

HOLIDAYS & HEROES

Let's Celebrate
**INDEPENDENCE
DAY**



BY Barbara deRubertis

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When we think of the Fourth of July, we think of fireworks, flags, parades, and picnics. America has been celebrating Independence Day with gusto since July 4, 1776. It is one of our country's most important national holidays!

But what are the reasons for all this excitement?



To get the whole story, we have to go back to the years *before* American independence.

In 1773, the 13 American colonies belonged to Great Britain and were ruled by King George III. But people living in these colonies were unhappy. Why? They were not being treated fairly!

Angry colonists in Boston, Massachusetts, protest high taxes.





The dumping of British tea in Boston's harbor became known as The Boston Tea Party!

One big problem was that colonists were being asked to pay more and more taxes to the British government on basic things like sugar and tea. And they had no say in the matter whatsoever.

So the colonists resisted paying the taxes. Some even protested by dumping a shipment of British tea into the waters of Boston's harbor! The British government passed harsh laws to punish the colonists.



British "redcoats" entered the towns of Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775, and were met by local militiamen. The first shots of the war were fired.

In 1774, delegates from the 13 colonies gathered in Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress, which would now act as the colonists' own government. The delegates asked the colonists to refuse to buy British goods because of the high taxes.

In April of 1775, fighting broke out between the American colonists and the British soldiers. This marked the beginning of the American Revolutionary War.

In May, delegates to a Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. They sent a letter directly to King George asking him to protect the colonists and their interests. He refused even to read their letter!

By January of 1776, there was much debate in the colonies about whether or not they should separate themselves from Great Britain. More and more, the colonists disliked the idea of being ruled by a king.

King George III



The Second Continental Congress met at the State House in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The building was later renamed Independence Hall.

By June of 1776, the Second Continental Congress was ready to take a bold step. They would prepare a document declaring their independence from Great Britain.

A “Committee of Five” was appointed to draft the document. The committee decided that Thomas Jefferson should write the first draft.



The Committee of Five (from left to right: Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston, and John Adams)

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