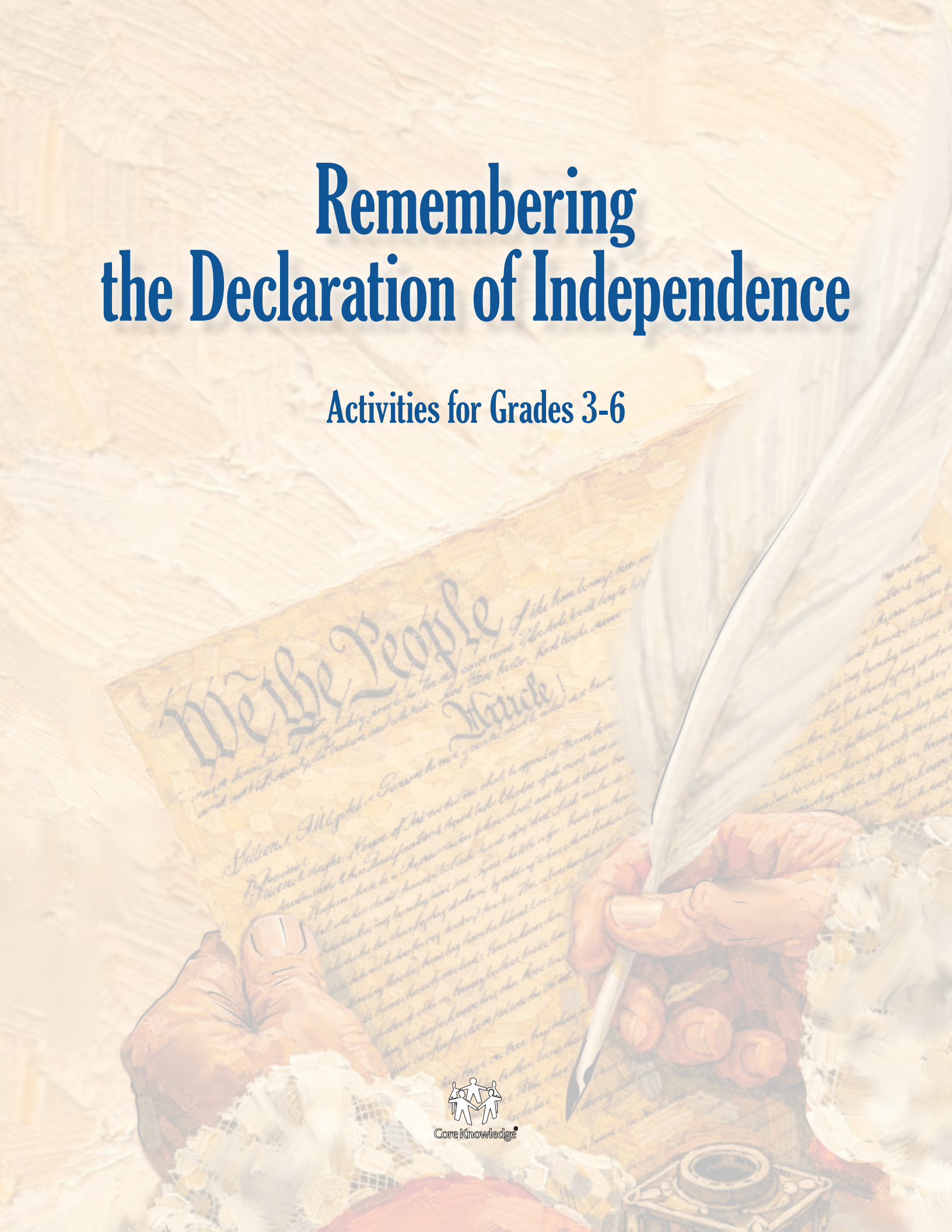
# Remembering the Declaration of Independence

## Activities for Grades 3-6




Core Knowledge

ISBN: 979-8-88970-740-0

# Remembering the Declaration of Independence

## Table of Contents

# Remembering the Declaration of Independence

## Activities for Grades 3-6

Core Knowledge History and Geography™

# Activity 1 Introduction

## Implementation Note

In this activity, students will work in small groups to review, summarize, and give presentations on the major events leading to the writing and signing of the Declaration of Independence. These events include: the Proclamation of 1763, the Stamp Act crisis, The Boston Massacre, The Boston Tea Party and the Intolerable Acts, Declaration of Rights, The Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Battle of Bunker Hill, and Common Sense.

We recommend that Grade 4 students complete the following lessons before starting this activity:

- Unit 7 *The American Revolution*, Chapter 14 "The Great Declaration"
- Unit 11 *Understanding Civics*, Chapter 2 "Creating the American Government"

We recommend that Grade 6 students complete the following lesson before starting this activity:

- Unit 3 *The Enlightenment*, Chapter 6 "The Enlightenment in Action"

If you are implementing this activity before students complete the recommended lessons, we suggest calling back to this activity when they do encounter those lessons.

The activity directions include time allocations. These are only suggestions. You may need to extend or adjust the activity time to better accommodate your students.

GRADES 3–6

# Breaking Point: Events Leading to the Declaration of Independence

## Primary Focus Objectives

- ✓ Identify historical influences on American government. **(RI.4.1)**
- ✓ Understand the colonial policies Britain made as a result of the French and Indian War, including the Proclamation of 1763. **(RI.4.7)**
- ✓ Explain how the colonists organized themselves to protest the Stamp Act. **(RI.4.5)**
- ✓ Describe the colonists' attitude towards Britain after the Boston Massacre. **(RI.4.3)**
- ✓ Explain why American colonists wanted independence from Britain. **(RI.4.2, RI.4.3)**
- ✓ Describe the events of the Boston Tea Party. **(RI.4.3)**
- ✓ Describe the colonists' reactions to the Intolerable Acts. **(RI.4.7)**
- ✓ Understand the events that occurred at Lexington and Concord. **(RI.4.3)**
- ✓ Understand the course and outcome of the Battle of Bunker Hill. **(RI.4.3)**

## Materials Needed

Activity Pages

AP 1.1– AP 1.8

- Internet access
- capability to display Internet in the classroom
- a small bundle of spaghetti pasta (5-8 noodles), with rubber bands or strings secured around each end.
- two desks moved within 8 inches of each other
- sufficient copies of **Activity Pages 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9**
- small paper cup with two holes cut into the sides towards the top of the cup, string pulled through the holes to tie around the spaghetti bundle
- 10 coins (preferable heavy, metal coins)
- a timer or stopwatch

## What Teachers Need to Know

In the 1600s and 1700s, European powers followed an economic policy known as mercantilism. According to mercantilism, colonies existed for the economic benefit of their home countries. For this to happen, nations had to export more to their colonies than they imported from them. As a result, Great Britain imposed taxes and export restrictions on the North American colonies. However, through much of the late 1600s and up until 1764, Parliament followed a policy of salutary neglect and did not enforce the taxes or trade laws in the colonies.

