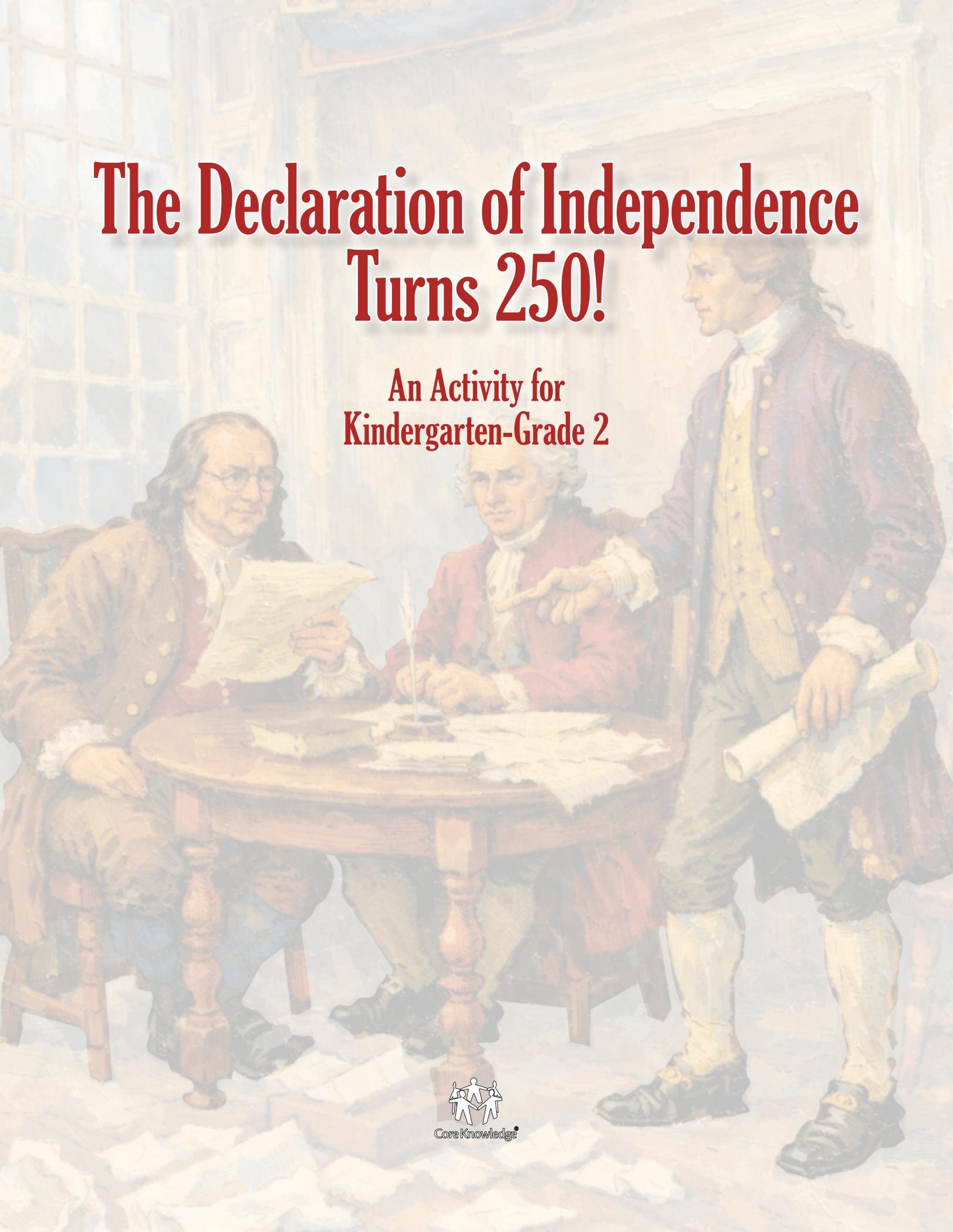


# The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!

An Activity for  
Kindergarten-Grade 2



## Creative Commons Licensing

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



### You are free:

- to Share**—to copy, distribute, and transmit the work
- to Remix**—to adapt the work

