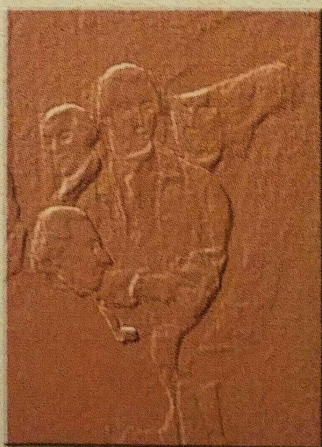


This plaque honors the men who planned the Continental Army. What was their plan?



This plaque honors the men who selected the leader of the Continental Army. Whom did they choose?



This plaque honors the men who debated independence. What did they decide?



# The Declaration of Independence

## 12.1 Introduction

In Chapter 11, you read how American Loyalists and Patriots argued over whether to declare independence from Britain. In this chapter, you will learn about American independence from the point of view of Patriot leaders, such as Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson wrote one of the most important documents in American history: the **Declaration of Independence**.

In 1775, the colonies sent delegates to the **Second Continental Congress** in Philadelphia. War was already starting between the colonies and Britain, and the Continental Congress became the government for the American revolutionaries. The delegates had to decide how to fight the war and whether to take the bold step of declaring independence.

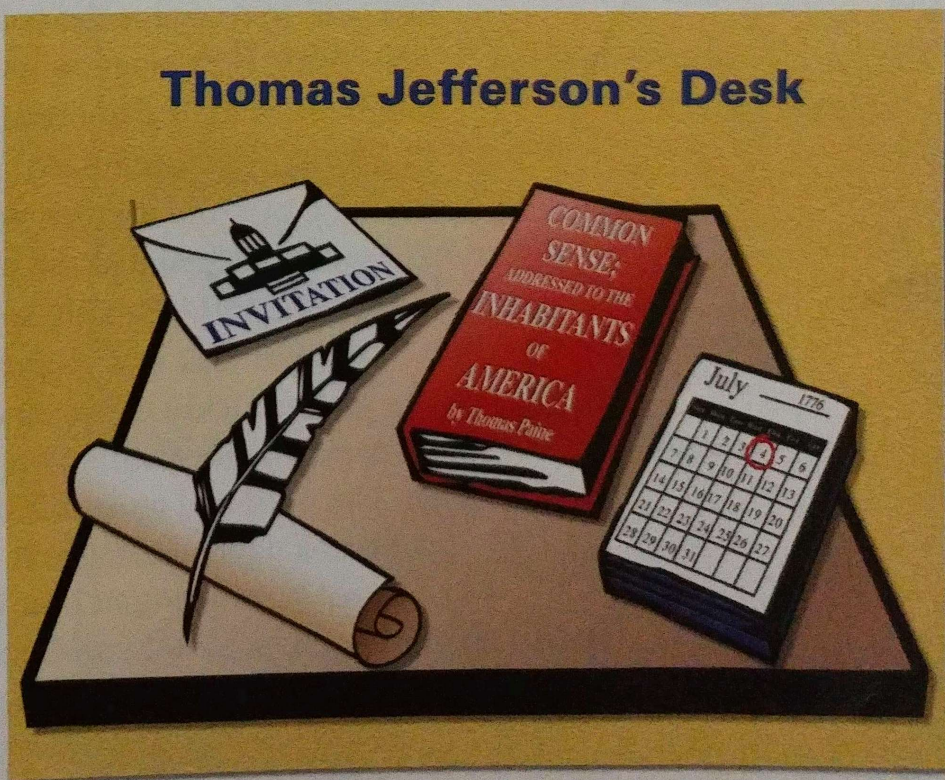
By early 1776, more and more colonists favored independence. Many of them were influenced by a booklet written by Thomas Paine called **Common Sense**. Paine argued strongly for independence in simple language that everyone could understand.

In June, Congress asked five of its delegates to write a document telling why the colonies had the right to be a separate nation. Young Thomas Jefferson sat at his portable desk in the room where he was staying and wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

Look at the drawing of Jefferson's desk to the right.