After 1763, in an effort to pay off the debt accrued during the French and Indian War, the British Parliament began enforcing its policies in its North American colonies and enacting new ones. Following the French and Indian War, the British government saw a need to increase its military presence in North America. The Quartering Act, an amendment to the Mutiny Act, required the colonial governments to provide and pay for accommodations and supplies for these troops. This practice was common across the British Empire; however, the colonists viewed it as one more attempt by Parliament to exercise control over the thirteen colonies. In 1774, Parliament passed the Quartering Act of 1774, a part of the Coercive (Intolerable) Acts, which required colonists to quarter soldiers in private residences.

### *The Stamp and Quartering Acts*

The Stamp Act directly taxed paper products, including almanacs, cards, and newspapers. The colonists were required to pay for a stamp signifying proof of their purchase. The colonial response to the Stamp Act was overwhelming. The refusal to purchase stamps was accompanied by a spectrum of actions, ranging from petitions to riots, acts of intimidation, and violence against tax collectors. Representatives from nine colonies met at the Stamp Act Congress in October 1765 in New York. The group authored a list of grievances that was sent to and ultimately ignored by Parliament. The Stamp Act was repealed in 1766, largely due to pressure from British manufacturers and merchants whose businesses had suffered from colonial boycotts and protests.

The British sent troops to Boston to patrol the streets and ensure that protests by colonists did not escalate into violence. The presence of these troops only increased the colonists' anger. On the night of March 5, 1770, a crowd of Bostonians was harassing a lone British sentry. He called for help from nearby soldiers. The heckling intensified; snowballs packed around pieces of ice and stones were hurled at the soldiers. The soldiers opened fire on the crowd. Five Bostonians were killed, and six more were wounded. Among those killed was Crispus Attucks, a sailor and former enslaved worker who was part African American and part Native American. Attucks was a member of the Sons of Liberty and a ringleader of the day's heckling. He is remembered as the first person to die for American liberty. The already angry colonists called this event the Boston Massacre. After the massacre, relations between the colonists and Great Britain calmed.

### *The Boston Tea Party and the Intolerable Acts*

In 1773, the British imposed a tax on tea. The colonists determined that they were not going to pay that tax, and when three British ships carrying cargoes of tea entered Boston Harbor, the citizens of Boston demanded that their governor order the ships to leave. The governor refused. On December 16, 1773, a group of colonists dressed as Native Americans boarded the ships and dumped all of the tea in the harbor.

The Boston Tea Party, as it became known, resulted in retaliatory laws called the Coercive Acts (by the British) or the Intolerable Acts (by the colonists). These acts closed the port of Boston

until the East India Company was paid for its losses, put Massachusetts directly under the governance of the king, sent British troops to the colony to enforce these laws (and required the colonists to pay for housing for these troops), and allowed the governor to have a soldier or an official accused of a crime to be tried outside Massachusetts if the governor deemed it impossible for the accused to get a fair trial within the colony.

## *Lexington and Concord*

By early 1775, as conflict was brewing, the British Army was firmly entrenched in Boston, and colonists were storing guns and ammunition in outlying areas in case of trouble. General Thomas Gage, the commander of the British Army and the governor-general of Massachusetts, was determined to seize the arsenal that his spies told him was stored at nearby Concord. On the night of April 18, 1775, some seven hundred British infantry left Boston. The colonists did not know if the soldiers would cross the Charles River by boat or march the whole route overland. Paul Revere wanted to make sure that when the British left Boston, the Patriots would know which route they were taking. He arranged for a signal in the steeple of the North Church. When the signal indicated that the British soldiers were going to be ferried across the river, Revere, William Dawes, and Dr. William Prescott spread the word, traveling from Boston to Lexington and Concord to warn of the impending British arrival. By 1:00 a.m. on April 19, 1775, the minutemen—Patriot militia—of Lexington were waiting for the British redcoats on Lexington Green. The advance party of the British saw the minutemen and raced toward them, forming a battle line. The commander of the minutemen told his troops to disperse. In the confusion, someone fired a shot, which caused the redcoats to open fire. When the British officers finally stopped shooting, eight Americans lay dead and ten were wounded.

No one knows to this day if it was a minuteman or a British soldier who fired first that morning. But that shot, "the shot heard round the world," began the Revolutionary War. The British re-formed into companies and continued the march to Concord. In Concord, they searched the village for weapons and gunpowder but found only a small amount. The minutemen exchanged shots with the British on the North Bridge. In five minutes, the battle was over, and the British retreated to Boston with minutemen firing at them all along the route.

## *Bunker Hill*

While the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, a fresh round of fighting began in Massachusetts. Both the British and the Americans pursued defensive positions around Boston after the fighting at Lexington and Concord. The colonial militia discovered that the British forces, led by General Thomas Gage, planned to take the Charlestown peninsula north of the city on June 18.

The Americans arrived in Charlestown on June 16 and began building defenses the next day. They originally planned to fortify Bunker Hill but switched their attentions to Breed's Hill, a more easily defensible position, instead. The British arrived later that day. Despite holding the high ground, the 1,400 to 1,800 militia members ultimately retreated from Gage's force of 2,200 soldiers. Both sides suffered significant casualties in the two-hour-long battle. The Americans had upwards of three hundred casualties, while the British had about a thousand casualties. The Battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill confirmed two things: the toughness of the American forces and just how grueling the American Revolution would be.

## *Common Sense*

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published his pamphlet Common Sense. In it, he explained why the colonies should separate themselves from Great Britain. Drawing on the thinking of Enlightenment philosophers, Paine asserted that the colonies had a "natural right" to their own government. He also said that the British system of government was based on tyranny. Common Sense greatly affected the thinking of the delegates to the Second Continental Congress and increased support among colonists for American independence.

## Day 1 — 45 min

### Introduce *"Breaking Point: Events that Led to the Declaration"* — *15min*

Prior to the start of the lesson:

Push the two desks or tables together, so their inner edges are six to eight inches (15–20 cm) apart. Bundle eight spaghetti strands together and secure each end with a rubber band or tie with string, so the bundle is firm.

Punch one hole on each side of the paper cup, directly opposite each other, near the rim.

Thread a length of string through the two holes and tie the ends, so the cup hangs level from the string. Adjust the knot position so the cup's hanging point is centered.

Place the tied string around the middle of the spaghetti bundle and tie it securely so the cup hangs from the bundle's center. (Alternatively, tape the string to the bundle's center.)

Rest the two ends of the spaghetti bundle on the two desks, so the bundle spans the gap and the cup hangs freely between the desks.

If time allows, consider testing how many coins it takes to snap the noodles.

**Ask students if they have ever heard of the phrase "the straw that broke the camel's back."** Explain that the phrase "the straw that broke the camel's back" means a small thing that finally causes something big to happen. Imagine a camel carrying lots of straw. It can handle a lot, but if you add just one more straw, it might be too much, and the camel could fall. It's like when lots of little things upset you, and then one more tiny thing makes you lose your patience.