### Under the following conditions:

**Attribution**—You must attribute the work in the following manner:

*This work is based on an original work of the Core Knowledge® Foundation ([www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org)) made available through licensing under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. This does not in any way imply that the Core Knowledge Foundation endorses this work.*

**Noncommercial**—You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

**Share Alike**—If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

### With the understanding that:

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to this web page:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Copyright © 2026 Core Knowledge Foundation

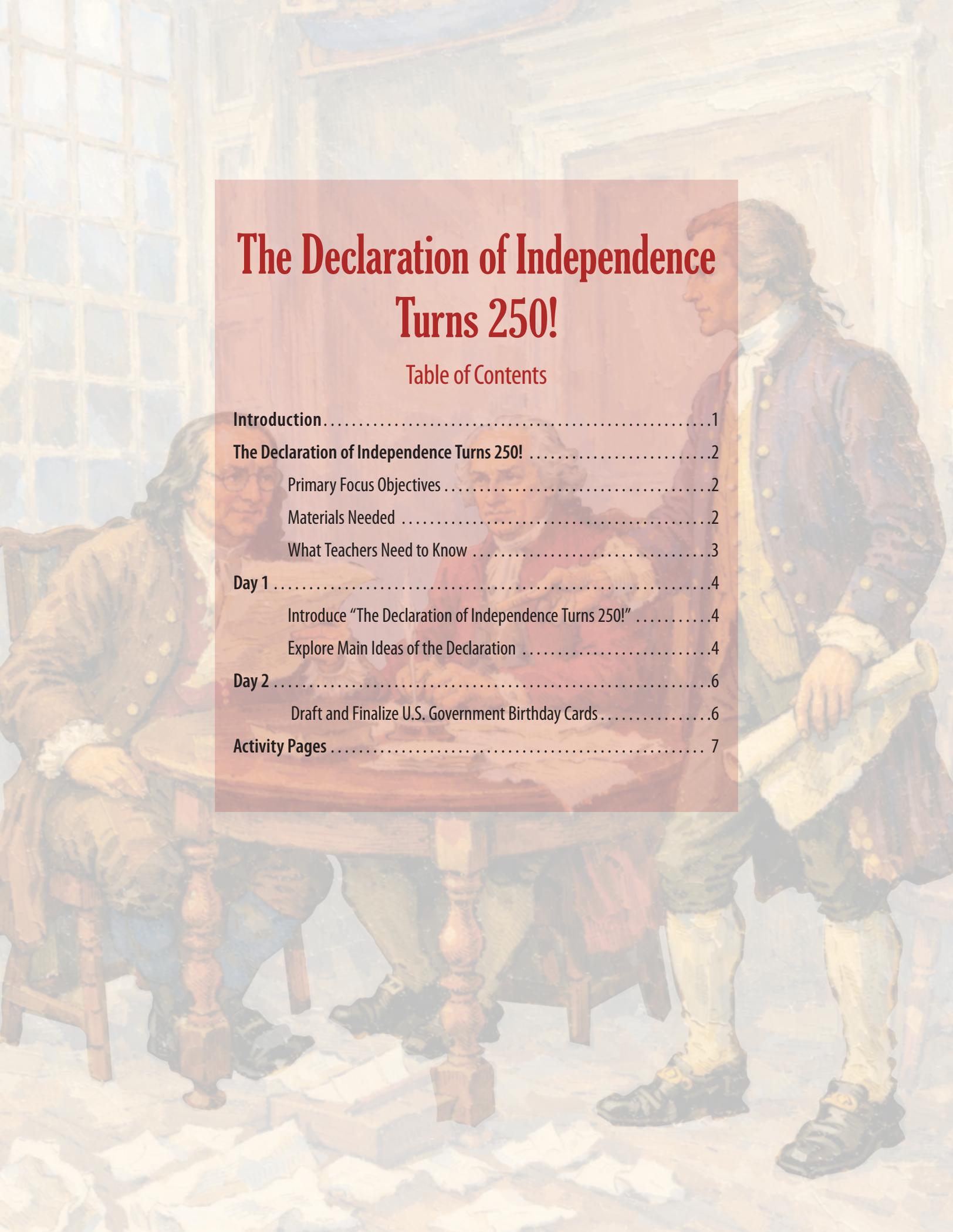
[www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org)

All Rights Reserved.

