

# *Decoding the*

**DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**



**AMERICAN  
VILLAGE**  
CITIZENSHIP TRUST™

# resource information

## **Standards:**

- ALCOS.2010.SS.2.1
  - Relate principles of American democracy to the founding of the nation
    - Recognizing basic principles of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the establishment of the three branches of government, and the Emancipation Proclamation.
- ALCOS.2010.SS.3.10
  - Recognize functions of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.
- ALCOS.2010.SS.5.8
  - Identify major events of the American Revolution, including the battles of Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Saratoga, and Yorktown.
    - Describing principles contained in the Declaration of Independence.

## **Objectives:**

- ALCOS.2010.SS.2.1
  - I can explain why the Declaration of Independence was created and its basic structure.
- ALCOS.2010.SS.3.10
  - I can explain the importance of the Declaration of Independence and its contents as well as the structure of the document.
- ALCOS.2010.SS.5.8
  - I can explain the importance of the Declaration of Independence and its contents as well as the structure of the document.

## **Background Information:**

- [National Parks Service - Declaration House](#)
- [National Archives - Declaration of Independence: A History](#)
- [National Archives - What does it say?](#)
- [Library of Congress - Jefferson's Rough Draft](#)

## **Suggested Reading:**

- For Adults
  - *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* - Pauline Maier
  - *The Pursuit of Happiness* - Jeffrey Rosen
- For Students
  - *What is the Declaration of Independence?* - Michael C. Harris
  - *The Declaration of Independence (A True Book: American History)* - Elaine Landau

# background information

The Declaration of Independence was passed on July 4, 1776 – a date we all know and many celebrate each year. It was the beginning of the United States of America and freedom from the reign of England. But where did the idea start? How did it come to fruition?

In 1754, the Seven Years War had made its way across the ocean. The North American front of the war is referred to as the French and Indian War. The war concluded in 1763 and became one of the first issues between the colonists and the British Crown. Taxes were set on the colonies in order to pay the massive debt from the French and Indian War. Many of the colonists responded in anger through the use of boycotts, protests, and written word. “No taxation without representation” became a battle cry. Through the years, the colonists wanted representation in Parliament and that was a request that was denied over and over again.

Tensions began to build even more in the 1770s with events like the Boston Massacre, Boston Tea Party, and Coercive Acts. April 18, 1775 was the tipping point. Riders left Boston to warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams in Lexington that the British Army was on its way to arrest them and to confiscate munitions in Concord. The British were met with resistance in Lexington, Massachusetts and the first shots of the war were fired on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775.

With the American Revolution in its early stages, the colonies sent delegates to Philadelphia in May 1775 for the Second Continental Congress. The Congress met for the duration of the war and disbanded in 1781. The initial hope was to create peace with England, but after almost a year, that hope was abandoned. In June 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced the Lee Resolutions, which called for independence from England. The Congress created the Committee of Five to draft an official call for independence. Dr. Benjamin Franklin, President Thomas Jefferson, President John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. Jefferson drafted this document between June 11 and June 28th. The document was then revised by both Adams and Franklin before being presented to Congress on July 2, 1776.

After a few more edits, the Declaration of Independence was approved on July 4, 1776. It is believed that the only signature that day was that of John Hancock. The rest of the signatures would be added in August with a few being collected over the next year.

King George III did not respond to the Declaration of Independence until October 31, 1776 and gave a brief remark to Parliament concerning the document. King George III is quoted as saying, “for daring and desperate is the spirit of those leaders, whose object has always been dominion and power, that they have now openly renounced all allegiance to the crown, and all political connection with this country.”

# lesson plan

## **Engage:**

- Pages 5-7
- Bell Ringer Options
  - Writing - What do you think America would be like if the Founders had never declared independence?
  - Art - Draw a picture of what you think the room looked like during the first reading of the Declaration of Independence.
  - STEM - Build a model of Independence Hall using assorted materials.

## **Explore:**

- Pages 8-11
- Primary Source
  - Take a look at the Declaration of Independence and have students annotate the text.
    - This can be done individually, in small groups, or whole group.
    - 4 pages are provided with the whole document and a section for annotation.
      - Transcript - <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

## **Explain:**

- Pages 12-16
- Discussion
  - Graphic Organizer & Interactive Notebook Foldable Provided

## **Elaborate:**

- Pages 17-21
- Using the activity provided, students will “translate” the document into modern terms.
  - Matching Version
  - Annotation Version

## **Evaluate:**

- Pages 22-23
- 5 Question Quiz
  - Fill in the Blank
  - Multiple Choice

# Bell Ringer

What do you think America would be like if the Founders had never declared independence?

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# Bell Ringer

Draw a picture of what you think the room looked like during the first reading of the Declaration of Independence.