Explain that the events leading to the Declaration of Independence are like the phrase "the straw that broke the camel's back." The American colonies were dealing with many problems caused by British rule, like unfair taxes and laws. Each event, like the Stamp Act and the Boston Tea Party, added more weight, just like adding straws to a camel's load.

Tell students that in this activity, they will work in small groups to review the major events that led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Direct students to the spaghetti noodles and the plastic cup you have suspended between two desks. Explain that after each group presents its summary, they will place a heavy coin into the cup. At some point, the cup will become so heavy that the noodles will break. **Ask: What will the noodles breaking represent?** (*The colonists finally deciding to separate from Great Britain.*)

Before students move into their groups, review the following points with students:

1. The colonists were members of the British Empire. They modeled their own governing bodies on the British system, meaning they enjoyed some amount of self- government. Explain that self-government means the ability of people to rule themselves and make their own laws.

2. As subjects of the British Empire, the colonists had certain historical rights and liberties. For example, the government could not just take away a person's house or land or ship or other property. If the government said it needed that property for a very important purpose, it had to prove that to a judge. If the judge agreed with the government, the government had to pay the owner for whatever it was taking. According to the law, British citizens could not be put in jail unless they were accused of breaking a law. If they were accused, they could not be kept in jail indefinitely.

3. They also had the right to a trial before a jury. There were other rights, too. If citizens wanted to gather peacefully to talk about a problem or to protest something, the government could not stop them. If they wanted to petition their government, they had that right, too. To petition the government is to ask the government to change a law, or to do something, or even to stop doing something.

**Ask: What rights and liberties did the American colonists feel they should enjoy as members of the British Empire?** (*The right to trial by jury, right to peaceful gather, right to their private property, to petition of the government*)

## Students Complete Event Summaries 30 min

Divide students into small groups of three or four using a quick counting-off method. Have students count off by however many of the events below you intend to review.

Assign each group to one of the following events and distribute the appropriate activity pages to each of the groups. Ensure that each student has a copy to read from.

Activity Pages

AP 1.1– AP 1.9

- Proclamation of 1763 and the Quartering Act **(AP 1.1)**
- Stamp Act Crisis **(AP 1.2)**
- Boston Massacre **(AP 1.3)**
- Boston Tea Party and Intolerable Acts **(AP 1.4)**
- The First Continental Congress and the Declaration of Rights **(AP 1.5)**
- Battle of Lexington and Concord **(AP 1.6)**
- Battle of Bunker Hill **(AP 1.7)**
- Common Sense **(AP 1.8)**

Distribute an Event Summary **(AP 1.9)** to each student.

Walk students through each section of the Activity Page. Explain they will need to list their event and the date it took place. They will then need to summarize the entire event. Finally, they will need to explain the significance of the event. In this case, they should focus on how it contributed to the Declaration of Independence and separation from Great Britain. Encourage students to think about the cause-and-effect relationship with British policies.

Explain to students that they will have fifteen minutes to read their assigned section in groups, taking turns reading each paragraph. After reading, they have another fifteen minutes to complete their worksheets. Younger students may need more time.

As students work in their groups, circulate to ensure that all group members are getting a turn to read aloud and that the other members are actively listening.

Before the end of class, collect students' activity pages. Explain to students that you will redistribute them at the beginning of the next class so they can prepare to give their presentations.

# Day 2 — 45 min

## Students Prepare Presentations — 10 min

Hand back the activity pages from Day 1. Tell students they have ten minutes to review their event summaries. Remind them that during their group presentations, everyone must speak, so they should use this time to plan who says what.

While students are preparing their presentations, set up the spaghetti and plastic cup again.

## Presentations — 25 min

Direct each group to come to the front of the class (or wherever you've set up the spaghetti and hanging cup). Allow each group two or three minutes to present their event to the class. Ensure that every member of each group speaks during the presentation. After each presentation, allow one group member to add a coin representing their event to the plastic cup.

As the final coin is added, the noodles may or may not break. Consider adding more coins to cause the pasta to snap, symbolizing the break with Great Britain.

Lead students in a whole-class discussion about how each event contributed to growing tensions, leading to the "breakup" with Britain. **Ask students: Which event do you think was the "straw that broke the camel's back"** (*Answers will vary*)

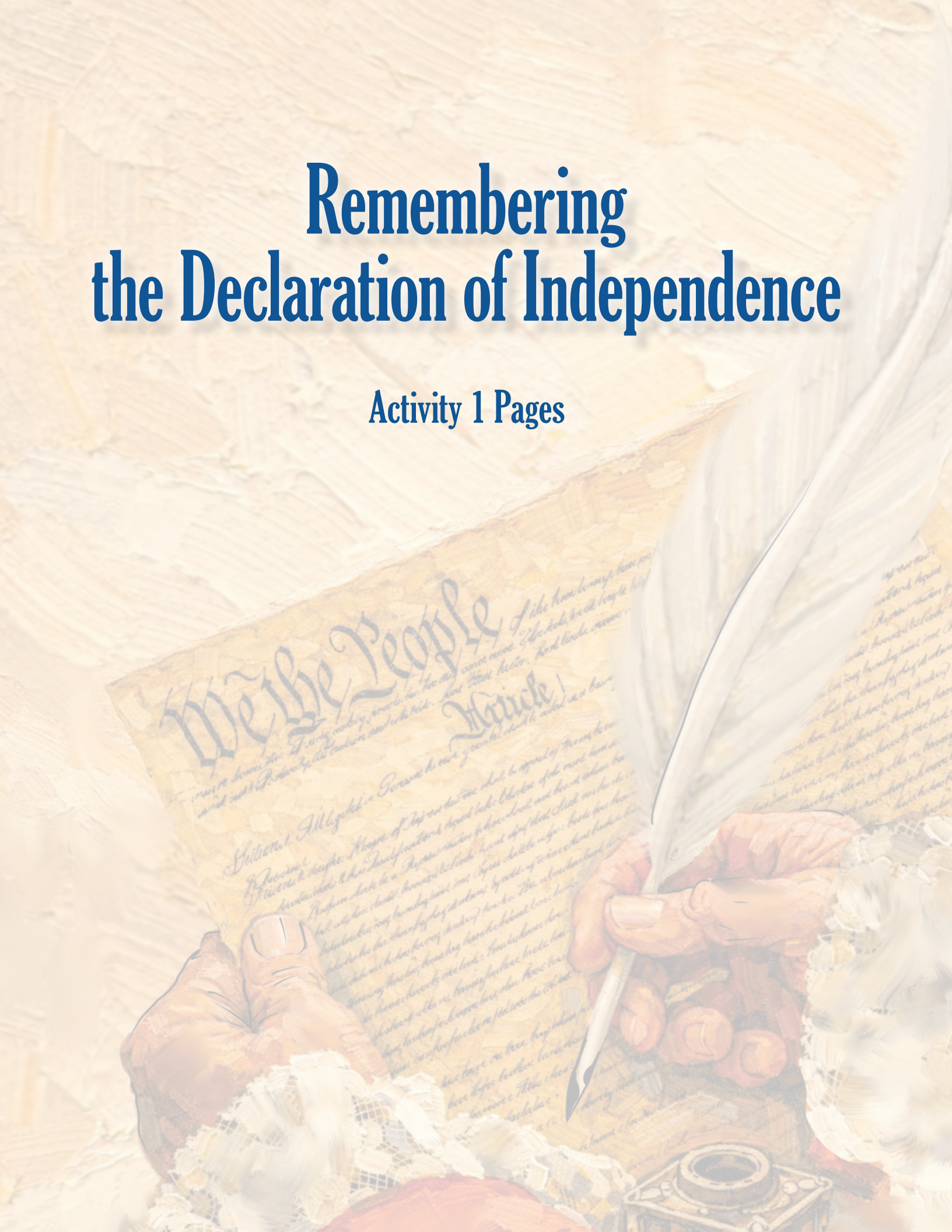
## Wrap-Up and Check for Understanding — 10 min

