

★The Declaration of Independence★

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is for students to develop investigative skills and to identify the reasons our American forefathers issued the Declaration of Independence.

Objective

The student will investigate and identify the reasons the American colonists issued the Declaration of Independence.

Theme - Freedom

The Declaration of Independence (1776) was written by colonists seeking a way of communicating to the world their interest in being free.

Core Knowledge

Grade 2 - Amer Hist & Geog. Sec V: Immigration & Citizenship. People come to America from many lands to find freedom. America is a land of opportunity, but citizens have responsibilities as well as rights.

Grade 4 - Amer Hist & Geog. Sec I: The American Revolution. C. The Revolution. What caused the colonists to break away and become independent nations? What does the Declaration of Independence say about natural rights of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness"? Sec II: Making a Constitutional Government. A.

Main Ideas behind the Declaration of Independence. The proposition that "All Men are Created Equal" is reflected in the Declaration.

Grade 6 - Amer Hist & Geog. Sec I: Immigration. What ideas does the Declaration of Independence present about why people would leave their country?

Time

45 minutes

Materials

- ★ Radio Theatre Script
- ★ "Context of the Declaration of Independence" reading
- ★ Assessment Tool, KWL Chart
- ★ John Trumbull painting "Declaration of Independence"
- ★ Preamble Text & Puzzle
- ★ Declaration of Independence Document & Text Scramble
- ★ Website - www.americanheritage.org

Preparation

- ★ Copy materials/handouts.
- ★ Teacher prepares copies and/or transparency of the Trumbull painting.
- ★ Teacher has table, chairs, and tablecloth available for students to pose as the men in the painting.

Focus

Ask students why Americans celebrate every 4th of July. (The Declaration of Independence was adopted on this day.)

Activity

1. **We Got To Get Independence.** Perform radio show, *We got to get independence!* Discuss the problems/restrictions the colonists likely experienced under the King George III and the British government, what they probably thought/felt, and why they sought/declared independence. Have students journal about what they might have thought/felt in the same situation and what they might have done.

2. Context of Our Declaration of Independence. Read and discuss “Context of our Declaration of Independence” reading. The true-false assessment tool can be used as a pre- or post-reading exercise, a discussion stimulus, or an assessment tool for the reading and radio show. Discuss the situation that prompted the colonists to seek independence. (See Links page on www.americanheritage.org for additional resources on the Declaration.)

3. The Declaration in Visual Art. Show the class the Trumbull painting. Have them look at it carefully for one minute without talking. Then, ask them what they see. You might ask questions about the people. Ask them to name colors they see and notice light, shadow, and tone. Have students describe the room and furniture. Ask them what they think is happening and who is in charge (the boss). Discuss the significance of the event in the painting. Who is the artist? When was it painted? Discuss why the artist might have painted this picture. How does it make the students feel and think about the event? (see Links page on www.americanheritage.org for additional resources on American art.)

4. Preamble Text & Puzzle. Use as introduction to the Declaration of Independence and as a language arts/vocabulary exercise. Discuss the importance of the Preamble and what it says and means about the American colonists’ beliefs and principles. Complete KWL chart as post-reading and/or pre-reading preparation for the rest of the Declaration primary document.

5. Declaration of Independence Primary Document & Text Scramble. Use as a reading passage/research tool. The Text Scramble can be copied, cut, and stored in baggies. As a reading strategy, have students individually or in groups piece together the text scramble in the right order. Each group can also take a different excerpt from the document and read, research, and discuss its meaning. Students share with the rest of the class the meaning and importance of that specific part of the Declaration.

Discuss the three main sections of the Declaration of Independence:

- ★ Basic human rights and the purpose of government
- ★ Wrongs done by the King
- ★ Declaration of Independence by the colonies

5. Research Assignments. The teacher or students may offer suggestions for individual or cooperative group projects.

Closure

Review the three parts of the Declaration of Independence and the important ideas included in the opening passage. Discuss the ultimate effect of the Declaration. Also discuss how relations between the the U. S. and England are different today and/or have changed.

Assessment

Students will write a paragraph or journal entry explaining why the God-given rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are important to people today.



Radio Theatre Script: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

*****This is a radio theatre. The characters are set in front of real or imagined microphones. They can sit or stand. The inflection of their voices along with the script will tell the story. The title, author, and list of characters are introduced to the audience by the narrator.***

List of Characters:

Narrator

John Hancock

Samuel Adams

Chorus of 10 students or more

Narrator: This event is set in Boston, in the colony of Massachusetts, several years before 1776. This fictional play reflects a conversation that could have taken place between two good friends and American patriots, John Hancock and Samuel Adams. Their conversation reveals some of the true reasons why the American colonists decided to declare their independence.

