

Following the first battles at Lexington and Concord, the colonies decided they should have a meeting and decide what to do next. The colonies had worked together in the past to protest British taxes and discuss common interests. This new group was called the **Second Continental Congress**, and it would become the national government. The congress lasted six years and made important decisions, helping establish American independence and unite the colonies.

- **Directions:** Read the passage and underline four main ideas. Then answer the questions.

What was the purpose? News of the battles at Lexington and Concord spread throughout the colonies. In 1775 the colonies agreed to meet at the State House in Philadelphia. Not all colonies agreed there should be a war between America and Britain. In fact, the congress sent a petition asking British King George III for peace.



Gen. George Washington

By the time the letter arrived in London, the angry king was sending more soldiers to stop the colonial rebellion. Although the congress hoped to avoid a war, they decided they should at least prepare for one. First, the leaders formed the Continental Army, a group of professionally trained soldiers who would replace the local militias. Next, they chose **George Washington** as the commander-in-chief to lead the army. Congress asked each colony to supply the army with soldiers, food, and supplies. They also printed American money that could be used in all colonies, called Continentals.

Who was there? The group chose **Peyton Randolph** to serve as president, with other notable members like John Adams, John Jay, and Richard Lee. New arrivals to the congress included Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, and Thomas Jefferson. Overall, there were about 60 delegates representing their colonies. The colonies volunteered to work together.



John Hancock



Thomas Jefferson



Peyton Randolph



Independence Hall Philadelphia

Declaration of Independence Since they were considered rebels, the congress risked their lives by meeting. The congress moved locations several times to avoid capture. In 1776, the congress decided the united colonies ought to be free and independent. A motion passed, and 33-year-old lawyer **Thomas Jefferson** spent 17 days writing the first draft of the Declaration of Independence. John Adams and Benjamin Franklin helped revise it, and the document was presented to the group. On **July 4, 1776** it was approved by congress. Bells rang and a crowd gathered at Independence Hall to hear it read aloud. News spread quickly and joyful colonists tore down British statues and signs. General



Signing of Declaration of Independence

Washington read the declaration to his troops five days later, and King George III received news in London a month later. The war for independence would last seven more years.

1. What was the Continental Congress? (≥ 1 sentence)
2. Explain the purpose of the congress in your own words. (≥ 4 sentences)
3. Cite two examples from this page how the colonies worked together. (≥ 2 sentences)
4. How was the Declaration of Independence created? (≥ 2 sentences)

**Interesting Fact:**  
Although they worked together for independence, each colony was now considered its own country. It would take the Constitution, 33 years later, for the colonies to become one nation.