Discuss with the class how small actions build over time to cause significant change.

Ask students to write one sentence about why one of the events was crucial in leading to independence.

# Remembering the Declaration of Independence

## Activity 1 Pages



Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.1

### Proclamation of 1763 and the Quartering Act

What's the point of winning land in a war if you're not allowed to use it? Even before the French and Indian War, some colonists had moved onto the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. Now that France had given up its claim to land in the Ohio River Valley and beyond, many colonists looked forward to using the land themselves. The British government saw the matter differently. Many groups of Native Americans lived on that land. Some of them had fought with the British in the war against France. Having just ended one war with France, the British did not want to start a new one with Native Americans. They would surely have a war, though, if colonists kept pushing onto Native American lands. In fact, one conflict did break out among Native Americans, settlers, and British soldiers. This conflict was called Pontiac's War.

During this rebellion, Native Americans in the Great Lakes area tried to drive settlers off of their land. Great Britain believed that it would be best to keep colonists away from Native American lands—for now, at least. On a map of North America, the British king, George III, drew a line running along the Appalachian Mountains from New York all the way south to Georgia. He then issued a proclamation. Until further notice, no more colonists were allowed to settle west of that line.

The Proclamation of 1763 angered the colonists. They had not fought the French to win land for Native Americans. They expected to keep it for themselves. Now their own king was telling them they couldn't settle there. The king also said that thousands of British soldiers would stay along the frontier to enforce the proclamation. The presence of British soldiers meant colonists couldn't move west of George III's line.

When the French and Indian War ended, there were thousands of British soldiers in the colonies. The British government wanted to keep them there. To help pay for this, Parliament passed the Quartering Act. The act required colonial governments to supply quarters, or places to live, for the British soldiers.

The colonists did not like the Quartering Act. Why did the British government want to keep soldiers in the colonies? If it was for the colonists' protection, from whom were they being protected?

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.2

### Stamp Act Crisis

The British also created new taxes to collect money from the colonists. In 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act. This law made colonists pay a tax on just about every kind of printed paper. The tax applied to about fifty different items in all. Under the Stamp Act, colonists had to buy special tax stamps from a tax collector. They would put a stamp on each of the taxed items they used. Every time they bought such things as a newspaper, a calendar, a marriage license, or any kind of legal or business paper, they had to pay a tax. They even had to pay a tax on playing cards.

This made many of the colonists very angry. Do you see why the colonists were so outraged? Had their own colonial assemblies passed this tax law? No, they had not. It was the British Parliament in faraway London, England. Sure, British subjects living in Great Britain were already paying a stamp tax. But those subjects were represented in Parliament. The colonists were not. They could not elect members of Parliament. They had no voice and no representatives in Parliament. What right did Parliament have to pass a law taxing them? None. Absolutely none. To the colonists, this was "taxation without representation." It was completely unjust!

One colonist who strongly protested the Stamp Act was a twenty-nine-year old Virginian named Patrick Henry. Patrick Henry was a member of the Virginia assembly. He gave a powerful speech against the new tax. He warned that the Stamp Act would take away the colonists' liberty. The speech made people think. In New York, Boston, Newport, and other places throughout the colonies, people protested, debated, and formed groups called the Sons of Liberty. These groups threatened the stamp tax collectors. Many stamp tax collectors decided that the best thing to do was get out of town and forget about selling tax stamps. The Sons of Liberty did more than threaten tax collectors. They also organized a boycott of British goods. People throughout the colonies agreed not to buy goods from Great Britain as long as the Stamp Act remained a law.

Like the Sons of Liberty, women's groups called the Daughters of Liberty helped support the boycott. One of the most important goods purchased from British merchants was cloth. To make up for the growing shortage in the colonies, the Daughters of Liberty wove their own cloth. The Sons of Liberty, Daughters of Liberty, and the many other people who supported the colonists' cause also gave themselves another name. They called themselves Patriots.

Colonial leaders called for a special meeting of all the colonies to decide on a course of action. In October 1765, nine colonies sent delegates to the meeting held in New York. Delegates at the Stamp Act Congress agreed on a number of statements that confirmed the rights of colonists as British subjects. They also asked Parliament to repeal the hated law. These actions by the colonists shocked the leaders of the British government. Never before had the colonies acted together against the British government. British leaders did not want this to become a habit. British merchants weren't happy either. The boycott was causing them to lose a lot of money. In 1766, after one year, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act. When the news reached America, the colonists celebrated. Through their resistance, they had brought an end to the hated Stamp Act.

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.3

### The Boston Massacre

As more British troops arrived in the colonies, the colonists grew alarmed. For them, the presence of British soldiers represented a threat to their freedom. The British said the soldiers were needed to defend the colonists against Native American attacks. If that were true, then why weren't the soldiers on the frontier, where the Native Americans were? Why were so many troops located in eastern cities, like Philadelphia, New York, and Boston?

In Boston in particular, troops seemed to be everywhere—on the street corners, in front of buildings, in the parks. The citizens of Boston jeered at the soldiers. They made fun of them. They tried to make their lives miserable. Because British soldiers sometimes had regular jobs, tensions grew over employment opportunities, too. In several cities, fights broke out between colonists and soldiers. Those fights were not nearly as bad, though, as what happened in Boston on the evening of March 5, 1770. There, a crowd of men and boys gathered around a lone British soldier on guard duty. They shouted insults and threw snowballs at him. Some of the snowballs had rocks inside of them.