Core Knowledge®, Core Knowledge Curriculum Series™, Core Knowledge History and Geography™, and CKHG™ are trademarks of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Trademarks and trade names are shown in this book strictly for illustrative and educational purposes and are the property of their respective owners. References herein should not be regarded as affecting the validity of said trademarks and trade names.

ISBN: 979-8-88970-739-4



# The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!</b> .....	2
Primary Focus Objectives .....	2
Materials Needed .....	2
What Teachers Need to Know .....	3
<b>Day 1</b> .....	4
Introduce “The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!” .....	4
Explore Main Ideas of the Declaration .....	4
<b>Day 2</b> .....	6
Draft and Finalize U.S. Government Birthday Cards .....	6
<b>Activity Pages</b> .....	7

**The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!**  
**An Activity for Kindergarten-Grade 2 Classes**  
Core Knowledge History and Geography™

# Introduction

## IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

In this activity, students will celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, demonstrate their civic knowledge, and express their creativity and patriotism by writing birthday cards to the U.S. government. Through colorful drawings and thoughtful messages, students will reflect on the enduring principles of freedom and democracy that have shaped our nation.

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

- Unit 4 *The Mount Rushmore Presidents*, Chapter 3 “Thomas Jefferson”

We recommend that Grade 1 students complete one or both of these CKHG lessons before starting this activity:

- Unit 8 *The Colonies to Independence*, Chapter 6 “Colonial Leaders Meet Again”
- Unit 10 *Lessons in Civics*, Chapter 8 “What Does it Mean to Be American?”

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.

# The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!

### Primary Focus Objectives

---

- ✓ Identify Thomas Jefferson as the principal writer of the Declaration of Independence. **(SL.1.2, SL.1.3)**
- ✓ Describe some of the important ideas that Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence. **(SL.1.2, SL.1.3)**
- ✓ Describe why the Fourth of July is called America’s birthday and the importance of its 250th anniversary **(SL.1.2, SL.1.3)**
- ✓ Identify the symbols of the United States **(RI.1.1)**
- ✓ Name important U.S. national holidays. **(RI.1.1)**
- ✓ Understand the meaning of the following domain-specific vocabulary: *nation, independence, Declaration of Independence, government, equal rights.* **(L.1.4, L.1.5)**

### Materials Needed

---

Activity Pages



AP 1.1  
AP 1.2

- Internet access
- capability to display Internet in the classroom
- individual student copies of the Birthday Card Rough Draft Templates printed on copy paper **(AP 1.1)**
- individual student copies of the Birthday Card templates printed on cardstock **(AP 1.2)**
- markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- image of [Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776 painting](#)
- image of [July 4th fireworks, Washington, D.C.](#)
- [image of the U.S. flag](#)

## What Teachers Need to Know

---

Thomas Jefferson was a Virginian who served in the House of Burgesses, the Virginia Colony's legislature, from 1769 to 1775. Jefferson was a delegate to the First Continental Congress and served in the Second Continental Congress as well. He was chair of the committee instructed by the Second Continental Congress to draft a document explaining why the colonies were severing their ties with Great Britain. Because of his skills, most of the actual writing fell to him.

The resulting Declaration of Independence has four parts. The preamble states that the colonists believed it necessary to explain why they were declaring their independence from Great Britain. The next part explains the political ideas behind their action. The third, and longest, part lists all the charges against the king; the fourth section lists all the rights that the new nation was claiming for itself as a nation.

Students may be familiar 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."

"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 eighteenth century, not all people were considered equal. For example, women and African Americans did not receive equal treatment.

Although fighting had broken out between colonists and British soldiers at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, it took the Continental Congress more than a year to approve a declaration of America's independence. While the Congress agreed to sign the document on July 2, 1776, it took two more days before they agreed on the exact wording and signed the document. That's why we celebrate Independence Day on July 4 and not on July 2.

**Introduce “The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!”****5min**

Display the image of the painting, [Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776](#). Give students time to quietly study the image.

**Ask: What do you notice about this painting?** (*Answers will vary*). Point out the clothing worn by the individuals in the painting. **Does the clothing worn by the three figures look like clothes we wear today?** (*No, they look very old-fashioned.*)

**Do we notice any dates or numbers in the painting that could give us a clue to the time period being shown?** (*There is a piece of paper with “1776” written on it.*) If students cannot locate it, call their attention to the left-hand side of the image where a paper is hanging from the wall.

Call students’ attention to the man standing on the right side of the painting. Explain that he is holding a quill, a writing utensil used before ballpoint pens were invented.

**Ask: What are the three people featured in this painting doing?** (*They appear to be reading and writing something important. All the papers on the floor could mean that they’ve been working on this for a while.*)

**Ask: Do you recognize any of the people featured in this painting? What do you think they are writing?** (*The three figures, from left to right, are Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.*)

**Think about what you already know about the year 1776. What do you think they are writing?** (*They are writing the Declaration of Independence.*)

**Look at all the papers on the floor. What do you think they are? Why do you think they’re there?** (*The papers are copies or drafts that Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson didn’t like.*)

**Explore Main Ideas of the Declaration****20 min**

Explain to students that the painting they have been looking at is an artist’s rendition of the writing of the Declaration of Independence, an important document in the history of the United States. Explain that someone who is independent is free from the control of others. They make their own choices and take care of themselves. For example, when students get ready for school all by themselves, they are acting independently.

Help students understand Americans’ relationship with Britain prior to 1776. Explain that before the Declaration of Independence, the colonies were part of another country called Britain. The American colonists paid taxes to Britain but were not allowed to make their own laws or take part in the British government. They believed this was unfair. Explain that not only did the Declaration state Americans’ intention to separate from Britain, but it also made clear some of the ideas that are most important to the United States. One of these ideas is equal rights.

Write the phrases “All men are created equal” and “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” on the board or chart paper. Read both statements aloud slowly. Tell students that these are perhaps the most famous and important lines in the Declaration of Independence.

Explain that the first phrase means that everyone is born with equal rights. Explain that equal rights are freedoms that are protected by law for everyone. In the United States today, everyone has freedom

of speech and freedom of religion. Laws protect our freedom to say almost anything we want and our freedom to worship the way we want—or not to worship at all.

Explain that the second phrase means that people have the right to live, the right to be free, and the right to work towards happiness.

Call students' attention to the fact that the Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal." Explain that at that time, equality and liberty were thought by some to be the rights of white men only. (In many cases only white men who were property owners had rights.) **Ask students what other people living in the colonies did not have the same rights as white men.** (*women, enslaved Africans, Native Americans*) Note that if the Declaration of Independence were written today, it might say that "all people are created equal."

Display the image of [July 4th fireworks, Washington, D.C.](#) Give students a moment to study the image. **Ask: what do you notice about this image? Do you recognize any buildings in the background?** (*Students will likely notice the colorful fireworks display; they may recall learning about the nation's capital or recognize the Washington Monument.*) **What holiday is being celebrated?** (the Fourth of July)

Remind students that the Fourth of July is Independence Day. It celebrates the day the Declaration of Independence was approved. Explain that on July 4th, 2026, we will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration, a huge milestone for the United States of America. Explain that in a certain way, July 2026 is the nation's 250th birthday, and to honor the event, they will be creating birthday cards for the United States.