Samuel Adams: I've been reading over the Navigation Acts. Did you know it means that all goods that come in to or go out of our colony have to be inspected by the British and transported on their ships? We can't even ship our own goods.

John Hancock: It's so the British can make money from the American colonies.

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

Samuel Adams: And did you know that the British government won't allow us to trade with other countries without British permission and regulation?

John Hancock: That will greatly hinder the colonies' success.

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

Samuel Adams: It also says that we're not allowed to manufacture products in our colonies that are already made in Britain. We have to buy from them.

John Hancock: Where will we get the money to pay for those things?

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

John Hancock: I've been reading over the Stamp Act. Did you know the British government could tax us fifty-five ways from this act alone?

Samuel Adams: The colonists did not agree to it.

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

John Hancock: When I graduated from college, they charged a tax on my diploma. And when a friend wrote his will, there was a tax on that too. They put taxes on every kind of document!

Samuel Adams: Why don't they let us make our own laws?

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

John Hancock: Do you know about his other acts? Now the British are stationed at all our ports, and they have search warrants to make sure we don't ship anything without their permission. We can't get fair trials if we go to their courts about it.

Samuel Adams: Will they ever learn how much we value liberty?

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

John Hancock: I'm not buying or drinking that tea shipped to the colonies from one of their companies. There's a tax on it, too! They think we won't notice, and they just want to control our colony.

Samuel Adams: I know what to do. Do tea leaves mix with salt water?

John Hancock: What are you planning?

Samuel Adams: There's tea waiting to be unloaded on the ships in Boston harbor. Let's disguise ourselves tonight and dump it overboard!

John Hancock: The fewer people who know the better.

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

Samuel Adams: The king is sending his redcoat soldiers over here. Can you believe his Intolerable Acts? He has closed our ports until the tea is paid for. He forbids us from getting together in town meetings. And he's using our buildings to house his soldiers.

John Hancock: Intolerable!

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

John Hancock: The king said I was a dangerous man. He put a price on my head, dead or alive. Now, I have to hide!

Samuel Adams: Me too!

Chorus: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

Samuel Adams: Let's get together with our friends and other colonists and declare our independence as a country. If we have to, we'll fight!

All: WE GOT TO GET INDEPENDENCE!

The Context of Our Declaration of Independence

At one time, the American colonies belonged to the King of England. The British government had taken a lot of the Americans' money for taxes. They would not let them buy and sell things with other countries. The king said that his soldiers could live in the buildings and homes of the American colonists. There could be little protests because the judges and government officials were appointed and paid by the king.

Many people in America were tired of all the problems with the British government and king, so their leaders or delegates met to decide what to do. These leaders were rich plantation owners, business men, and ordinary citizens such as Samuel Adams. After the first meeting, a list of pleas were sent to the king, but he refused to make changes. The American leaders decided that they wanted to be independent, or free, from the king and the British government. At their next meeting, they chose Thomas Jefferson and some other men to write a paper to tell the world about how they wanted to be free to make their own decisions in their own nation. The colonists' leaders voted to accept what Jefferson had written and signed their names on the paper.

John Hancock, the presiding delegate, or leading man, at both meetings was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence. The story is that Hancock made his signature big and bold because he wanted the king to be able to read it without the aid of eyeglasses. Hancock's signature became so famous that even today when someone asks for a person's signature, he or she sometimes says, "Put your John Hancock there."

After the other delegates signed the Declaration, copies were made so that all the people could read it. The Declaration said that all men were created equal and that God gives all people important things like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration also listed the reasons why the American people were mad at the king and British government. Lastly, the Declaration said that the people were starting their own country called the United States of America.

All of the fifty-six men who signed the Declaration of Independence knew that the king would not let them be free without a fight. Many of them would be hurt or killed in the fighting. The colonists knew that if the British won, all who signed the Declaration would go to jail or maybe even hanged. Nine of the signers died because of the fighting. Twelve of them had their homes destroyed. These men and other Americans fought hard and won the war for independence. Now every year on the 4th of July, we remember the Declaration of Independence and the brave men who fought so that we could be free.

Declaration of Independence

Assessment Tool

Instructions: This is an assessment tool for the reading passage entitled, “The Context of Our Declaration of Independence.” Write T for each true statement and F for each false statement.