The frightened soldier called for help. More British soldiers arrived. The crowd grew larger. The shouts, the dares, and the insults grew louder and angrier. Then, for reasons that are unclear, the soldiers turned their guns on the angry crowd and shot. When the smoke cleared, five colonists lay dead or wounded. Their blood stained the snow-covered street. One of them was Crispus Attucks, an African American and Native American who had once been enslaved and now worked as a sailor. Crispus Attucks was the first person to die for the cause of American liberty.

He was not the last. A few days later, more than half of the population of Boston turned out for a funeral march for the dead men. Shops were closed. Church bells rang. Angry Bostonians called the killing a massacre— a needless killing of defenseless people. The event became known as the Boston Massacre. A Boston silversmith named Paul Revere made a copper engraving that showed soldiers firing on a group of perfectly peaceful, innocent citizens. Many paper copies can be printed from a single engraving. That is exactly what Revere did.

No one knows for sure whether Revere actually saw the shooting. Some of the things shown in the engraving are not true. But Paul Revere was a Son of Liberty. He made that engraving because he wanted to make people angry at the British. Sure, the citizens who were shot had been asking for trouble. But they certainly did not deserve to die. The British soldiers who fired on the crowd were tried by a local court. It found six soldiers innocent and two guilty of manslaughter.

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.4

### The Boston Tea Party and Intolerable Acts

Parliament continued to put a tax on tea just to show the colonists that it had the right to tax them. Meanwhile, the colonists had maintained the boycott on tea just to show Parliament that it didn't. Parliament decided its plan had not worked. British tea merchants had lost their colonial customers. The colonists were buying tea smuggled in by Dutch merchants. As a result, the government hadn't collected more than a few pennies in taxes. So in 1773, Parliament came up with another plan. It passed the Tea Act.

Parliament's new plan was clever but tricky. Parliament lowered the price of the tea itself. But it also kept the tax on the tea. When the new price of the tea was added to the tax, the total cost was less than what the colonists paid for tea from the Dutch. Parliament thought the colonists would now buy British tea again. When they did, they would be paying the tea tax! Soon two thousand chests of tea were loaded aboard British ships bound for the American colonies. Once there, the tea would be sold by certain colonial merchants.

The Tea Act of 1773 showed how poorly Parliament understood the colonists. The colonists did not care about the price of tea. They cared about "taxation without representation." They were not going to pay that tea tax, no matter what British tea cost. As British tea ships headed for the colonies, the news spread through the colonies.

The Sons of Liberty prevented the tea ships from being unloaded in several ports. Some captains had their ships wait in the harbor. Others turned their ships around and headed home. That is not what happened in Boston. Early in December 1773, three tea ships entered Boston Harbor.

Citizens gathered at a town meeting. They demanded that the governor of the colony order the ships to leave. The governor did not like Sam Adams or the Sons of Liberty. He refused. Colonists took matters into their own hands. On the night of December 16, 1773, a group of colonists dressed as Native Americans as a symbol of independence. Then they rowed out to the ships in the harbor. They boarded the ships and dumped every chest of tea into the water. Exactly 342 chests went into the harbor. All of this was done in a quiet, business-like way. When they were through, the "Native Americans" swept the deck and put everything back in its proper place. This event became known as the Boston Tea Party.

When Parliament and the king heard about the Boston Tea Party, they were outraged. Parliament passed laws to punish the people of Boston and the whole Massachusetts colony. One law closed the Port of Boston until the colonists paid for the wasted tea.

For a city that depended on trading and fishing, this was a harsh punishment. Parliament hoped that Boston's merchants and fishermen would turn in the guilty persons. Maybe they would even pay for the tea themselves. They did neither. A second law took away most of the Massachusetts colony's self-government. The British also appointed an army general to be the governor of Massachusetts. The new governor came with thousands of British soldiers. These laws became known as the Intolerable Acts because the colonists would not tolerate or accept them.

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.5

### The First Continental Congress and the Declaration of Rights

In September 1774, fifty-six colonial leaders met in Philadelphia. They represented twelve of the thirteen British colonies in North America. Only Georgia did not send delegates. The colonists thought this meeting was important. We can tell by the delegates they chose. George Washington, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson represented Virginia. Sam Adams and his cousin John represented Massachusetts. New York sent John Jay. Jay later served on the Supreme Court of the United States. John Adams wrote in his diary, "There is in the Congress a collection of the greatest men upon this continent."

This meeting became known as the First Continental Congress. The delegates discussed their common problems. They shared their anger at the British government. They issued a Declaration of Rights. The declaration said that as British colonists, they were entitled to all the "rights of Englishmen." They listed the ways Parliament had taken their rights away since the French and Indian War. They also told King George III that the colonists were still loyal to him. They asked him to consider their complaints.

The First Continental Congress did two more things. It voted to stop all trade with the British until Parliament repealed the Intolerable Acts. Until Parliament removed the laws, colonists would buy nothing from Britain and sell nothing to Britain. The Congress also agreed to meet again in May 1775 if Parliament still had not given back their rights.

The First Continental Congress and the Declaration of Rights were the most defiant actions the colonies had ever taken. But something more than defiance had happened. This "something" had no exact name. There is no exact date when it started. Still, it was as important as any of the resolutions passed by the First Continental Congress. Maybe it started with those shipments of flour and rice and money to Boston from the other colonies. Maybe it began with the Stamp Act Congress. Maybe it had been happening all along, before anyone was aware of it. That "something" was that the colonies were coming together as never before. Before this, each colony had thought of itself as separate from the others. The colonists thought of themselves as Virginians or New Yorkers or Georgians. When they thought of an attachment to any other place, it was to Great Britain. That was partly because each colony had more to do with Britain than it did with other colonies. It was also due to the fact that the colonists thought of themselves as British citizens, with all the "rights of Englishmen."

By the end of the First Continental Congress, many colonists were thinking of themselves as part of one country, not as people living in thirteen different ones. They were more aware of the things they had in common. They were more aware that they needed each other. Patrick Henry summed up the new awareness perfectly. He told the First Continental Congress, "The distinctions [differences] between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders, are no more. I am not a Virginian but an American."

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.6

### The Battle of Lexington and Concord

By the start of 1775, more and more colonists expected the quarrels with the mother country to lead to war. By spring, the militias in many colonies were preparing to fight. Each militia was made up of citizens who volunteered to be part-time soldiers. In March, members of the Virginia General Assembly debated whether their colony should prepare for war as well. Patrick Henry stood up and said people could not wait. He warned that war had already begun and urged action. He ended with his famous line: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Three weeks after his speech, the fighting began. For several months, militias in Massachusetts had been training to fight. These farmers and townspeople called themselves Minutemen because they could be ready to fight on a minute's notice. To prepare for battle, the Minutemen had been collecting guns, gunpowder, and other supplies. They hid these supplies in the village of Concord, about fifteen miles northwest of Boston. Governor Thomas Gage learned about the supplies and that two Sons of Liberty, Sam Adams and John Hancock, were in nearby Lexington. He sent soldiers at night to capture them and take the supplies. Paul Revere and William Dawes found out and rode ahead to warn the townspeople.

