Chapter 12
The Declaration of Independence
• **Declaration of Independence** – the document that announced that the American colonies were breaking away from Great Britain

• **Second Continental Congress** – the meeting of delegates from the American colonies that began in Philadelphia in 1775

• **Common Sense** – a short, powerful book by Thomas Paine that argued plainly and simply that the American colonies should break away from Great Britain

• **militia** – a small army made up of ordinary citizens

• **treason** – the crime of disloyalty toward a ruler or government
Prior to 12.2

• Just before the Second Continental Congress met, there had been an incident in Lexington and Concord

• The evening prior, Paul Revere had made his famous ride to warn the Patriots that, “The British are Coming!”
12.2 The Second Continental Congress

- Patriot leaders met on May 10, 1775 in Philadelphia, PA

- 65 delegates took part, including George Washington, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin.

- They had three tasks:
  1. To organize the colonies for war against the British, thus creating the Continental Army
  2. To decide who should lead the Continental Army
  3. To decide whether or not to declare independence from Britain
12.2 The Second Continental Congress

- The Battle of Lexington and Concord occurred just before the Second Continental Congress met
  - British soldiers fought against Patriot militias, made up of ordinary men that were not full time soldiers

- George Washington was chosen to lead the Continental Army

- Some Patriots were ready to declare independence, but most were still loyal to King George. As fighting spread they had hoped that the colonies would eventually make peace with Britain.
12.3 Thomas Paine and *Common Sense*

- Many were afraid that the colonies could not win a war against one of the world’s most powerful armies.
- Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* in January 1776 and gained popularity due to its simple and strong message.
- Paine came to America from Britain in 1774 and said that:
  1. It was natural for people to rule themselves
  2. America had a chance to show the world a better form of government
  3. Parents do not “make war upon their own families.”
  4. Said that it was time to separate from Britain and they were strong enough to defeat the British army
- 120,000 copies of the book were printed, more than any other at the time, and people everywhere read it
12.4 Writing of the Declaration of Independence

- *Common Sense* helped convince the Second Continental Congress to move toward independence.
- On June 7, 1776, Virginian delegates introduced a resolution declaring that the colonies should be free and independent states.
- Thomas Jefferson was a 33 year old Virginian delegate.
- John Adams and Benjamin Franklin asked Jefferson to write a draft of the colonies’ declaration of independence.
- He worked for almost 2 weeks at writing and rewriting the document.
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- Congress argued over independence for several days, but finally voted to separate from Britain on July 2, 1776.

- Congress delegates spent 2 days discussing every word of the document and voting on changes.
  - Two southern colonies insisted on taking out Jefferson’s statement that slavery was a “cruel war against human nature.”

- Jefferson did not like to see his document changed, but in order to become a united country, everyone had to agree.

- On July 4, 1776, Congress voted to approve the Declaration of Independence.
After approval, a handwritten copy was prepared for the delegates to sign. Signing the declaration would be an act of treason toward the king and was punishable by death. John Hancock warned the delegates that they must stay united or they would “all hang together.” Copies were sent to the governments of each colony and to the Continental Army. People cheered, fired guns and cannons into the air, rang church bells, had parades, and built bonfires to celebrate. The Continental Army tore down a statue of King George and melted it to make 42,088 musket balls (bullets).
“When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another... a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”
12.6 The Declaration of Independence

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”
12.6 The Declaration of Independence

“To secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government.”
12.6 The Declaration of Independence

“The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having, in direct object, the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.
12.6 The Declaration of Independence

“(We) solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and that State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved.”