

An Independent Nation

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



Before the United States was a country, it was a group of English colonies. Until 1763, England didn't really bother the American colonists. The people handled their business the way they wanted. However, England had a lot of war debts to pay. Some of the money was owed because England had defended the colonies in the French and Indian War. Citizens who were living in England wanted taxes to be lowered. The king decided to take more control over the colonies to get the money to pay off the debts. He started a new tax for the colonies. After being left to make their own decisions for so long, some of the colonists did not want to give up control. They did not want to pay high taxes. They did not want to follow rules that didn't make sense to them. Colonists were not given a chance to participate in government decisions in England.

The colonists were divided. Loyalists wanted the colonies to stay part of England. Patriots wanted America to be **established** as an independent nation.

The Patriots decided that it was time to send a letter to the king. They wanted to make an official declaration, or statement, of **independence**. Thomas Jefferson wrote the group's ideas into a letter to King George III. Jefferson explained why the colonists believed they no longer had to listen to his authority. By signing the Declaration of Independence, the men were risking their lives if the colonies lost the war. They signed it anyway.

Fighting in the American Revolutionary War had already begun when Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. After the war was over, there was still work to do. The job of uniting 13 separate colonies into one nation had to be done. It was a difficult process with lots of compromises. In 1781 the **Constitution** was written to describe the rights and responsibilities of the new government and its people.

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What country did the American colonies belong to before the American Revolutionary War?

2) Why did King George III decided to take more control over the colonies than he had before?

3) Did all the colonists think that it was time to be independent from England? Explain.

4) Do you think you would have been willing to risk death by signing the declaration of independence? Why, or why not?

5) What are some rights and responsibilities you think citizens should have?
