

Name: _____

Debating Independence

Patriots: Fight for Independence!

It's June 1776 and Richard Henry Lee has proposed a resolution to declare independence, leading to debate in the Second Continental Congress. You AGREE with Mr. Lee and support independence, so your job is now to convince the rest of Congress to support his resolution and draft an official declaration of independence. Using the provided sources, work with your fellow Patriots to formulate and present your strongest arguments to convince Congress to vote for independence.

The sides:

Fight for Independence (Patriots)	Remain Loyal (Loyalists)
<p>Damn the king and damn Parliament! They have murdered our fathers and brothers, burned our homes, and stolen our property. Is this how a loving parent treats her children? The ties that once bound us to the mother country have been broken by British force. Now we must stand up for ourselves. The brave souls who came here to find the religious freedom and economic opportunity they were denied in England have built a new society. By right, we are entitled to independence. Feelings of gratitude and obligation toward Britain are misplaced. Britain has not protected our interests, but its own. Trade regulations were not intended to benefit the colonies, but to enrich Britain. Moreover, this conflict was started by British officials, not by us. The British took it upon themselves to close our ports, ban our assemblies, take away our property, and fire upon our citizens.</p> <p>There is no longer good reason to remain tied to Britain. Our population is growing rapidly and in fifty years will surpass that of Britain. Our land is fertile and without limits, and our God-given resources dwarf those of the British Isles. Our trade would expand. Without the restrictions imposed by London, new markets in Europe would be open to American goods. Our merchants would be free to import products from France, Spain, Holland, or any other nation. Even the British would soon be eager for our trade. Independence will be a boon to our economy. Independence will also permit us to develop along the path we have set for ourselves. From all over Europe, freedom-loving men who wish to be judged by their abilities and not by their birth would be attracted to our shores. Our foreign relations would be of our choosing. No longer would we be drawn into London's distant wars. The British cannot wage war in the colonies for long. Their supply lines stretch to the other side of the Atlantic, and the French and the Spanish will see an opportunity to weaken their rival by supporting our cause--even now, there are reports that French aid is on the way. God gave each of us the sacred natural rights of life, liberty, and security in our property. No power on earth can take these away without our consent. As John Locke asserted, we have an obligation to overthrow a government that violates its duty to protect our fundamental rights. We have the moral authority to establish a government that will promote our well-being. Past divisions among the colonies will fade away once a continental government of our own replaces British rule.</p> <p>Last year, it was the farmers of Lexington who were massacred. Who will be next? There is no turning back. We must strike out for freedom.</p>	<p>Damn those rabble-rousing radicals in Boston and Philadelphia!</p> <p>The actions of these mad, power-hungry fools are threatening to sever the ties that bind us to our beloved mother country and our gracious king. We are at risk of losing the protection of the British constitution—the most noble effort yet produced by the minds of men to govern human affairs. To take up arms against Britain is both treasonous and suicidal.</p> <p>How short are the memories of these rebels! They have forgotten that we are here thanks to the crown and the Parliament. The Britain they now despise founded our colonies, nurtured our development, and protected us from our enemies. Just a few years ago, they were praising King George and Prime Minister Pitt for Britain's glorious victories over the French and their cruel Indian allies—a triumph that opened up the entire continent to our use. At great costs, the British military has guarded our shipping and defended our frontier settlements. The meager taxes that we have been asked to pay are a small price for the benefits we receive.</p> <p>Consider how we have prospered within the British empire. Our population is now two million and doubling every twenty-five years. Our merchant ships carry cargoes to the West Indies, Europe, and Africa. Our fishermen cast their nets in Canadian waters and sell their catch locally and abroad. For more than a century and a half, our legislatures have enjoyed the right of self-government. Compared to our brothers in Britain, we pay much less in taxes. Indeed, they and the rest of the world envy our happiness and wellbeing.</p> <p>Of course, all that we have gained would be ruined by war. Our towns would be occupied, our merchants driven into bankruptcy, and our ships sunk. With markets abroad closed, the bounty produced by our farmers and fishermen would be left to rot. Brother would be turned against brother, and neighbor against neighbor. Fire and sword would reach the smallest village. Are we willing to bring all this upon our heads rather than sit down with British officials and settle our differences?</p> <p>Reflect for a moment on what awaits us if, God forbid, the radicals are successful in severing our ties of blood and tradition with Britain. In such circumstances, the thirteen colonies would immediately begin to squabble among themselves, much like selfish children deprived of parental guidance. How would the disputes over the western land claims be settled? Who would sort out disagreements over trade, or the usage of harbors and rivers? Even worse, the rabble and lower classes that have become the tools of the Boston radicals would soon turn on their betters. Do you want Sam Adams and his mob to govern you? Instead of the imagined tyranny of the king, we would suffer the real tyranny of the democratic mob. Whose property will be safe then?</p> <p>Above all, let us recognize that loyalty and obedience to the king and Parliament are our sacred duties. King George is the head of our church, and he rules by the grace of God. We must honor the words of Saint Paul to respect legitimate authority. Our lives, our liberties as Englishmen, and our prosperity depend on our obedience to God and our allegiance to our king and Parliament.</p>

Use the space below to prepare your argument:

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Your strongest arguments	Your weakest arguments/possible counter-arguments

Summarize(during/after debate/presentations): What were the major arguments for and against independence? Which side do you think had the more compelling argument(s)?

In support of independence	Against independence

Most compelling argument and explanation: