

**Genre** Historical Fiction

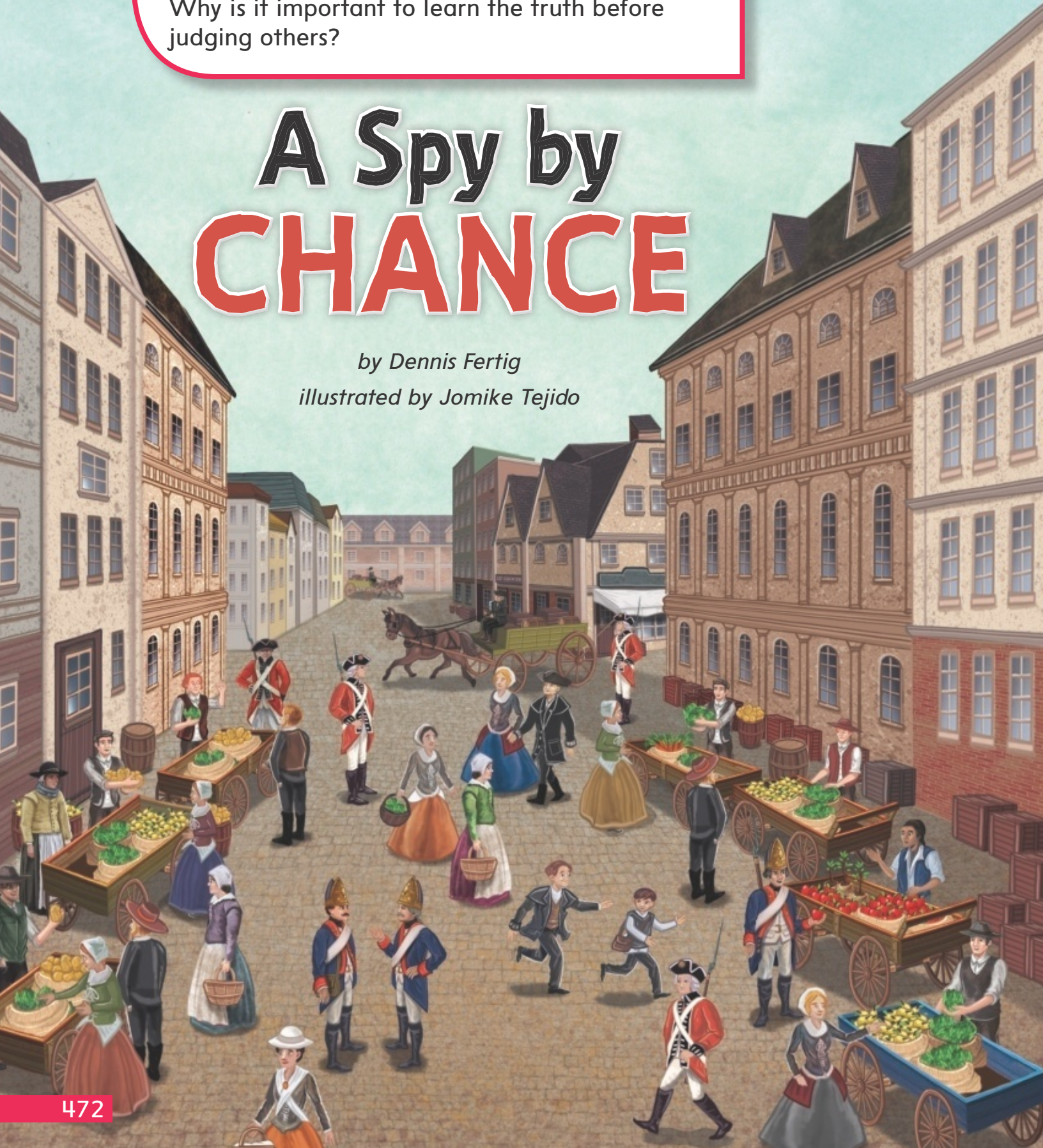
**Essential Questions**

How does progress rely on people taking risks?  
Why is it important to learn the truth before  
judging others?

# A Spy by CHANCE

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Walter Krafft stood by a pushcart in a busy Manhattan market square, shouting to anyone who would listen. “Fresh apple?” he would ask passersby. Business was good here, especially since the British Army took control of the city almost two years ago, back in 1776. On most days, Walter sold all his apples by noon, usually to the British soldiers in their sharp red jackets. He would tell his friends, “Redcoats like red apples.”