**Turn and Talk:** Have students turn to a partner. Explain that they will have two minutes to brainstorm the kinds of things that people typically write on birthday cards with their partner. After two minutes, you will be calling on a few pairs to share their examples with the class. Give the students a few minutes to discuss. Circulate the room as they do and take notes on any strong suggestions. If students are struggling to come up with examples, have them think about birthday cards they have written or received. What did the covers look like? What kinds of notes were written inside?

Call on a few pairs to share their examples. As the students share, record their examples on the board or chart paper. Add any other examples you heard as you circulated that were not shared. (*Likely examples will include balloons and confetti, birthday cake and candles, wrapped gifts; messages saying: "Happy Birthday!", "Celebrate your special day!", "Here's to another year of amazing adventures!", "Cheers to you on your birthday—let the fun begin!"*)

Explain to students that because this card is celebrating the birth of a nation, and not an individual, we will need to write birthday messages that are a bit different. Use these ideas to give students concrete examples: *"Happy 250th Year of Independence!", "Today, all people are created equal", "Good job Jefferson, here's to 250 more years!", "Happy Birthday Declaration!", "1776 was a long time ago, but life and liberty never go out of style!"* Read each of these examples to students and ask them if they have any other ideas for personalized messages. Record them on the board or chart paper.

**Ask students: What are some other symbols of United States that might be appropriate to add to a birthday card?** (*The American Flag, the Bald Eagle, the White House, July 4th, 1776, fireworks*) Add these examples to the board or chart paper.

Display the [image of the U.S. Flag](#). **Ask: How many stripes do you see on the flag?** (*thirteen*) Explain that each stripe represents one of the original thirteen colonies. How many stars do you see? (*fifty*). Explain that each star represents one of the current U.S. states.

**Review****5min**

Review the ideas collected on the board or chart paper on Day 1. Explain that students will use these ideas to help them create a birthday card for the United States.

**Draft and Finalize U.S. Government Birthday Cards****25min**

Explain to students that a good birthday card has colorful, interesting images on the front, and a kind, personal message of congratulations on the inside. Their birthday cards for the Declaration of Independence will need to have both.

Explain to students that they will now begin to draft their “birthday” cards for the United States government. They will have the remainder of this class period to work on their draft. Encourage them to decorate the front of their card with images that represent the United States.

For the inside of their card, they will need to write a happy birthday message. Encourage them to use the example messages you wrote on the board or chart paper as a model. Younger students who are still learning to write may need a good deal of additional support here. Consider crafting a single birthday message as a class that they can copy onto the card template or having an adult take dictation from students.

