

Local and State Declarations

Teacher Power Point Notes

Historical background leading up to declaring independence addressing these essential questions:

- How did some American colonists show Congress they supported breaking away from Britain?
- What is the relationship between the people and their government representatives?
- How do local and state declarations show the idea of consent of the governed?

The Continental Congress voted to break away from King George III on July 2, 1776. Then it approved the final wording of the Declaration on July 4. But the delegates didn't make that decision on their own. People across the colonies already supported independence. **Towns, counties, and states** sent messages to their **representatives**, urging them to vote for separation. These actions show that ordinary Americans across the colonies played a key role in the push for independence—not only leaders in Philadelphia.

What do state and local declarations show?

- Ordinary Americans across the colonies played a key role in the push for independence—not only leaders in Philadelphia.
- The people spoke up and shared their opinions with their representatives.
- Americans were withdrawing their consent to be governed by a king who violated their rights.

Background

- **Glorious Revolution**
 - **Main idea**—The Glorious Revolution of 1688 showed that the king's power should be limited by law and shared with Parliament. It led to the creation of a constitutional monarchy, where the king or queen had to follow the laws and work with Parliament to govern the country.
 - ♣ **Details**

- James II reigned from 1685 to 1688. He was not popular among Protestants due to his strong Catholic beliefs and policies that favoured Catholics. In 1688 he fled to France to avoid court proceedings that would find him guilty, thus abdicating the throne.
- It marked the peaceful overthrow of King James II who, along with his father, heavily emphasized “divine right of kings.” James II was peacefully replaced by William III and Mary II under the condition that they accept the Bill of Rights (1689), which firmly established Parliament’s authority over the Crown and some basic civil rights for subjects.
- **Declaration of Rights**
 - Formally ended the reign of King James II, listing in 13 clauses the king's misconduct that justified his removal. In the second Whereas clause it stated the “late King James the second having abdicated the Government,” the throne was “thereby vacant.” opening the throne for the inauguration of William of Orange and his wife Mary.
 - This provides a precedence for colonists listing grievances with the king.
- **Colonial Charters**
 - **Main idea**—To start a colony, settlers needed the king’s permission, which came as a colonial charter. This charter created a direct connection between the colony and the king—not with other colonies. So when the colonies began breaking ties with the king and declaring independence, it was a new idea for them to start working together.
- **French and Indian War**
 - **Main idea**—The French and Indian War was part of a global conflict that left Britain in debt, so British leaders raised taxes on the American colonies, which had gotten used to governing themselves while Britain was focused on the war.
- **Colonists Protest, the Empire Strikes Back**
 - **Main idea**--Colonists protested new taxes, including through the Boston Tea Party, which led to harsh punishments from Britain. These actions, along with the presence of British soldiers, increased tensions and helped start the Revolutionary War.

See worksheets with excerpts from state, county, and town declarations. Those worksheets lead into a class discussion of these questions:

Class Discussion

- How did some American colonists show Congress they supported breaking away from Britain?
- What is the relationship between the people and their government representatives?
- How do local and state declarations show the idea of consent of the governed?

Classroom Activity: “Declare Independence in Your Town!”

Town Meeting Simulation

Objective:

Help students understand how towns and counties declared independence **before** July 4, 1776, and how they told Congress what to do.

Step 1: Set the Scene

Tell the class:

"It's May 1776. You live in a small town in the American colonies. Tensions with the King are high. You and your neighbors must decide: Should we stay loyal or declare independence?"

Step 2: Town Meeting Simulation

Break students into small groups. Each group represents a **colonial town** (like Ashby, Massachusetts or Spencer Town, New York). Give them these questions:

1. Should we declare independence from Britain? Why or why not?
2. What should we tell our representative in Congress to do?
3. What kind of future do we want for our colony?

Have each group write a short statement like a real town might have in 1776 — **one paragraph** is enough.

Step 3: Share & Vote

Each group reads their “Declaration” aloud. Then, as a class, take a vote:
Should your colony officially break from Britain?