The American Revolution

Background: Why did the American Colonies Revolt Against Great Britain?

At the end of the French and Indian War (1763), victorious Great Britain was the only superpower left in North America, with France losing all her North American colonies. However, the French and Indian War left the British colonies broke. Beginning in 1763, the British government imposed a series of taxes and proclamations on their American colonies. The American colonists rebelled against these taxes through a series of boycotts, claiming that, as Englishmen, they were entitled to representation in England prior to any colonial taxation. In response to the British government’s taxes and its declaration that the colonies were in open revolt, on June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a formal resolution to the Second Continental Congress calling for independence of the American colonies from Great Britain. Thomas Jefferson was tasked in writing the Declaration of Independence. On July 2, 1776, Congress approved Lee’s resolution for America’s independence from Great Britain by a 12-0 vote (New York abstained). With independence adopted, Congress spent the next two days editing Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration. On July 4, 1776, Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence and sent it to the printer for duplication and distribution.

Excerpt from The Declaration of Independence

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 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.
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*American Revolution Reading Questions:*

1. What war gave Great Britain power over North America? How did this war impact the economy in the British colonies?

2. Why were colonists in America frustrated with the British government?

3. When did the colonists formally adopt the Declaration of Independence?

4. Which Enlightenment philosopher does the Declaration of Independence sound like? Write two quotes that sound similar to his writings.

5. List at least two grievances the colonists list in the Declaration of independence.

6. Why do you think some colonists didn't want to join the revolution? (i.e. why were they loyal to the British crown).

7. Do you think the colonists had legitimate reasons to revolt against the British government? Write a paragraph responding to this question.