

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Know how the colonies were formed. In 1607 England started its first colony in America, Jamestown, Virginia. As time went on, more people moved to America and more colonies were formed until there were 13. Each colony had its own government. Most of these governments were formed as democracies; town meetings were used as forums for the citizens to participate in government.
- 2) Know about the events that lead to the revolution. Though Great Britain ruled the colonies, many colonists ignored British laws, because the government was far away and could not enforce the law. Also, Great Britain chose to “ignore” the colonies for a long time. Consequently, the relationship between Great Britain and the colonies stayed peaceful for over 100 years. However, this relationship became strained after the war between Great Britain and France. Although it resulted in the acquisition of land in America, the war put Great Britain into debt. King George decided it was time to pay more attention to America and to tax the colonists to pay for the war. From that point, there were many events that lead to the Revolutionary War:
 - a) **British Soldiers in America:** First, the British government sent soldiers to the colonies to keep order. Then, it passed a law that forced colonists to house and feed the soldiers.
 - b) **Restricted Use of Land:** The British government passed a law that restricted the colonists from using the land obtained from the French.
 - c) **Taxes:** In order to pay for the war, the British government imposed taxes on the colonists. The first tax, in 1764, was on sugar and molasses. Then, in 1765, the Stamp Act forced colonists to pay a tax on newspapers, playing cards, and legal papers. The colonists did not think the taxes were fair because they were not represented in the British government. So the colonists decided to boycott British goods. As a result, the government decided to stop the Stamp Act. However, the British began to tax other goods, including paint, paper, and tea. To make sure the colonists obeyed, the government sent more soldiers to the colonies.
 - d) **Boston Massacre:** On March 5, 1770 five colonists were shot and killed while taunting British soldiers who were quartered in Boston. The colonists were outraged. In response to the killings, Great Britain stopped all taxes, except the tax on tea.
 - e) **Boston Tea Party:** To protest the tea tax, some colonists dressed up as Indians, boarded a British trade ship, and dumped cases of tea into Boston Harbor. This angered the British government, which passed more laws, the Intolerable Acts, giving it more power over the Massachusetts Bay colony. Great Britain thought punishing one colony would cause the other colonies to respect British laws. But

the Intolerable Acts only angered the colonists more. They began to join together against the British government.

- f) **First Continental Congress Meets:** In 1774 delegates from 12 of the 13 colonies decided to boycott British goods until the Intolerable Acts were repealed.
- g) **Fighting Breaks Out:** On April 19, 1775, 70 patriots battled 700 British soldiers in Lexington, Massachusetts.
- h) **Second Continental Congress Meets:** Delegates decided to form the Continental Army to fight the British. George Washington was chosen as its leader.
- i) **“Common Sense” is Written:** Thomas Paine wrote this pamphlet to support the revolution. It inspired many colonists to join the side of the Patriots.
- j) **Second Continental Congress Adopts the Declaration of Independence:** Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write a document to explain why colonists should be free. After the ideas in the document were discussed, all 56 members voted to separate from England on July 4, 1776.

In 1781, with the help of French troops, the patriots won the last major battle of the Revolutionary War. In 1783 the Treaty of Paris was signed, and Great Britain recognized the United States as an independent country.

- 3) Know about the Articles of Confederation and why it was problematic. In 1777 delegates met to form a new government under the Articles of Confederation. This document gave each state many rights, and it provided a weak national government to keep peace with other nations. The Articles of Confederation were ratified in 1781. Unfortunately, they gave the states too much power. Each state could print its own money, which made trading difficult.
- 4) Know about the adoption of the Constitution and the three themes on which it is based. In May of 1787 delegates from each state came together to change the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they came up with a new government. The delegates used plans from different states and countries; they also used ideas from delegates like James Madison (“The Father of the Constitution”) to form the Constitution. The delegates based the new government on three main ideas:
 - a) **Shared Powers:** This means that the national government has some power (i.e., print money and declare war) and the state governments have some power (i.e., run schools, build roads, and regulate local government). Both the national and state governments have their own courts, and they can require people to pay taxes.
 - b) **Bicameral Congress:** The delegates decided that the House of Representatives would be based on population; meaning, states with more people would have more representatives. They also decided that the other section of congress, called the Senate, would have equal representation; each state has two senators.

- c) **Separation of Powers:** This makes sure that no one part of the government has too much power. The Constitution divides the national government into three branches: the Legislative Branch (Congress) makes the laws; the Executive Branch, led by the President of the United States, carries out the laws; and the Judicial Branch makes sure the laws passed by Legislative Branch and carried out by the Executive Branch are fair. In addition, each branch can check, or stop, another from using its power.

Two states, North Carolina and Rhode Island would not ratify the Constitution because they did not believe it protected people’s rights and freedoms. So the delegates added ten amendments called the Bill of Rights to the Constitution. Written in 1791, the Bill of Rights protects certain rights and freedoms of individual citizens, including the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, the right to assemble, and the right to a fair trial.

- 5) Understand that the United States government was designed as a Democratic Republic. This means that the government is run by the people through the representatives they elect.

Vocabulary

Amendment — A correction to the Constitution

Checks and Balances — Refers to the limitations on the power of any branch of government. Each branch has some powers that offset those of the other two

Colony — A settlement that is far away from the government that rules it

Democracy — A kind of government that is run by the people

Patriot — One who supported the revolution

Tax — Money that people pay to support the government