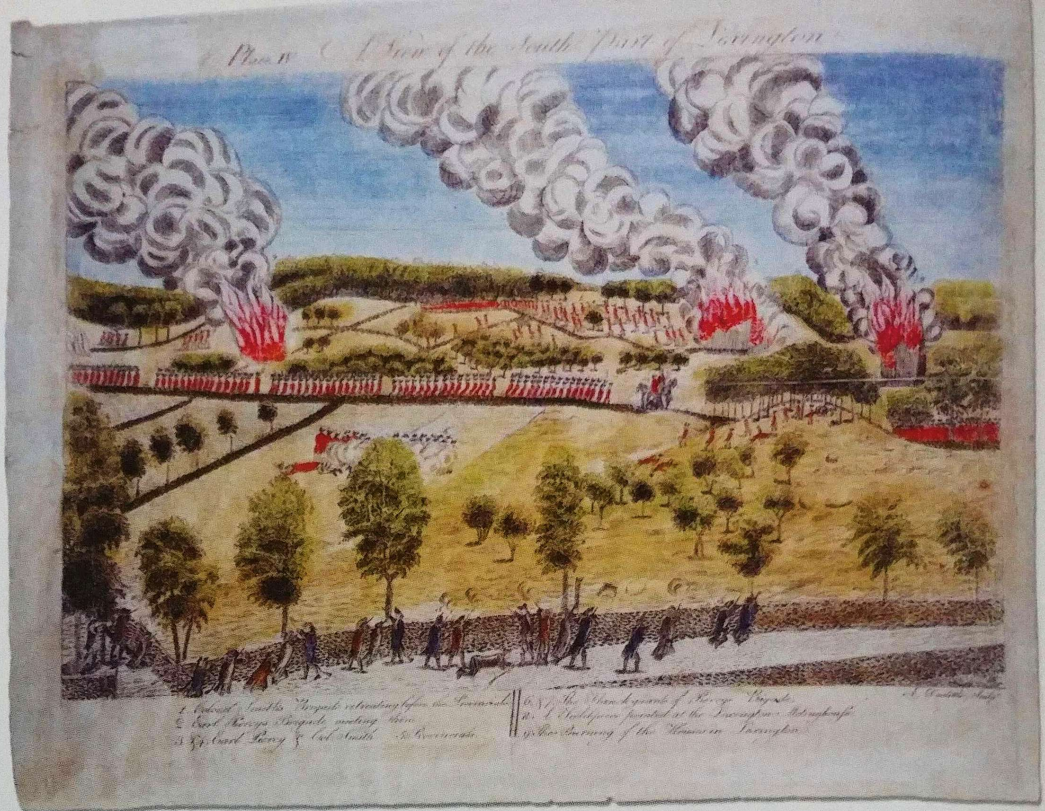
To learn about this important document, imagine Jefferson sitting at his desk. What objects does he see? What might they tell us about the Declaration of Independence?

### Thomas Jefferson's Desk





Amos Doolittle's engraving shows a small local militia attacking British soldiers. The Second Continental Congress created a large, organized army to fight the British after this battle.



## 12.2 The Second Continental Congress

On May 10, 1775, Patriot leaders began meeting in Philadelphia in the Second Continental Congress. People in the streets cheered as George Washington arrived from Virginia in his blue and gold military uniform. John Adams came by carriage from Massachusetts, and wise Benjamin Franklin sailed back from Britain to represent Pennsylvania. All together, 65 delegates took part in the Congress. Soon, these men were acting as the new government for the colonies.

The Congress faced three important tasks. The most urgent task was to organize the colonies for war against the British. Just before the Congress met, British soldiers fought with members of the Patriot **militia** at the towns of Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. The colonies' small militias were made up of ordinary men who were not full-time soldiers. The Congress decided that the colonies needed a more organized army to fight the British, so it created the Continental Army.

The next task was to decide who should lead the new army. Congress quickly chose an experienced soldier and a strong leader: George Washington.

The third and most difficult task was to decide whether to declare independence from Britain. Some Patriots, such as John Adams, were ready to take this step. But most of the delegates were still loyal to King George. Even as the fighting spread throughout the colonies, they hoped the colonies could eventually make peace with Britain.

**militia:** a small army made up of ordinary citizens



## 12.3 Thomas Paine and *Common Sense*

Like the delegates to the Continental Congress, most colonists were not sure that they wanted independence. They wanted Britain to pay attention to their complaints, but they were still loyal British citizens. And many were afraid that the colonies could not win a war against one of the most powerful armies in the world.

Then, in January 1776, Thomas Paine published a booklet called *Common Sense*. Paine had come to America from Britain in 1774. He had been in the colonies only a short while, but he was strongly in favor of independence. He argued that it was only natural for people to rule themselves instead of being ruled by a king. America, he said, had a chance to show the whole world a better form of government.

*Common Sense* had a powerful effect on the colonists. Paine wrote simply and strongly in words that everyone could understand. Many colonists still thought of Britain as the parent country, but Paine said that parents do not “make war upon their own families.” The blood of the Patriots killed in Massachusetts, he wrote, “cried out” that it was time to separate from Britain. And he told the colonists that they were strong enough to defeat the British army.

Within a few months, 120,000 copies of *Common Sense* were printed, more than any other book in America up to that time. People everywhere read it. Soldiers in the Continental Army passed copies of the book among themselves. George Washington wrote that *Common Sense* was changing many people’s minds. By the spring of 1776, most people were ready for the Continental Congress to vote for independence.

Thomas Paine’s booklet *Common Sense* convinced many colonists to declare independence.