There were two routes to Lexington. One was longer but all on land. The shorter route meant crossing the Charles River by rowboat. William Dawes took the long land route and warned people as he went. Paul Revere stayed back to watch the river. A young man in the Old North Church would hang one lantern if the British went by land, two if by water. When two lanterns were hung, Revere knew the British would cross the river. Revere and two friends rowed across, and he then borrowed a horse and rode to warn Lexington and Concord.

Stopping at every village and farm, he pounded on doors to warn people. Many think Paul Revere shouted, "The British are coming!" but he probably said, "The Regulars are coming!" Revere warned Sam Adams and John Hancock in Lexington but did not reach Concord. At dawn about seventy Minutemen stood on the village green facing 600–700 British soldiers. Captain John Parker told his men, "Don't fire unless fired upon." Then someone fired, and both sides shot. Eight Minutemen were killed and ten were wounded. Dawes and Revere were caught, but another patriot named Dr. Samuel Prescott escaped and rode on to warn Concord. When the British reached Concord, most of the supplies were gone.

Nearly four hundred Minutemen waited for the British at the North Bridge near Concord. Soldiers fired, the Minutemen fired back, and after five minutes the British retreated to Boston. Paul Revere had warned people along the road, and colonists hid behind fences and trees. They shot at the redcoats as they marched back. By night, 73 British soldiers were dead and about 200 were wounded. The colonists lost nearly 50 men. The American did not know it at the time, but the War for Independence had begun.

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.7

### The Battle of Bunker Hill

As they petitioned King George III to change his bad policies and restore the colonists' rights, the Second Continental Congress also prepared for more fighting. John Adams of Massachusetts took the lead. Adams believed that the local militias were fine for fighting here and there. To fight a war, though, they needed to create a real American army—an "Army of the United Colonies." At the time, members of the Massachusetts militia were camped outside of Boston, near the British troops. Those militiamen, said Adams, were ready to be the first soldiers in the new army. But who would lead Adams's "Army of the United Colonies"? How fortunate the Congress was, Adams continued, to have the right man for the job in that very room! He was a man of "great talents and excellent character." He was an experienced military leader from Virginia. As Adams continued to speak, all eyes turned to the tall man dressed in an old militia uniform, standing in the back of the room. The man quickly turned and walked out. He wanted the delegates to be free to discuss him without him being present. That man was George Washington. Adams was right, and the other delegates agreed.

George Washington was picked to lead the new Continental Army. He had fought in the French and Indian War and was a respected leader from Virginia. More British troops were arriving in the colonies, so Washington went to Massachusetts to lead the militia around Boston. Before he arrived, the American soldiers fought an important battle near Boston on Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill.

On the night of June 16, 1775, the militia marched to Breed's Hill and climbed it. They were supposed to take up positions on Bunker Hill, but moved onto the wrong hill. All night they dug trenches, piling the earth into walls six feet high for their protection. When the morning came, the British were surprised to see the colonial militia in control of the hill. General Gage was now worried that the militia would be able to fire on his troops below. They could even use cannons to fire upon the British ships in the harbor. Gage needed to drive the militia off the hill. Gage didn't know that the Massachusetts militia didn't have any cannons. The next day, British soldiers marched up Breed's Hill. The colonists had only a small amount of ammunition. They couldn't afford to waste any. They stood shoulder to shoulder behind their earthen walls. When the British got close, the militiamen opened fire. Hundreds of redcoats fell. The rest fled back down the hill. Once more the British marched up the hill. Once more they were driven back by a hail of bullets. After the second charge, the colonists began to run out of ammunition. When the British marched up the hill a third time, the militia retreated.

The British won the hill but at a terrible cost. More than a thousand soldiers were killed or wounded. A British officer said that his army couldn't stand many more "victories" like this. Even though the battle took place on Breed's Hill, it is known as the Battle of Bunker Hill. The Battle of Bunker Hill was very important to the colonists. They lost the hill, but they won new confidence. They were beginning to believe these citizen-soldiers could hold their own against one of the world's greatest armies—the British army. Soon after, the colonists learned King George III's answer to their petition. He had no intention of backing down. Instead, he was eager for a fight.

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.8

### Common Sense

By the start of 1776, the argument with Great Britain had lasted more than ten years. The fighting had gone on for almost one. Still, many colonists weren't sure whether they really wanted independence. A number of colonists opposed independence. These people were called Loyalists. Loyalists belonged to different religions and came from different social classes. They had different reasons for their loyalty. Some Loyalists made their decision for economic reasons. Some chose the British side for political reasons. Others followed religious or personal values. But all Loyalists agreed on one thing: the need to stay faithful to the king and to Great Britain.

No colony had ever broken away from a mother country. Giving up a place in the world's greatest empire and all the advantages of being part of it—was that really a smart idea? On the other hand, Patriots argued, shouldn't the colonists defend their rights and liberties? It was a very tough decision. The decision became easier after Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet called Common Sense. Paine had a great and rare skill.

Thomas Paine could write about important ideas in everyday language. If you could read at all, you could understand Common Sense. Paine's pamphlet was read throughout the colonies. People talked about it in their homes, on street corners, and in taverns and inns. A lot of what Paine wrote was, in fact, plain common sense. He got readers to think about his ideas not just by telling them what he thought but also by asking what they thought. Did it make any sense for America to be ruled by a small nation three thousand miles away? Did it make sense for people to be ruled by one man, a king, just because he was born into a certain family? Wouldn't it be better if the colonists chose their own rulers?

Paine said that it was common sense for Americans to cut all ties to Great Britain. It was common sense for Americans to be independent and create a government of their own. Americans didn't need a king. They could live in a land where "the law is king." The more they thought about it, the more Americans agreed. They didn't need the Parliament and the king to rule them. They had plenty of experience in choosing their own leaders and ruling themselves. Perhaps it really was time, then, to separate and go their own way.

Name_____ Date_____

## Activity Page 1.9

### Event Summary

**Name of Event**_____

**Event Date** _____

**Event Summary**

**Significance of the Event**

# Activity 2 Introduction

## Implementation Note

In this two-day lesson, students will explore the Declaration of Independence by creating blackout poems. This activity will help students understand the historical significance and key ideas of the document while encouraging them to express their interpretations through poetry. By selecting meaningful words and phrases, students will craft unique poems that reflect their understanding of the path to American independence. This activity was designed to be implemented after students have completed the "Breaking Point: Events that Led to the Declaration of Independence" activity.

If students have not completed the Breaking Point activity, we recommend that they complete the following lessons before starting this activity:

Grade 4 students:

- Unit 7 *The American Revolution*, Chapter 14 "The Great Declaration"
- Unit 11 *Understanding Civics*, Chapter 2 "Creating the American Government"

Grade 6 students:

- Unit 3 *The Enlightenment*, Chapter 6 "The Enlightenment in Action"

If you are implementing this activity before students complete the recommended lessons, we suggest calling back to this activity when they do encounter those lessons.

