

# The War for Independence

*Revolution and the New  
Nation (1754–1815)*



Tea and taxation

**The Revolutionary War**

Independence

## Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

**Icons:** For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn about the events leading up to the Declaration of Independence and be able to answer these key questions:

- Who won the early battles of the Revolutionary War? Why did they occur?
- Why did the colonies declare independence?
- Who supported and who opposed the Revolution in both the colonies and Britain?



The First Continental Congress proved that the colonies were united in their desire for better treatment and that they were willing to campaign for it together.



The Coercive Acts demonstrated how harshly parliament reacted to acts of colonial rebellion. Some worried that further retributions and attempts to regain control were on the way.

Some colonies began military preparations by raising the militia and the **minutemen**, and stockpiling firearms and gunpowder.

What effects do you think this might have had?



The heightened tension between the colonial militia and the Red Coats came to a head in mid-April 1775.

Watch this animation to find out more about some of the early battles of the Revolutionary War.

Press **start** to begin.

start



Who was the most successful in these early battles?

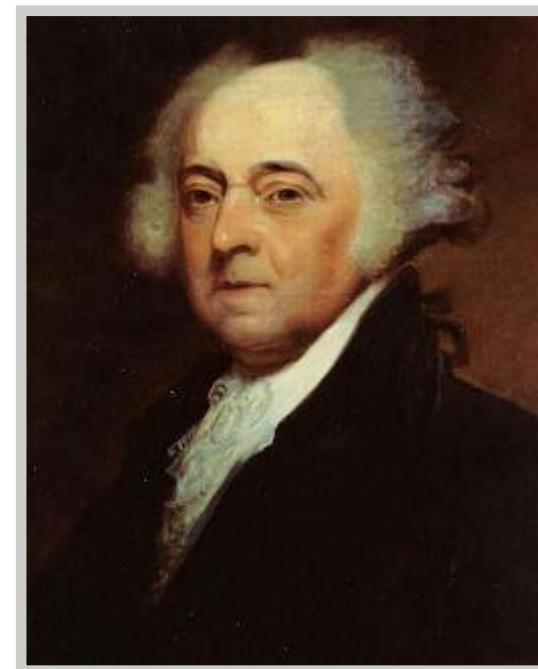


The **Second Continental Congress** met in Philadelphia in May 1775, and now all 13 colonies were represented.

Much debate ensued on what steps should be taken next. John Adams, the delegate for Massachusetts, advocated for:

- **independence**
- **self-government** in each colony
- the minutemen around Boston to become the **Continental Army**.

Only the Continental Army suggestion was agreed upon and **George Washington** was named commander.



Why do you think the colonists were divided?



Although opinions in the Second Continental Congress were divided, many delegates advocated reconciliation with Britain.

Therefore, in July 1775, the Congress adopted the **Olive Branch Petition**, which they later sent to the king.



John Dickinson wrote the petition in an attempt to prevent war. Instead of independence, the petition affirmed the loyalty of the colonists and entreated the king to stop further conflicts.

The king rejected the petition.

Why did this help the more radical colonists?



# Patriot or Loyalist?



The American colonists soon became divided over whether to support rebellion, the **Patriots**, or to maintain loyalty to the Crown, the **Loyalists**.

The division between Patriots and Loyalists was not a clear one.

Despite this, many Patriots tended to be laborers, artisans, merchants or elected officials.

Conversely, many Loyalists were members of the elite or landed class.



What affected which side people chose to take?





Even Britain was divided over the American issue. Some British subjects sympathized and understood the colonists' complaints. One such sympathizer, Isaac Barré, had felt so strongly that he had argued against the Stamp Act in parliament. Read the following account. Then press on the highlighted text to explain the arguments being used by both sides in your own words.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**



Why did other British subjects oppose the colonists?



Political theorists often used cartoons and leaflets to publicize their ideas about how the colonies should respond to Britain.

One such publication was a popular pamphlet called **Common Sense**.

Read this passage about the pamphlet and select the correct word to fill each blank.

Press **start** to begin.

start





The deteriorating relations between the 13 colonies and Britain during the first half of 1776 culminated in Congress signing the **Declaration of Independence** on July 4, 1776.

A group of congressmen developed the ideas behind the document, which was drafted by **Thomas Jefferson**.

Whereas before, colonists argued for fair treatment under British law, the Declaration based its case on John Locke's concept of "natural rights" and it makes an appeal to the world at large.





# The Declaration of Independence



The Declaration of Independence is an important and powerful legal document, detailing the reasons why the 13 colonies wanted to separate from Britain. Watch this animation to read the declaration in full and to find out more about the arguments and language it uses. Press **start** to begin.

start



Do you think Paine influenced this document?



# Beyond the Declaration



board  
works

The Declaration of Independence was a crucial turning point in the Revolutionary War.

In signing the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress demonstrated that the 13 colonies were unanimous in their rejection of the British system of government. Yet many feared that the rebellion could not last against the strength of an entire empire.



Do you think the Declaration of Independence did enough to rally support behind the Patriot cause?