Walter was friendly to all his customers, but in spite of the good business that the recent British occupation brought his small enterprise, he wished they were no longer in New York. Walter was a quiet American Patriot who looked forward to the day when George Washington’s army would drive British soldiers out of America. At times, Walter thought about joining Washington’s army.

The October morning was chilly. Yesterday, Walter’s father had joked in German about the fall weather: “Cool and crisp, just like a bite into a good apple!”

Walter’s father had come to the American colonies from Germany almost forty years ago, and his family settled on a farm just north of New York City. He learned to speak English, but was more comfortable with his native tongue. Walter could speak both languages, but speaking English helped him sell apples to British soldiers. He preferred the English language anyway.

Walter’s father and grandfather grew apple trees on the family farm. Since he was a young boy, Walter had worked in the orchards. Before the war, he often traveled around New York, visiting other apple orchards and studying types of apples. Now, that sort of travel could be difficult and dangerous.

Every day for the past few years, Walter came to the marketplace to sell apple tree saplings and cider apples at the market square. He had been doing this work for so long now, he assumed he would do it the rest of his life. He imagined his future children tagging along, too.

This morning, most of Walter’s customers were soldiers. Many were Hessian soldiers, who came from German-speaking countries in Europe to fight for the British against the American revolutionaries.



Sometimes, Hessian soldiers buying apples from Walter would make fun of him in German or talk about stealing his apples. Walter just smiled and never let on that he understood every word they spoke. In fact, Walter never spoke German except on the family farm.

Today, Walter did not sell all of his apples until the late afternoon. As he rolled his cart out of the square, he spotted Abraham Woodhull talking and laughing with some Redcoats. He had not seen Abraham for weeks and was keen to talk to him. The two friends waved and walked toward each other.

Walter and Abraham had met before the war. Abraham farmed on Long Island near Setauket, a pretty village sitting close to the waters of Long Island Sound. Walter had been traveling through Long Island, studying other apple farms. When he knocked on Abraham's door to inquire about his crops, Walter learned that Abraham grew cabbage, corn, and other produce . . . but not apples. But as Walter and Abraham chatted over a cup of cider, camaraderie soon began. In fact, it was probably for the best that Abraham did not grow apples—less competition for Walter's family farm.



Since that first meeting, the two often ran into each other in the market square. Sometimes, at the end of a busy day, Walter and Abraham sat down together for supper at the inn, where they would swap stories, jokes, and opinions. Of course, they often talked about the war. Both men supported the Revolution. Abraham had even been in the local Patriot militia in Setauket, but not for very long.

After the British Army took control of New York, conversations about the war became risky. Saying the wrong thing at the wrong time could get a person arrested or even hanged.

It had been a few weeks since the two men last talked, but Walter recently heard a rumor that Abraham had taken a loyalty oath to the King of England. Walter did not believe his friend would betray his country like that, but he had to find out if it was true.

Walter and Abraham shook hands and greeted each other. "I haven't seen you for weeks, Abraham," Walter said.

"Business has kept me in Setauket, but it is good to be back at the market." Abraham said this with a smile, but Walter noticed that Abraham's darting eyes seemed to be watching other people in the market.

The friends agreed to meet for supper later. Abraham walked back to his produce stand, where he continued talking to the Redcoat soldiers. Walter could not remember Abraham being this outgoing before. Walter knew it was wise to be friendly with the British troops in order to stay on their good side and not get into trouble . . . but was Abraham being *too* friendly?



That night, the inn was filled with people and conversation. As Walter and Abraham leaned across the table to talk, Abraham admitted that he *had* taken a loyalty oath to King George. He explained that it was important for business in Manhattan and Setauket, which were both controlled by British troops.

“I am shocked,” said Walter softly. “Your feelings for the Patriot’s cause—for independence!—have been so strong.”

“Yes,” said Abraham a bit nervously, “but I have grown wiser. This war will almost certainly end badly for the Patriots.”

Walter looked into Abraham eyes, but did not know what to say. Then Walter sensed something—a possibility. “Is there more going on?” he asked quietly.

“More? What could you mean?” Abraham replied with a crooked smile.