The activity directions include time allocations. These are only suggestions. You may need to extend or adjust the activity time to better accommodate your students.

GRADES 3–6

# The Declaration of Independence: Blackout Poetry

## Primary Focus Objectives

✓ Understand and summarize the Declaration of Independence. **(RI.4.2)**

## Materials Needed

- Access to CKHG Grade 4 Unit 7 *The American Revolution* Student Reader
- display copy of original "Obama's Farewell Address" **(NFE 1a)**
- display copy of blacked out "Obama's Farewell Address" **(NFE 1b)**
- individual student copies plus a few extras of "Excerpts from the Declaration" **(NFE 2)**
- black markers, one per student

## What Teachers Need to Know

The Declaration of Independence has four parts. The Preamble states that the colonists believe it necessary to explain why they are declaring their independence from Great Britain, so they have written this document. The next part explains the political ideas behind their actions. Thomas Jefferson borrowed many of these ideas from French and British thinkers of the era, a time in history known as the Enlightenment. The third, and longest, part lists all the charges against the king, and the fourth part lists all the rights that the new nation is claiming for itself. Students should be familiar (at a minimum) with the beginning of the second part: "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." This second section continues with some words that may be less familiar to students but are no less important to the foundation of the nation:

*That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that is, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect [bring about] their safety and happiness.*

In general, the signers of the Declaration and the framers of the later Constitution were educated men who drew on ancient Greek and Roman ideas about government. They also read the works of British Whigs Trenchard and Gordon and European philosophers and political theorists of the Enlightenment period, such as Locke, Montesquieu, and Voltaire.

The underlying idea of the Enlightenment was that reason was the basis of all knowledge, and all received ideas could and should be tested by reason. Instead of just accepting preexisting political institutions, political thinkers of the Enlightenment urged that reason be used to evaluate political ideas and institutions. It was the ideas of philosophers such as John Locke in England and Louis, Baron de Montesquieu in France to which Thomas Jefferson turned in writing the Declaration. Jefferson based the Declaration on the theory of natural rights, which argued that every human being has certain basic rights that belong to each person by virtue of their humanity. From this assumption, Jefferson pursued a logical argument that people institute government to preserve these rights. When government no longer safeguards these rights, he asserted, people have a right to change the government.

## *"All Men Are Created Equal"*

This is the basic assumption in the Declaration: every human is equal to every other by virtue of one's humanity. However, this does not mean that every person should necessarily have the same amount of education, money, or possessions, in material terms. It is also important to note that in the 18th century, not all people were considered equal. For example, women and African Americans did not receive equal treatment.

## *Natural Rights*

What rights does a person have by virtue of being human? The first sentence of the Declaration identifies these rights as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The Declaration states that these are unalienable ("inalienable" in some versions)—that is, they cannot be taken away by any person or government. It is important to note that the signers agreed that these rights were only examples of the rights people have, not a complete list.

## *Government's Responsibility*

The second sentence of the second section of the Declaration states, "That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men . . . ." According to the Declaration, people establish governments in order to ensure that their rights are guaranteed and protected; that is the purpose of government.

"Right of the People . . . to Institute a New Government"

If a government does not protect the rights of its citizens, asserts the Declaration, then its citizens have the right "to alter or abolish it" and to establish a new government. Jefferson explains in the next few sentences that changing a government structure is not something to be done lightly. He then outlines a long list of the king's abuses, including the following:

- quartering (housing) large bodies of armed troops among the colonists
- cutting off colonists' trade with all parts of the world
- imposing taxes on colonies without their consent depriving colonists, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury

## Introduction: Exploring the Declaration *15min*

On a board or chart paper, write the following quote from the Declaration of Independence:

> ***"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"***

**Ask: What famous founding document is this quote taken from?** (*The Declaration of Independence*)

Quickly review the context in which the Declaration was written (taxation without representation, the Boston Massacre and Tea party, and the first battles in Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill).

Display the section titled "The Declaration of Independence" on page 91 of *The American Revolution* Student Reader. Read aloud pages 91-93. Pause to review the following core vocabulary terms as they are encountered in the text: endow, institute and revolution.

Explain to students that Independence Day is celebrated each year in observation of American independence from Great Britain. July 4 is the day Americans celebrate this holiday because this was the date the Declaration of Independence was signed by the Founders. Emphasize that the Declaration of Independence was the colonists' way of asserting their independence from Britain while at the same time explaining their reasoning for that separation to the rest of the world. They supported their reasoning through the inclusion of basic rights, such as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, rights which they believed had been taken from them by the British.

**Ask: Who wrote the declaration of Independence?** (*Thomas Jefferson, with assistance from Ben Franklin and John Adams*) **What were the purposes of the Declaration of Independence?** (*The Declaration of Independence had several purposes. First, it outlined the reasons why the colonists wanted to separate from Great Britain. Second, it emphasized that Great Britain was wrong in its actions. Finally, the Declaration of Independence was meant to convince the colonists, and people around the world, that American independence was necessary.*)

Distribute copies of "Excerpts from the Declaration" **(NFE 2)** to all students

Explain that the Declaration is usually divided into four parts:

- **Preamble:** This is the introduction. It explains why the Declaration is being written. It talks about the importance of being free and making their own choices.
- **Declaration of Rights:** This part lists the rights everyone should have, like the right to be free and the right to pursue happiness. It says that these rights are very important.
- **List of Grievances:** This section lists all the complaints the colonies had against the British king. They talk about unfair taxes and laws that weren't fair.
- S**tatement of Independence:** This is the conclusion. It declares that the colonies are now free and independent from Britain. They are ready to have their own country!

**Ask: What parts of the Declaration are included in these excerpts?** (*The preamble, the Declaration of Rights and the Bill of Attainment and Statement of Independence*).

Read aloud the subhead "A Bill of Indictment." Briefly explain that an indictment is a formal accusation of a crime. **Ask students to infer what kind of information will be included in this section of the Declaration of Independence.** (*Students should recognize that this is the list of offenses the king committed against the colonists.*)

Read aloud the paragraphs under "A Bill of Indictment." Ask students if they were surprised or confused by anything in the Bill of Indictment. Help students connect each item with events they have read about so far.

## Introduction to Blackout Poetry — 20 min

Explain to students that a blackout poem is a type of poem made by taking an existing piece of text, like a page from a book, and covering up most of the words with a dark marker. You leave only a few words visible that, when read together, create a new poem with a special meaning or theme.

Explain to students that before they create their own blackout poem using the Declaration, you will model the process using another text.

Display the original "President Obama's Farewell Address" **(NFE 1a)**.

First, read the text in its entirety. Next, model how to create a blackout poem by selecting words and phrases to highlight a theme or idea. Use the black out version of "President Obama's Farewell Address" **(NFE 1b)** as a guide.

