response to the tax acts. Many delegates were opposed to independence and instead petitioned the King to repeal the Acts. When Britain ignored these efforts, they reconvened in May 1775 for a Second Continental Congress. By then, the Revolutionary War had begun with the first shots fired at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. With war underway and no official central government, the Second Continental Congress served as the de facto government of the United States.

On June 7, 1776, more than a year after the Revolution began, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced this resolution to the Second Continental Congress:

*“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.”*



*The image above is probably the most famous image of the Boston Massacre. It was engraved by Paul Revere about two weeks after the Boston Massacre occurred.*

The resolution proposed independence for the American colonies.

Inspired by Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, Congress formed a committee led by Thomas Jefferson to draft a declaration. Approved on July 4, 1776, it proclaimed liberty and equality for all and announced a new nation—the United States of America. As a result, this date is celebrated as Independence Day. The road to independence was a journey from loyalty to liberty—turning protest into the promise of freedom for future generations.

### Details of the Declaration

A committee from the Second Continental Congress wrote the Declaration. Drafted by Thomas Jefferson in collaboration with the “Committee of Five,” John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston, and Roger Sherman. While the words were mainly Thomas Jefferson’s, the ideas were centuries old.

The Declaration of Independence was intended for multiple audiences: the King, the colonists, and the world. It also had several purposes. The Declaration can be divided into three parts:

- 1. Preamble** - A statement of principle concerning the rights of a man and why a revolution was necessary; The most important and famous line states, “*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.*”

### Timeline and Events Leading to the Declaration of Independence

1763	1765	1767	1770	1773	1774	1775
<b>End of French &amp; Indian War</b> - Britain wins the war but is left with huge debt, decides colonies must help pay.	<b>Stamp Act</b> - imposed a high tax on colonists represented by a stamp, on various forms of papers, documents, and playing cards.	<b>Townshend Act</b> - duties imposed on the import of glass, paper, and tea, colonists begin boycott of British goods.	<b>Boston Massacre</b> - British soldiers fire on a crowd; 5 colonists are killed. Used as a rallying point against British rule.	<b>Boston Tea Party</b> - Sons of Liberty dump tea into Boston Harbor in protest of unjust taxes.	<b>Intolerable Acts</b> - series of 4 laws passed to punish colonists for the Boston Tea Party, First Continental Congress meets.	<b>Battles of Lexington and Concord</b> - First battles of the Revolution, “Shot heard round the world.”

**2. Grievances** - A list of 27 complaints against England's King George III is the longest part of the Declaration and begins with *"He has refused his Assent to Laws."* It lists the unfair actions from Britain and states the king is *"unfit to be the ruler of a free people."*

**3. A Formal Claim of Independence** - The final paragraph, beginning with *"We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America,"* affirms that the 13 colonies are free and independent states. This formal declaration of independence includes a dramatic statement, *"That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States."* It declares a complete break with Britain and its King and claims the powers of an independent country.

There are 56 signatures on the Declaration of Independence, all willing to give up their freedom as stated in the document, *"...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."* Fifty men from 13 states signed the document on August 2, 1776. The other six signed over the next year and a half. As the President of the Second Continental Congress, John Hancock signed first. He wrote his name very large. Some of the men abbreviated their first names, like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

The writing and signing of the Declaration of Independence took courage since the signers would act against authority and could be accused of treason. Still, the drafting of the document was an essential step in the founding of our government. Our values of equality, individual rights, and government by consent are the foundation of American democracy.

The important fact is not that the Americans had declared themselves independent, but that they had set down certain principles and beliefs that were new to governments: all men are created equal; all men have rights; and governments are subject to the will of the people.

The Declaration of Independence is not a constitution or form of government. It served to set up principles for a new government. Such beliefs were used in writing the United States Constitution.



On July 8, 1776, Colonel John Nixon reads the Declaration outside of Independence Hall.

## Spreading the News of Independence

Unlike today, there was no mass media, television, or internet, and not even a national postal system as we know it. Spreading news relied on public readings, horseback riders, handwritten letters, town criers, newspapers, and word of mouth. The thirteen colonies stretched over 1,000 miles, from New Hampshire to Georgia. Roads were often rough dirt paths, and travel by horse or carriage was slow. A message from Philadelphia could take weeks to reach the northern or southern colonies. News of independence spread at different speeds: towns near Philadelphia received information within days, while distant frontier areas might not learn of it for a month or more.

However, despite these challenges, the message of independence spread quickly enough to inspire celebration and strengthen the colonies' resolve to fight for freedom. On July 8, 1776, church bells were rung throughout Philadelphia to call the people to the first public reading of the Declaration. A day later George Washington had the Declaration read to the Continental Army and citizens in New York City.

## Reading the Declaration

As part of the celebration, there is no better way to show your civic pride and commitment to our great country than by reading the Declaration of Independence. This is not about memorizing history; it's about discovering the principles and values that define our nation and still shape our democracy today.

The Declaration of Independence has approximately 1,320 words for the main text, 1,337 words including the title, and 1,458 words when the 56 signers' names are also included. A complete, steady reading of the Declaration of Independence takes about 10 or 15 minutes without any context, discussion, or ceremonial pauses. The spelling and punctuation reflect the original.