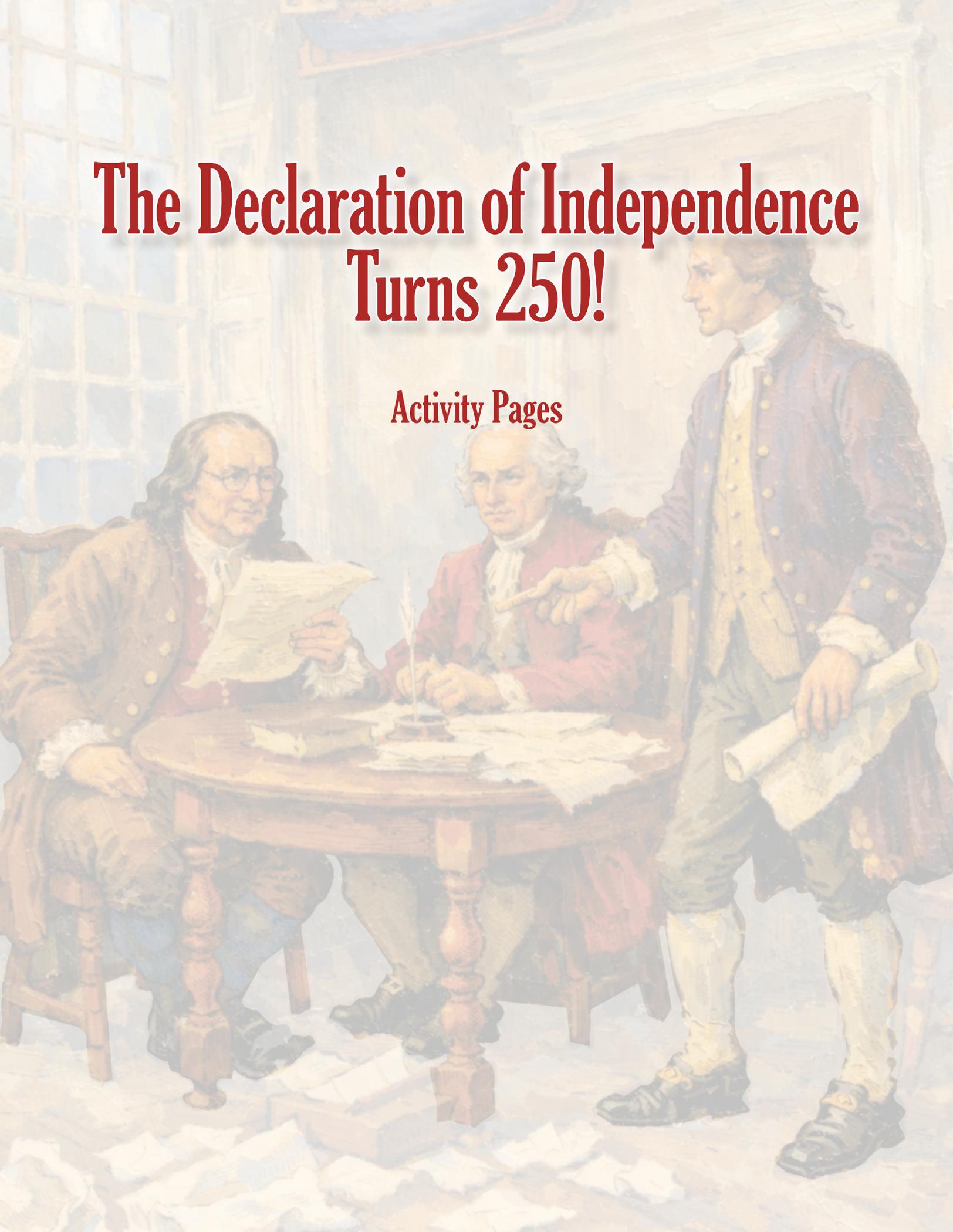
Explain to students that once they are done drafting their cards on a piece of paper, you will give them a new card to use for their finalized birthday card.

Distribute crayons, markers or colored pencils and the draft Declaration Turns 250 Birthday Card templates (**AP 1.1**). Give students time to draft their cards, circulating the room to offer assistance to students who need more support. Consider pulling students who need additional help into a single group to focus your support.

As students complete their drafts, review their messages to see if they’ve included the correct content, and spelling and capitalization errors. Then allow them to transfer their work onto the cardstock templates (**AP 1.2**) for their final copies. Consider having students present their cards to a partner, small group, or the entire class.