- ____ 1. The King of England totally owned the American colonies.
- ____ 2. In the pre-Revolutionary American colonies, a new needle and spool of sewing thread had to be bought from a British company.
- ____ 3. In the pre-Revolutionary American colonies, all trade was open and free.
- ____ 4. Thomas Jefferson was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence.
- ____ 5. All delegates or leaders of the American colonists were rich businessmen.
- ____ 6. John Hancock loved the British and their king.
- ____ 7. Fifty-six men and women signed the Declaration of Independence.
- ____ 8. On the 5th of July every year, we celebrate our independence.
- ____ 9. According to the British king, all 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence committed treason.
- ____ 10. A British soldier in pre-Revolutionary War time could occupy your home.
- ____ 11. Tyranny or injustice caused the colonists to unite and declare their freedom.

Answers: 1=T, 2=T, 3=F, 4=F, 5=F, 6=F, 7=F, 8=F, 9=T, 10=T, 11=T

★ The Declaration of Independence ★



United States Capitol, Washington DC, United States

This painting by John Trumbull, entitled *Declaration of Independence* (1817), commemorates the signers of the Declaration of Independence, showing them convening in what is today known as Independence Hall. It portrays the committee that drafted the document--John Adams (standing left center), Roger Sherman, Thomas Jefferson (presenting the document), and Benjamin Franklin--standing before John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, to present the document. The painting also depicts 42 of the 56 signers and five other patriots. The painting currently hangs in the Rotunda of the U. S. Capitol Building. It is based on a smaller depiction of the same scene, held at Yale University. The painting can also be found on the back of the U. S. \$2 bill.

THE OPENING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution in the Continental Congress that said, “These United colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.” A committee of five men was selected to write a formal declaration explaining the reasons for independence. One of these men, Thomas Jefferson, was the primary

author of the Declaration of Independence that was adopted on July 4, 1776. The following passage from the beginning of the Declaration of Independence, called the Preamble, includes two important beliefs. First, all men are created equal with basic rights given to them by God, and second, men set up government to protect their rights and may change the government if it does not respect these rights.

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.

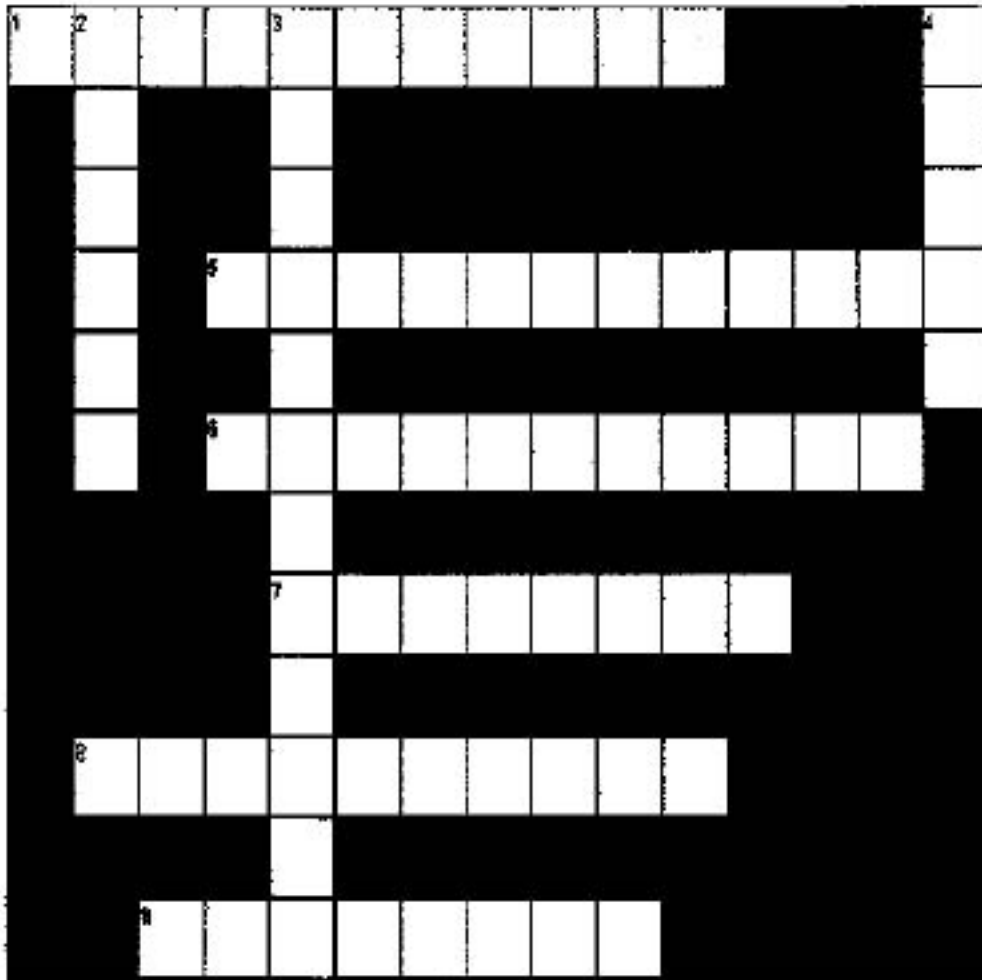
Complete the following on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Define the ten bold words in the passage.
2. According to the Declaration, what are the three rights given by God to all people? What do you think these rights mean?
3. What does Jefferson say the people should do when the government becomes destructive of their rights?
4. The Declaration of Independence has been called the “birth certificate of the United States.” What do you think this statement means?