Walter suspected something, but dared not speak it aloud. Instead, after finishing their meals, the two men shook hands and left to return to their farms for the weekend.

A couple days later, the two friends were both back doing business in the market. From a distance, Walter watched Abraham chat with several Redcoats. Abraham even tried to talk with Hessian soldiers, although not many spoke enough English to hold a conversation. Walter still doubted his friend had switched loyalties. He thought his dinner with Abraham would have confirmed it, but it only left him more curious and unsure.

Since their supper at the inn, the two had conversed on several occasions. They did not talk again about the loyalty oath, but Walter’s suspicions grew. Once or twice in the market, he had overheard Abraham ask Redcoats friendly questions about their families back home in England, what they thought of America, and when they thought they might return to their families.

Weeks later, Walter was again in the market square. It was the last trip he would make for months. It was winter, the orchard had just about stopped producing apples for the season, and there was little business in the square when it was so cold. The only people around were unfriendly Hessian soldiers who really did not want his apples, even if they were crisp. The British Redcoats must have been off to someplace else, perhaps their winter camp.

Walter searched for Abraham, but could not see him. In fact, he had not seen Abraham for at least a week.

Was it a coincidence that Abraham had disappeared from the market around the same time the Redcoats had left? Maybe it meant that Abraham was helping the British army. Or perhaps Abraham had heard something from the soldiers and was now acting upon it. A soldier might have told Abraham that British army food supplies were low, or that travel would be more difficult because the British planned to blockade a port or a bridge.

Walter had an idea that started in his brain but quickly fell heavily down to his gut—could his friend Abraham Woodhull be a spy? Despite his oath of loyalty to the king, could Abraham still be helping the revolution?

Walter then thought about Nathan Hale, the Patriot spy that the British had caught and hanged two years ago. That was the punishment that Abraham and those who helped him could face if they were caught.



Walter was preparing to leave the market square that day when he overheard Hessian soldiers speaking in German. The square was almost empty, and the soldiers spoke freely near Walter's cart. They felt comfortable in the square, not suspecting that any of the Americans nearby could understand their language.

The Hessians chatted about General Washington's winter camps in Morristown, New Jersey, and Redding, Connecticut.

This information didn't surprise Walter. The British army always knew where the Americans stayed during the winter, and the locations of the British winter headquarters were well known by Washington and his men.

But then one Hessian soldier mentioned something frightening. The British troops that had left New York were going to be part of a sneak attack on Washington's troops, he said. In early December, they would attack regiments moving from Hudson Highlands in New York to the Redding headquarters. The British Army hoped to kill or capture *hundreds* of Americans.





As Walter heard the soldier's words, he could not believe they were foolish enough to discuss these plans in the market square. Then Walter felt the weight of what he had heard. In two weeks, American regiments would be destroyed in a sneak attack. Walter quickly realized that he was the only American who knew about the plan.

Walter sat on a nearby bench and wondered whether the Hessians soldiers were watching him. Did they know he understood their language? They soon walked away, laughing about something one of them had said. They did not suspect anything, Walter thought.

Still, Walter was deeply frightened. He wanted to leave quickly for his family farm and stay there until this terrible war was over, but he knew he now had a responsibility. He had to tell someone about the planned attack, someone who could do something about it. The only person he knew who might be able to do that was Abraham, if he was what Walter suspected. This meant Walter must trust his suspicions about his friend and get to Setauket as soon as possible. He knew Abraham might not be there, but Walter did not know what else to do.



Walter shivered in the November cold, yet it was not just weather that chilled him. It was fear. Walter walked to the stable where he kept his horse and wagon. It had been years since Walter had been to Setauket, but he remembered the ride would take hours. He dared not waste any precious time.

As Walter readied his horse and wagon, he thought about the route he would take and the dangers he would face. Long Island roads had a fair share of bandits, but he hoped the frigid weather would keep them home.

Walter also thought about British Army checkpoints he would encounter along the route. Checkpoint soldiers could be rude and threatening.

In the stable, Walter had stored some things under lock and key. They were goods he had traded for in the market square—rolls of cloth, teas and spices, books, and a burlap bag filled with shiny trinkets of little value. He knew that British soldiers would make him pay taxes on these goods if he tried to take them through a checkpoint. He also knew that paying taxes would make it easier for him to get by unquestioned. An empty wagon would lead to too many questions. So he loaded the things onto his small wagon and strapped it to the horse.