The language of the Declaration reflects 18th-century English, the formal writing style of the late 1700s, which can sound old-fashioned or complex to modern readers. It reads like a carefully reasoned speech rather than a short declaration — every word is chosen for rhythm and impact. The spelling and capitalization reflect 18th-century habits — words and ideas were capitalized for emphasis rather than grammar. "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" — capital letters highlight ideals. Words like "unalienable" were spelled differently than today's "inalienable."

You will find that reading will help you build vocabulary and comprehension skills. Pay close attention to the words that had an impact and inspired change. There will be an appreciation for how America's founders used powerful language to express freedom and justice. While the words may seem outdated, their message remains timeless.



IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

# The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

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. — 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 wins 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 calling 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 & 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 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 lay 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.

Boston Greenwich  
Sylvan Hall,  
Geo. Wallcut.

John Hancock  
Joseph Hewes,  
John Penn

Edward Rutledge.

Thos. Heyward Jr.  
Thos. Lynch Jr.  
Arthur Middleton

Samuel Chase  
Wm. Paro  
Thos. Stone  
George Carroll of Carrollton

George Wythe  
Richard Henry Lee  
Wm. Jefferson  
Wm. Harrison  
Thos. Nelson Jr.  
Francis Lightfoot Lee  
Carver Braxton

John Hancock  
John Morison  
Benj. Franklin  
John Morison  
Geo. Taylor  
James Wilson  
Wm. Fitz

Caspar Wadsworth  
Wm. Smith  
Thos. M. Dray

John Jay  
Phil. Livingston  
Joan Lewis  
Lewis Morris

Josh. Stockton  
Geo. Witherspoon  
Trist. B. Hopkinson  
John Hart  
Abra. Clark

Josiah Bartlett  
M<sup>rs</sup> Mapple  
Sam. Adams  
John Adams  
Robt. Treat Paine  
Wm. Gorry

Step. Hopkins  
William Ellery  
Roger Sherman  
John W. Huntington  
M<sup>rs</sup> Williams  
Oliver Wolcott  
Healthew Thorpe



IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776

*The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,*

*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.*

*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 harrass 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 compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & 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 Brittish 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.*

### Signers of the Declaration

<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Virginia</b>	<b>New Jersey</b>
Button Gwinnett	George Wythe	Richard Stockton
Lyman Hall	Richard Henry Lee	John Witherspoon
George Walton	Thomas Jefferson	Francis Hopkinson
	Benjamin Harrison	John Hart
<b>North Carolina</b>	Thomas Nelson, Jr.	Abraham Clark
William Hooper	Francis Lightfoot Lee	
Joseph Hewes	Carter Braxton	<b>New Hampshire</b>
John Penn		Josiah Bartlett
	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	William Whipple
<b>South Carolina</b>	Robert Morris**	Matthew Thornton
Edward Rutledge	Benjamin Rush	
Thomas Heyward, Jr.	Benjamin Franklin*	<b>Rhode Island</b>
Thomas Lynch, Jr.	John Morton	Stephen Hopkins
Arthur Middleton	George Clymer*	William Ellery
	James Smith	
<b>Massachusetts</b>	George Taylor	<b>Connecticut</b>
John Hancock	James Wilson*	Roger Sherman**
Samuel Adams	George Ross	Samuel Huntington
John Adams		William Willams
Robert Treat Paine	<b>Delaware</b>	Oliver Wolcott
Elbridge Gerry	Caesar Rodney	
	George Read*	*Signed both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution
<b>Maryland</b>	Thomas McKean	
Samuel Chase		
William Paca	<b>New York</b>	**Signed the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, and the U.S. Constitution
Thomas Stone	William Floyd	
Charles Carroll of Carrollton	Philip Livingston	
	Francis Lewis	
	Lewis Morris	



*The Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, known collectively as the Charters of Freedom, are on permanent display in the Rotunda of the National Archives Building in Washington, DC.*



## Charters of Freedom

The Declaration of Independence (1776), the U.S. Constitution (1787), and the Bill of Rights (1791) are called “The Charters of Freedom.” They are different documents, written at different times, but they all express the core ideals of liberty, equality, and justice. Everyone has certain fundamental rights that governments are created to protect.

All three documents are distinct, each serving a unique purpose. The Declaration declared freedom. The Constitution organized that freedom into a functioning government. The Bill of Rights ensured that freedom would be protected for every citizen. The Declaration stands on its own—it has never been amended—while the Constitution has been amended 27 times. The first ten amendments of the Constitution are collectively known as the Bill of Rights.

Despite these similarities and differences, the three are linked in the minds of Americans because they represent what is best about America. All create a nation where the people are free, the government is limited, and the rule of law defends everyone’s rights. The liberties articulated in the Declaration became enforceable through the rules and laws established in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The *Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom* is the permanent home of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights, located in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. These historic documents are displayed in a cathedral-like, dimly lit rotunda, which is open to the public. A visit can be both a moving and educational experience, deepening your appreciation for the principles that continue to guide American society.