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Draw a picture of what you think the room looked like during the first reading of the Declaration of Independence.

# Bell Ringer

Build a model of Independence Hall using assorted materials.

What materials do you need?

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Sketch your plan here. →



# Bell Ringer

Build a model of Independence Hall using assorted materials.

What materials do you need?

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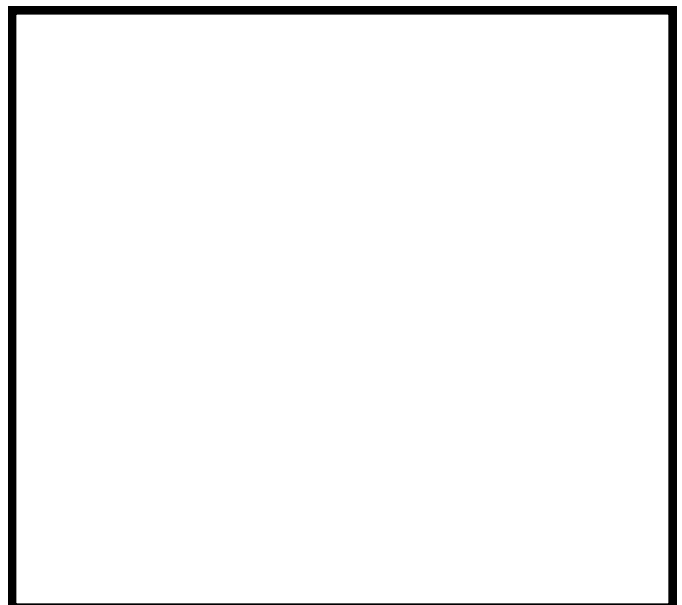
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Sketch your plan here. →



# Declaration of Independence

"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."

Blank lined area for writing.



# Declaration of Independence

“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:”

Large empty rectangular box with horizontal lines, intended for student responses or notes.





# Interactive Notebook Graphic Organizer

Directions: Cut the large envelope out first. Put glue on the edges so that a pocket is created inside of notebook. The smaller rectangles can be stored inside the pocket.

## The Declaration of Independence

### SECTION 1: PREAMBLE

“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.”

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## SECTION 2: DECLARATION OF NATURAL RIGHTS

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.

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## SECTION 4: RESOLUTION OF INDEPENDENCE

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.

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# SECTION 3: LIST OF GRIEVANCES

There are 27 total grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence.

What is a grievance?

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What were some of the grievances listed?

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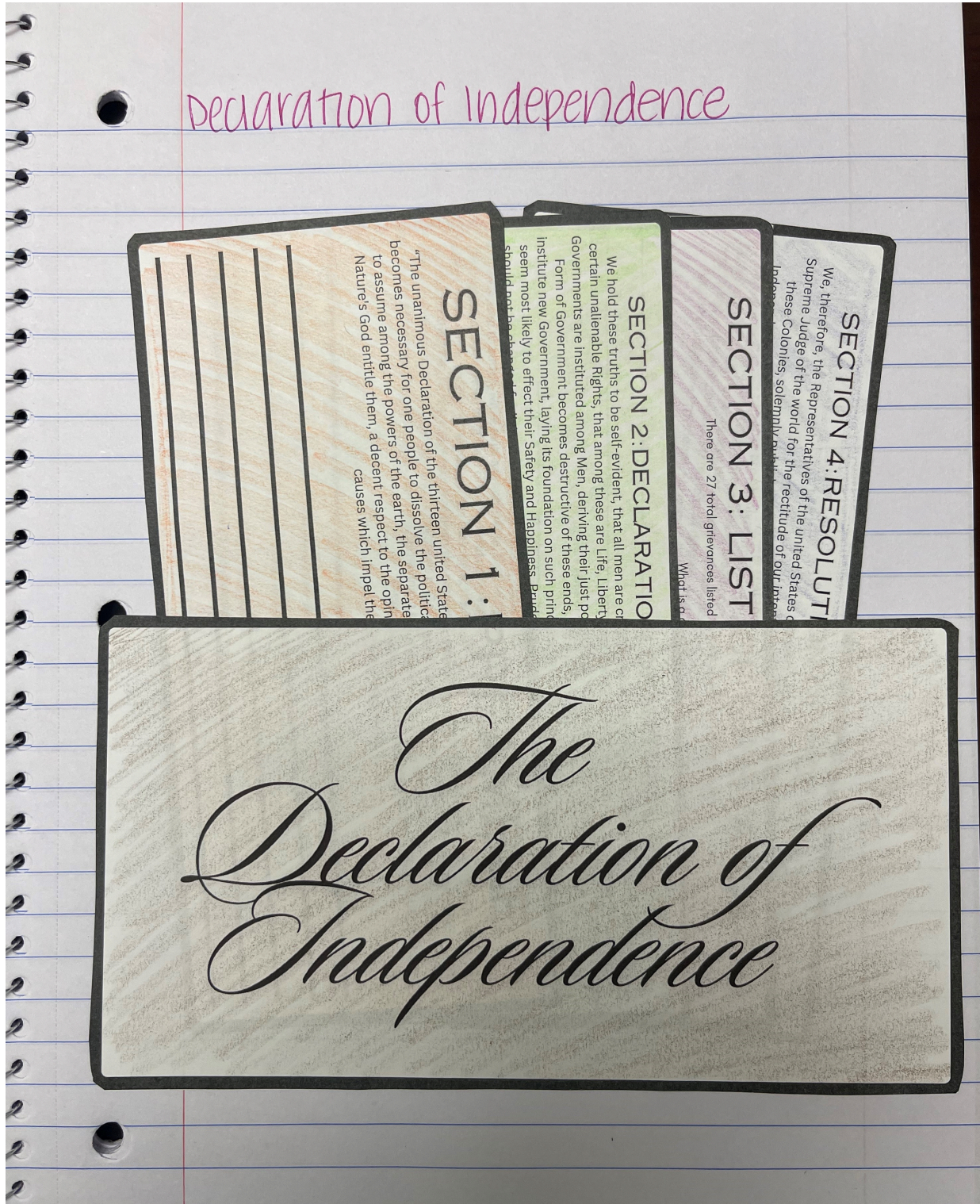
What were some of the grievances listed?