Darkness slowly dimmed the sky as Walter rode away from the stable. He pushed his horse to move quickly through Manhattan streets so that he would not miss the last ferry across the East River to Long Island.

Later, on the ferry, Walter saw a British prison ship anchored in the wide river. It was a brutal place that held people who had broken British laws. The ship frightened Walter, and he wondered whether Patriot spies were imprisoned deep in the ship's hull.

Walter remembered how he had hoped that Abraham wasn't a spy. Now he hoped that he was, and that Abraham could quickly reach American troops to warn them of the British attack.

It was dark when the ferry docked on the Long Island side of the river. As Walter nervously drove the wagon off the ferry, three unfriendly British soldiers stopped him and charged a tax on his goods. They also asked many questions, which made Walter nervous. When they asked him where he was going, he hesitated, and then lied: "I—I'm going to Smithtown." He thought it was too risky to mention Setauket.



Once the soldiers let him pass, Walter checked his pocket watch. It was nine o'clock. He hoped to get to Abraham's farm by early morning.

As the trip began, Walter proceeded slowly. Soon, however, he nudged his horse to a good clip. Walter hoped the poor fellow could hold that speed through much of the night. He also hoped both he and the horse could survive any bad luck the cold November winds might blow their way.

The goods in the wagon bounced around noisily. About 10 miles away from the ferry landing, Walter noticed movement in some trees on a slight hill and panicked. Were bandits lurking there? No, it was just a deer reacting to the noisy wagon.

During the long night, Walter often stopped and gave the horse feed, water, and a caring pat. As he did this, he kept a sharp lookout for bandits or British soldiers.

About halfway through Queens County, near midnight, more British soldiers stopped him. They were gruffer and even more frightening than the other soldiers. They took the bag of trinkets and more of Walter's money in taxes before sending him on his way. He was just glad they let him pass.



As the night got colder, Walter shivered in his seat. He thought to himself, "At least the cold should keep the thieves away." That's what he thought, but he was wrong. Just as Walter led his horse into a densely wooded area of the path, he heard an excited voice shout, "We got one!"

Walter snapped the reins on his horse's back. The horse reacted quickly and galloped as fast as it could. As the wagon sped away, Walter ducked under low-hanging branches. Behind him, four or five men ran into the road. They had been awakened by their friend's yelling but did not have time to reach their horses. Walter pushed his horse even harder.

Twenty minutes later, Walter felt he was free from the robbers, but he pushed his horse for another mile or so to be safe, and then stopped the wagon at the top of a hill. From the hill, Walter watched for the bandits as he fed and watered his exhausted horse.

Walter's hands trembled. A day ago, he had no idea he would be in the midst of such a frightening road trip. When he thought about the American regiments that could be attacked if he did not deliver the dire warning, Walter's hands steadied. He had to get to Abraham—and fast.



Abraham did not think of himself as a brave man. Since the early years of the American war for independence, he had avoided serious risk. Three years ago, in 1775, he had served in the local Suffolk County militia and trained for battles against the British. At first, those battles never came, and Abraham quit the militia. He told himself he must farm his land, not fight. He was glad he never had to risk his life.

So Abraham did not fight when the British won an important battle on Long Island or when they captured New York City. But as the American forces lost ground, Abraham knew his freedoms were being threatened. He knew he had to fight. Instead of joining the front lines, he used his charming produce stand to befriend occupying soldiers and gather confidential intelligence. He became a spy. Thanks to careful listening, secret codes, and a small group of loyal friends, Abraham was sending information to General Washington that was saving American lives. Among the handful of people who knew what he did, Abraham was considered a great hero.

Abraham knew he could be caught and hanged. He constantly felt fear, even if he did not show it. Fear or not, he was doing the right thing for the new country, and he had to keep doing it.

As Abraham lay in bed and considered his situation, he heard the sound of a wagon approaching. He grabbed his musket, ran outside, and took a hard look at the man driving the wagon. It was Walter Krafft! "Why is he here?" Abraham asked himself.

In a moment, Walter was out of his wagon, patting his horse behind the ear, and relaying to Abraham what the Hessian soldiers had said. Abraham looked at Walter and wondered whether or not he could trust him. After a long few moments, Abraham said, "You've done a good thing. Your quick thinking will save lives. I'll get this information to General Washington."

