



Declaring Our Independence

By Phyllis Naegeli

France and England were at war for many years trying to gain control of the world. The war had taken place from India to America. When it all finally ended, King George was victorious, but the war had been costly. He looked to the American colonies to raise the money needed to pay his war **debts**.

King George decreed that the colonies must purchase all manufactured goods from England and heavy taxes were placed on the items they bought. The **colonists** were enraged and began **smuggling** goods from other countries. When the king heard of this, he sent soldiers to search homes looking for these smuggled items. The cries of "taxation without representation" and "unlawful searches" began to echo through the American colonies.

Up until this time, the thirteen colonies each had its own system of self-government. They lived under British rule and were **loyal** to the king. They traded with each other, England, and countries around the world. There were bustling cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. With the new tyranny from England, things started to change. The colonies began to talk to each other about the **oppression** from England. They began to be united with the purpose of ending the tyranny. When the king ordered the colonies to purchase tax stamps for their newspapers and official papers, the tension between England and America escalated.

The king finally listened to the colonies and removed the taxes from everything but tea. However, he also instituted the **Tea Act**, which stated tea could only be bought and sold through the British East India Company. This would put colonial tea companies out of business. Again, the colonists were furious. When ships loaded with tea arrived in Boston Harbor, men dressed up as Indians and threw the tea overboard. This act, known as **The Boston Tea Party**, infuriated King George. He decided to force the colonists to behave and sent British ships and soldiers to Boston. The British ships blockaded the harbor, and the soldiers surrounded Boston to cut the city off from the rest of the colonies. The king wanted to use Boston as an example to the other colonists. His desire was for them to **submit** out of fear. Instead, the colonists came to the aid of Boston and sent supplies from all over America. The colonists refused to be **bullied** and defied the British wherever they could.

In September of 1774, delegates from the states attended the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia to discuss the situation with England. They wrote a list of **grievances** and sent them to King George. They decided to end all trade with England. If the king would not listen to them and nothing changed, they agreed to meet again on May 10, 1775. When King George did not reply, the **resistance** became **rebellion**.

On the evening of April 18, 1775, Paul Revere made his famous midnight ride to warn the colonists of the advancing British army. In the early hours of April 19, British soldiers met a group of **Minutemen** at the **Lexington Green**. It was here that "the shot heard round the world" was fired, beginning the **American Revolution**. The British moved on to Concord and encountered more resistance. After a fierce battle, the British soldiers were forced back to Boston.

The colonial militia was a rag-tag group of farmers and tradesmen with no training. They had heart and were determined, but they needed military leadership to turn them into a fighting force. They found what they needed in George Washington. Washington agreed to take control of the army, trained them, and turned them into a force that was able to drive the British from Boston. By this time, **sporadic** fighting between other colonies and British troops had sprung up. King George needed to send many more soldiers to crush the rebellion. However, dealing with individual colonies presented a **daunting** task to the British king.

Late in 1775, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. **Patriot** leaders - such as John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and John Adams from Massachusetts; and Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee from Virginia - called for independence from England. Soon, the plea for independence rang through the thirteen colonies. All over America, states held meetings to vote for independence. Each state sent the results to their representative at the Congress. "Independence" was their declaration.

Thomas Jefferson was chosen to draft the official document. After two weeks, he returned to Philadelphia with "The Declaration of Independence." On July 4, 1776, after three weeks of debate, it was approved. On July

Name _____



Date _____

8, the declaration was read to the people in Philadelphia. The Liberty Bell rang from the tower of Independence Hall declaring America an independent nation.

The Declaration of Independence is an important document that is used around the world as a standard for **freedom**. Its seven basic **tenets** are:

- 1) All men are created equal.
- 2) All men are born with certain rights that cannot be taken away.
- 3) Some of the rights men have are the right to life, liberty, and to pursue being happy.
- 4) Governments are formed to protect these rights.
- 5) Governments are to serve the people. The people give the government their powers.
- 6) If a government does not protect its people's rights, the people can and must change the government.
- 7) The people reserve the right to form new governments that will protect their rights.

As justification for becoming independent, Jefferson outlined the tyrannical acts King George performed in the remainder of the declaration.

The American Revolution was finally over in September of 1783. With the signing of the **Treaty of Paris**, Britain finally recognized the United States of America as a free, independent nation. The Declaration of Independence was the beginning of the United States of America we know today.

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Questions

1. How did the war between France and England cause problems for the American colonies?

- _____ 2. What did the colonies do to get the manufactured goods they wanted?

- A. They made them in America.
- B. They smuggled them in from other countries.
- C. They traded with the Native Americans.
- D. All of the above

- _____ 3. When King George lifted most of the taxes, he left one in place. What was the tax he continued?

- A. the coffee tax
- B. the sugar tax
- C. the tea tax
- D. the tax stamp

Name _____



Date _____

4. Which major event in history was brought on by the Tea Act?

_____ 5. Where was the "shot heard round the world" fired?

- A. Concord, MA
- B. Boston, MA
- C. Lexington, MA
- D. Philadelphia, PA

6. When was the "Declaration of Independence" read to the people?

7. List two of the seven tenets found in the Declaration.

_____ 8. The colonists submitted to the will of King George when he cut off Boston.

- A. True
- B. False

_____ 9. During the Second Continental Congress, the call for independence from England began.

- A. False
- B. True

Explain why you think the "Declaration of Independence" is still an important document today.

Name _____



Date _____

What are the seven basic tenets of the Declaration of Independence? Why are they still important today?

Do you think King George had the right to tax the colonists to pay for the war? Why or why not?

Name _____



Date _____

How did the Tea Act lead to the Boston Tea Party?

Write at least one paragraph about why you think it was difficult for the British to fight among the thirteen colonies.