## Closure — 5 min

Discuss what themes or ideas students saw in the blackout poem and how words were chosen. (*Possible response: People coming together to improve their government*)

# Day 2 — 45 min

## Introduction — 5 min

Recap how to create a blackout poem using the example from Day 1.

Have students take out their copies of "Excerpts from the Declaration" **(NFE 2)** from Day 1 or redistribute them. Explain that additional copies will be available if they make mistakes, or if they decide to try a different approach.

Distribute a black marker to each student. Consider using nonpermanent markers with younger students.

## Creating Blackout Poems — 25 min

Ask students to begin creating their blackout poem by selecting words and phrases that resonate with them. Encourage students to use their creativity and remind them to focus on a theme or messages. While students are working, circulate the room and offer support to students who struggle to get started. Once students have finalized their poems, encourage them to rewrite the uncovered words on the back of their handouts.

## Partner Presentations — 10 min

Invite students to present their blackout poems to a partner or a small group. Encourage classmates to listen for themes and ask questions after their partner has finished reciting their poem

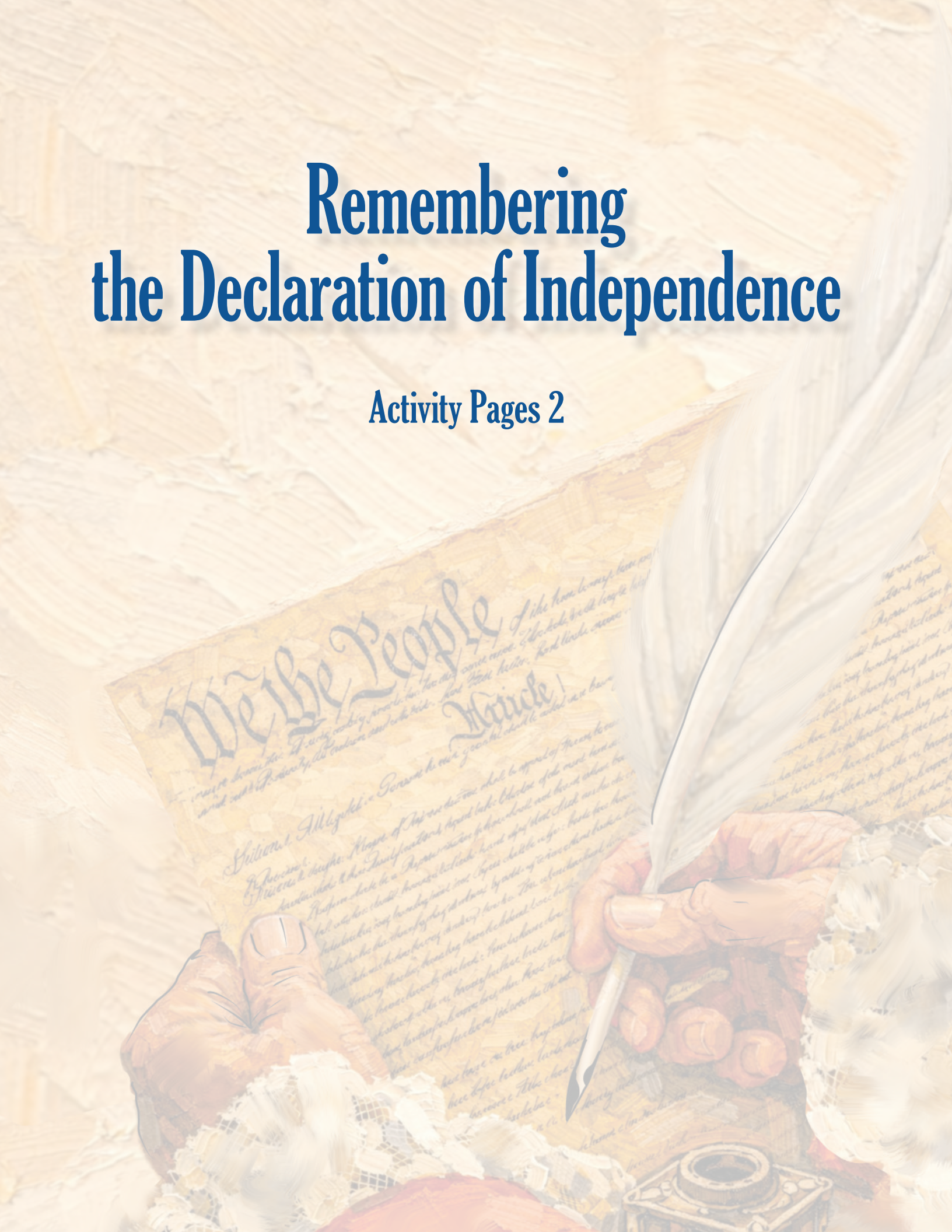
## Closure — 5 min

Invite students to reflect on what they learned about the Declaration and how creating a poem helped them understand the text.

Lead students in a discussion about how words can be powerful and convey different meanings.

# Remembering the Declaration of Independence

## Activity Pages 2



## Nonfiction Excerpt 1a: Obama's Farewell Address (original)

…I learned that change only happens when ordinary people get involved and they get engaged [interested], and they come together to demand it.

After eight years as your president, I still believe that. And it's not just my belief. It's the beating heart of our American idea—our bold experiment in self-government. It's the conviction [strong belief] that we are all created equal, endowed [given] by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It's the insistence that these rights, while self-evident, have never been self executing; that We, the People, through the instrument of our democracy, can form a more perfect union.

What a radical idea. A great gift that our Founders gave to us: the freedom to chase our individual dreams through our sweat and toil [hard work] and imagination, and the imperative [requirement] to strive together, as well, to achieve a common good, a greater good.

**Source:** President Obama's Farewell Address, January 10, 2017.

## Nonfiction Excerpt 1b: Obama's Farewell Address (blacked out)

[redacted] ordinary people [redacted] engaged [redacted] come together [redacted].

[redacted] I still believe that. [redacted] our bold experiment [redacted] we are all created equal, [redacted] life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. [redacted] We, the People, [redacted] can form a more perfect union.

[redacted] A great gift [redacted] freedom [redacted] strive together, [redacted] to achieve [redacted] a greater good.

**Source:** President Obama's Farewell Address, January 10, 2017.

## Rewritten Poem:

Ordinary people, engaged, come together
I still believe that
Our bold experiment, we are all created equal
Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
We the people, can form a more perfect union.
A great gift: freedom
Strive together, to achieve a greater good.

## Nonfiction Excerpt 2: Selections from the Declaration of Independence

### *The Preamble*

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.—

### *A Declaration of 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. . .

### *A Bill of Indictment*

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 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.—

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 kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures. . . . 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: . . .

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighbouring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies:—

### *Statement of Independence*

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled…… 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—

*Rewritten "Blackout" Poem*

## Illustration and Photo Credits

Ivan Pesic: Covers, TOC, 8, 24