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# Interactive Notebook Graphic Organizer Sample



# The Declaration of Independence

What was the purpose of the Declaration of Independence?

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## Preamble

## Declaration of Natural Rights

## List of Grievances

## Resolution of Independence



# Decoding the Declaration

Match the modern words to the original text from the Declaration of Independence.

- |          |  |  |
|----------|--|--|
| 1. _____ | "...when in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another..."   | A. For sheltering his troops in our homes without permission.  |
| 2. _____ | "...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."  | B. To show that we respect everyone, we should explain why we need to go our separate ways.  |
| 3. _____ | "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."   | C. If a government keeps mistreating people and trying to control them completely, it's not only their right but their duty to get rid of that government and set up a new one to keep them safe |
| 4. _____ | "...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..."   | D. Sometimes, when things change, one group of people might need to break away from whom they were connected to.   |
| 5. _____ | "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." | E. If a government isn't doing its job and making things worse, people have the right to change it or start a new one.   |
| 6. _____ | "He has refused his Assent to Laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good."  | F. He has stolen from our ships, damaged our lands, burned our towns, and caused harm to our people.   |
| 7. _____ | "He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures."  | G. He has said no to laws that would be good for everyone  |
| 8. _____ | "For Quartering large bodies on us without our Consent:..."  | H. Everyone has rights given by God that cannot be taken away.   |
| 9. _____ | "He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people."   | I. The military has been present in our towns even in times of peace without our permission.   |

# Decoding the Declaration

Match the modern words to the original text from the Declaration of Independence.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ "Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury."

J. These colonies are free and independent from England.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ "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."

K. With the separation from England, these independent states can start wars, create peace, build relationships with other countries, create trade routes, and do whatever is best for these states.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ "...That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States..."

L. The relationship between the colonies and Great Britain has now been destroyed.

13. \_\_\_\_\_ "all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved..."

M. Our requests to him have been denied and we received unfair treatment.

14. \_\_\_\_\_ "...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."

N. It is time to go our separate ways and be friends in times of peace and enemies in times of war.

# Decoding the Declaration Answer Key

1. D
2. B
3. H
4. E
5. C
6. G
7. I
8. A
9. F
10. M
11. N
12. J
13. L
14. K





# Decoding the Declaration Quiz

What are the four sections of the Declaration of Independence?

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What is a grievance?

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What are the some of the reasons that the colonists wanted to separate from England?

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Who was on the Committee of Five and wrote the Declaration of Independence?

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Where did the Continental Congress meet to approve the Declaration of Independence?

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# Decoding the Declaration Quiz

What are the four sections of the Declaration of Independence?

- A. Preamble, Declaration of Rights, Grievances, Resolution of Dependence
- B. Preamble, Declaration of Rights, Grievances, Resolution of Independence
- C. Preamble, Declaration of Rights, Compliments, Resolution of Independence

What is a grievance?

- A. A compliment
- B. A neutral statement
- C. A complaint

What are the some of the reasons that the colonists wanted to separate from England?

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Who was on the Committee of Five and wrote the Declaration of Independence?

- A. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston
- B. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Richard Henry Lee, Robert Livingston
- C. Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston

Where did the Continental Congress meet to approve the Declaration of Independence?

- A. Philadelphia
- B. Boston
- C. Williamsburg