## Giving Back to Your Community

In the spirit of America’s 250th anniversary, this milestone invites students not just to celebrate history, but to live out the ideals of the Declaration of Independence: participation, service, and unity. Join people across the country in giving back to recognize this important milestone. Whether you are volunteering for the first time or doing more than before, your efforts matter. Together, we can continue America’s tradition of service and inspire a culture of giving for years to come.

You can make a difference by helping veterans and military families, restoring nature trails, participating in food drives, picking up litter, or engaging in other activities. There is a way for everyone to contribute. Whether you volunteer for a day, a month, or all year, your effort will support a national movement of service and connection. Encourage your school and

classmates to take on the “250 Hours for 250 Years” Challenge. Students log community service hours through July 4, 2026, and receive recognition for their civic impact.

## What Can We Learn Today

Studying our founding documents together reminds us that history can unite us. This anniversary is not just a time to reflect on the past; it is also an opportunity to look ahead as one nation. When we approach learning with curiosity instead of confrontation, we replace division with understanding and foster empathy across generations. This anniversary serves as a reminder that liberty is not a gift passed down; it is a responsibility we carry forward.

The Declaration stated that “all men are created equal,” but not everyone in 1776 was treated equally. Enslaved Africans, Native Americans, women, and many poor men lacked rights and freedoms. Despite this, the Declaration became a promise that Americans would build upon. It introduced the idea that governments get their power from the people, which became the basis for the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Over time, Americans expanded the idea of equality through amendments and civil rights movements. Leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Martin Luther King Jr. used the Declaration as a guide for what the nation should strive for.

Our Declaration of Independence and the Constitution that followed have guided our country and defined us as a nation of laws. When our democracy is tested, we draw strength from the Constitution, which serves as the foundation for creating a more equal and just society for all citizens. American democracy requires our constant care, vigilance, and active participation to shape the future of our nation.

## America 250 Commission

The *U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission* was established by Congress in 2016 to plan and coordinate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This nonpartisan commission consists of 16 private citizens, 4 U.S. Representatives, 4 Senators, and 12 members from all three branches of the federal government, including independent agencies. Former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and Former First Ladies Laura Bush and Michelle Obama serve as Honorary National Co-Chairs, and the effort is supported by the extensive bipartisan Congressional Caucus.

The Commission aims to inspire Americans to reflect on the nation’s past, strengthen their love for the country, and renew their commitment to the ideals of democracy through programs designed to educate, engage, and unite us as a nation. You can visit [america250.org](http://america250.org) to see the events happening in your state.



## QUESTIONS

**THE DECLARATION OR CONSTITUTION?** To identify the purpose and powers of the Declaration (D) and Constitution (C), put an "X" in the column that applies to the detail listed.

	Document Details	D	C
1.	Mainly written by Thomas Jefferson		
2.	Rallied support for the American Revolution		
3.	Established the framework of government		
4.	Is the Supreme Law of the Land		
5.	Signed by members of the Continental Congress		
6.	Listed grievances against King George		
7.	Includes 27 Amendments		
8.	Starts with "We the People...."		
9.	Declared the U.S. as an independent nation		
10.	Main author was James Madison		

**THE DECLARATION BY THE NUMBERS.** Choose the correct number from the bank that matches the statement.

#	Number Bank: 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 27, 56, 250
	Number of committee members drafted Declaration
	Celebration is the result of this anniversary
	Number of parts in the Declaration
	Grievances against the King
	Number of signers of the Declaration
	Number of original colonies
	Signed both the Declaration and Constitution
	Amendments in the Bill of Rights

**VOCABULARY MATCH** - Identify the terms used in the Declaration of Independence, matching the statement in Section A with the vocabulary word in Section B.

## A

- \_\_\_ 1. Fix a wrong or make things fair again.  
 \_\_\_ 2. Not being able to be taken away or surrendered.  
 \_\_\_ 3. Cruel and harsh government or rule.  
 \_\_\_ 4. Good judgement and caution.  
 \_\_\_ 5. Loyalty or commitment to a cause or government.  
 \_\_\_ 6. Taking power or rights by force.  
 \_\_\_ 7. A single ruler holds absolute or unchecked power.  
 \_\_\_ 8. Failing to fulfill a responsibility.  
 \_\_\_ 9. The right to legal authority to make & enforce laws.

## B

- a. tyranny      b. allegiance      c. usurpation  
 d. despotism      e. unalienable      f. prudence  
 g. abdicate      h. redress      i. jurisdiction

## SHORT ANSWER

**READ THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.**

After reading the full text of the Declaration carefully, answer the sections below to confirm understanding of the main ideas and structure.

List 3 Key Phrases that stand out to you

1	
2	
3	

List 3 Grievances against the King

1	
2	
3	

Give 3 Powers of the new, free states

1	
2	
3	

**YOUR BIRTHDAY WISH TO THE UNITED STATES.**

As we honor the 250th Anniversary, reflect on its history, achievements, and hopes for the future.

1. What are you thankful for or proud of about America? Please share specific examples or experiences that reflect your pride.

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2. What are your hopes for our future, and in what ways do you believe America can improve?

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