# The Declaration of Independence Turns 250!

Activity Pages



Date \_\_\_\_\_

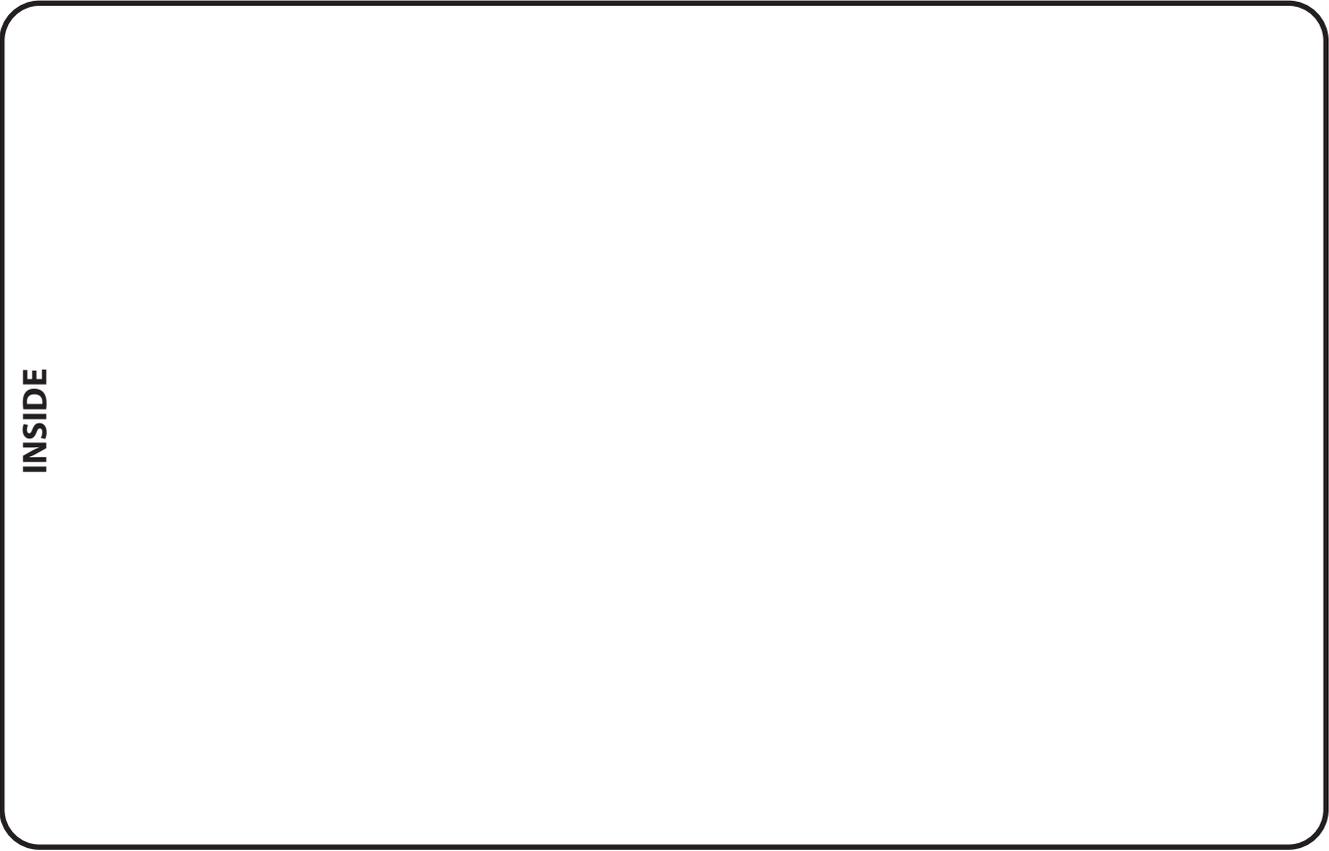
**INSIDE**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FRONT**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**INSIDE**



Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FRONT**





## Illustration and Photo Credits

Ivan Pestic: Covers, TOC, 7

Within this publication, the Core Knowledge Foundation has provided hyperlinks to independently owned and operated sites whose content we have determined to be of possible interest to you. At the time of publication, all links were valid and operational and the content accessed by the links provided additional information that supported the Core Knowledge curricular content and/or lessons. Please note that we do not monitor the links or the content on such sites on an ongoing basis and both may be constantly changing. We have no control over the links, the content or the policies, information-gathering or otherwise, of such linked sites.

By accessing these third-party sites and the content provided therein, you acknowledge and agree that the Core Knowledge Foundation makes no claims, promises, or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the content of such third-party websites, and expressly disclaims liability for errors and omissions in either the links themselves, or the contents of such sites.

If you experience any difficulties when attempting to access one of the linked resources found within these materials, please contact the Core Knowledge Foundation:

Core Knowledge Foundation

Charlottesville, VA 22902

Email: [coreknow@coreknowledge.org](mailto:coreknow@coreknowledge.org)