Walter sighed with relief.

Abraham said, "Welcome to our small, secret club, Walter. You're going to help us win this war. But first, come inside. You must be hungry after such a long journey!"

Walter was glad to be in the company of a loyal Patriot. Despite the risks, he was happy to use his knowledge of the German language to do what he could to fight for his country. As he and Abraham went inside to eat, Walter was more certain than ever that he had done the right thing.

You will answer the comprehension questions on these pages as a class.

### Text Connections

1. What rumor does Walter hear about Abraham?
2. How does Walter find out about the planned sneak attack on the Americans?
3. What goods does Walter pack in his wagon?
4. In "The Starving Time," you read about how the first colonists persevered when they first arrived in North America. How did colonists also persevere during the American Revolution?
5. Abraham and Walter are both loyal to the Patriots. Why do you think loyalty is important?



### Did You Know?

During the Revolutionary War, British soldiers were called Redcoats because of the red coats and uniforms they wore. The color red was chosen for the uniforms because red dye was one of the cheapest to produce.

## Write

Abraham did not think of himself as a brave man, but he was. Write about a time when you were brave.

## Look Closer

### Keys to Comprehension

1. Where was Walter's father born? Where was Walter born? How do you know?
2. Abraham risks his life in the story. Why? What is the theme, or message, that you take away from his actions?

### Writer's Craft

3. "A Spy by Chance" has a third-person omniscient narrator who is not a character in the story. How would the story be different if Abraham told it? How would the story be different if Walter told it?

### Concept Development

4. Think about the risks that characters took in "A Spy by Chance" and "The Starving Time." What makes these situations alike and different?







Read this Social Studies Connection. You will answer the questions as a class.

### Text Feature

Quotation marks are often used when an author wants to define a word or phrase.

## “Rule by the People”

You just read about a man who served as a spy in the Revolutionary War. The story takes place in a time when the American colonies were ruled by Britain. Although Britain was all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, their government still had direct control over the colonists in North America. Oftentimes this was a good thing for the colonists—their relationship with Britain meant that American enterprises had access to valuable trade routes. The British army also protected them. Despite these benefits, however, colonists still lacked one important thing: representation in the British government.

A government is defined by a system of rules and the people who make and administer those rules. Britain’s form of government was a constitutional monarchy. At that time, King George III and a representative group called Parliament ruled. However, the colonies were not represented in Parliament. They no longer wanted British rule.

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, in which the colonies declared their independence from Britain. When the war for independence finally ended in 1783, the Patriots had prevailed. They would create a democracy, which literally means “rule by the people.” The modern United States was born.

Although the American colonies separated themselves from Britain, other locations continue to be known as British Overseas Territories even to this day. Many, including Bermuda, Anguilla, and the British Virgin Islands, are islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Other colonies include locations in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and even in Antarctica. While these territories are mostly self-governing, the British monarch is still considered their head of state.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

# The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. 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. That 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 to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Tyranny, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government; and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. 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. — He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. — He has called together legislative Bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. — He has deprived Representatives in Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the People, — He has refused for a long time, after such Depositions, to cause others to be elected, whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their review, the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of Invasion from without, and convulsions within. — He has endeavored to prevent the Population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Strangers; refusing to grant others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing to assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their Offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. — He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers, and increased their salaries. — He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature. — He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power. — He has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: — For quartering large Bodies of armed troops among us: — For retaining in our Towns British Troops in times of peace: — For exercising in our Towns, without the Consent of our Legislature, the Power of raising Miltary Companies: — For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: — For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: — For depriving us in many Cases, without the Benefit of Trial by Jury: — For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences: — For abolishing the Charter of our former self-governing City, and altering its Charter: — For dissolving our Representative Houses, and declaring us out of Law, and abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: — For seizing our Castles, Forts, and Towns, and destroying the lives

## THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The original thirteen colonies each had their own systems of government, but they all came together to declare independence as a united group.

1. What is government? What does a government do?
2. Do you think a colonial power should have absolute power in another territory? Why or why not? What are the limits of authority? What should a government *not* be allowed to do?
3. A democracy is "majority rule." How are individual rights protected in a democracy? For example, what can we do to express ourselves?



## Go Digital

Search for more information about colonialism. For example, the British Empire was a huge global power. Which territories did it control other than the American colonies? Are these places still colonies?