K-W-L Chart

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

Preamble Puzzle

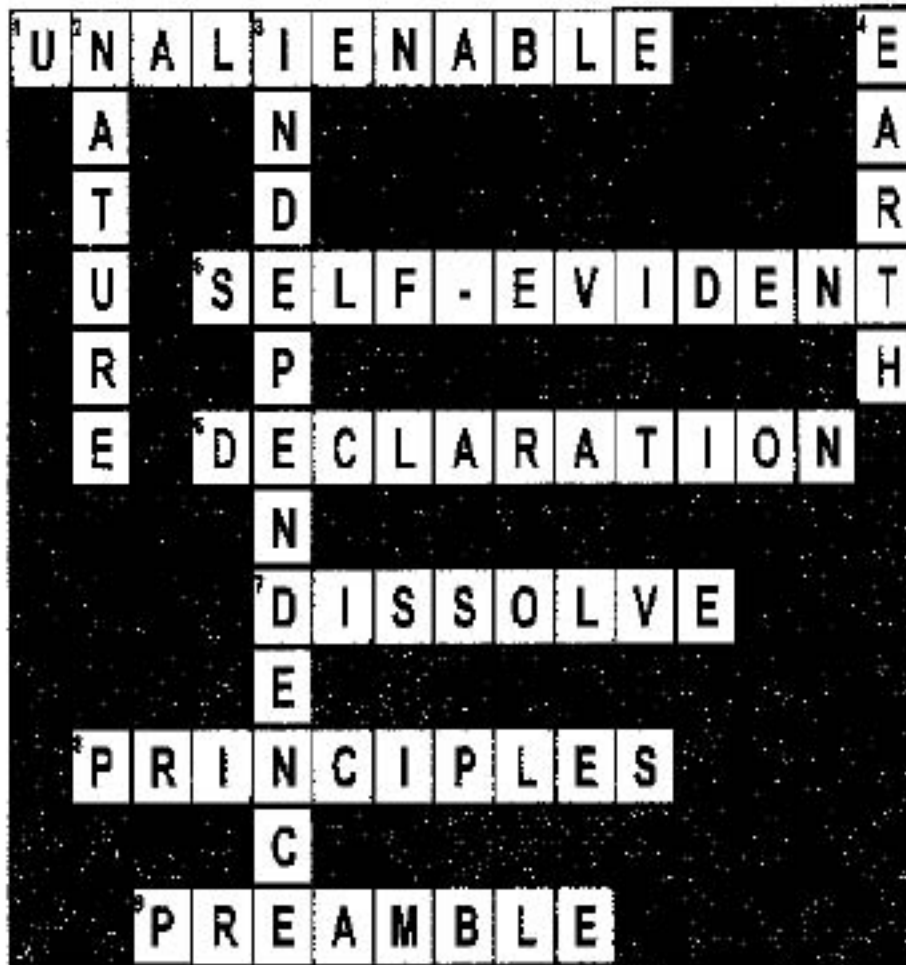


ACROSS	DOWN
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- 1. not surrendered
- 5. obvious
- 6. proclaim
- 7. terminate
- 8. code of conduct
- 9. an introduction or opening

- 2. basic part of people
- 3. self-reliance
- 4. our planet

Preamble Puzzle



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- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
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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 shown 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 meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their migration 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 offenses;

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring 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, burned 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 endeavored 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.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776 THE UNANIMOUS DECLARATION OF THE THIRTEEN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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