

Enlightenment and Revolution

Lesson 4

The American Revolution

Key Terms and People

Declaration of Independence document declaring American independence from Britain and the reasons for it.

Thomas Jefferson American statesman; third president of the United States; author of the Declaration of Independence and one of its signers.

checks and balances system in which each branch of government checks, or limits, the power of the other two branches.

federal system system of government in which power is divided between the national and state governments.

Bill of Rights first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which protect citizens' basic rights and freedoms.

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about the spread of Enlightenment ideas in Europe.

In this lesson, you will read about how Enlightenment ideas influenced the American Revolution.

As You Read

Use a chart to list the causes and effects of the American Revolution.

BRITAIN AND ITS AMERICAN COLONIES

How were the colonies governed?

The British colonies in North America grew in population and wealth during the 1700s. The Population increased from about 250,000 in 1700 to 2,150,000 in 1770. Economically, they prospered through trade with the nations of Europe. The 13 colonies also had a kind of self-government. People in the colonies began to see themselves less and less as British subjects. Still, Parliament passed laws that governed the colonies. One set of laws banned trade with any nation other than Britain.

1. How did the colonists' image of themselves clash with their status as colonists?

Lesson 4, *continued***AMERICANS WIN INDEPENDENCE****What caused Britain and America to grow apart?**

The high cost of the French and Indian War led Parliament to tax the colonists. The colonists became very angry. They had never before paid taxes directly to the British government. They said that the taxes violated their rights. Since Parliament had no members from the colonies, they said, Parliament had no right to tax them.

The colonists met the first tax, passed in 1765, with a boycott of British goods. Their refusal to buy British products was very effective. It forced Parliament to repeal the law.

Over the next decade, the colonists and Britain grew further apart. Some colonists wanted to push the colonies to independence. They took actions that caused Britain to act harshly. Eventually, the conflict led to war. Representatives of the colonies met in a congress and formed an army. In July 1776, they announced that they were independent of Britain. They issued the **Declaration of Independence**. It was based on Enlightenment ideas. **Thomas Jefferson** wrote it.

From 1775 to 1781, the colonies and the British fought a war in North America. The colonists had a poorly equipped army, and Britain was one of the most powerful nations in the world. However, in the end, the colonies won their independence.

The British people grew tired of the cost of the war and pushed Parliament to agree to a peace. The Americans were also helped greatly by aid from France. In 1783, the two sides signed a treaty. In it, Britain recognized the independent United States of America.

2. Name some of the steps that led to the American Revolution.

AMERICANS CREATE A REPUBLIC**What are some fundamental ideas in the U.S. Constitution?**

The 13 states formed a new government under the Article of Confederation. This government was very weak. States held all the power, and the central government had little. This proved unworkable. In 1787, American leaders met again. They wrote a new framework of government.

The Constitution of the United States drew on many Enlightenment ideas. It used Montesquieu's idea of separation of powers into three branches of government. Through a system of **checks and balances**, each branch was able to prevent other branches from abusing their power. The Constitution also set up a **federal system**. Under this system, power was divided between national and state governments.

The Constitution also used Locke's idea of putting power in the hands of the people. It used Voltaire's ideas to protect the right to free speech and freedom of religion. It used Beccaria's ideas about a fair system of justice.

Many of these rights were ensured in a set of additions to the Constitution called the **Bill of Rights**. The inclusion of a Bill of Rights helped win approval for the Constitution.

3. Explain how the Constitution divides power.

Lesson 4, *continued*

As you read, note some causes and effects relating to the American Revolution and the establishment of the United States as a republic.

Causes	Events	Effects
	1. British Parliament passes Stamp Act.	
	2. British close Boston's harbor and station troops in city.	
	3. Second Continental Congress votes to form an army under command of George Washington.	
	4. France enters the war in 1778.	
	5. By approving the Articles of Confederation, states create a weak national government.	