

## EPIC History Activity #1 – Elaboration

**Introduction:** Having read the essay on elaboration as historical thinking, here is an opportunity to try it for yourself. Below is a very simplified schema of an historical event that most Americans (and perhaps others?) know quite well: the story of American independence from Britain.

**Step 1:** Elaborate on this image by adding your own elements. Add as many as you know, and be creative.



## **Step 2:** Read about the American Revolution<sup>1</sup>

Primary Sources on the American Revolution. Read these brief excerpts from primary sources about the revolution. Some may be familiar to you. When you finish, move on to step 3

### **Source 1:** Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence

*Almost every American student has read the first part of the Declaration of Independence, and most have read the whole document. Below is an excerpt from the second section of the declaration<sup>2</sup>. The “He” being described is King George III.*

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 dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his 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 to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

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<sup>1</sup> You might want to start with the history textbook you are using in school, or, if you are not in school, there are many single-volume histories of the American Revolution, some very long, such as *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution: 1763-1789*, by Robert Middlekauf, others, like Gordon Wood's *The American Revolution: A History*, much shorter.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

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 protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

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, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

**Source 2:** The Earl of Chatham's Speech to Parliament, June 17, 1774<sup>3</sup>

*The following is an excerpt of a speech given by William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham, to Parliament in response to the Boston Tea Party.*

Had the British colonies been planted by any other kingdoms than our own, the inhabitants would have carried with them the chains of slavery, and the spirit of despotism; but as they are, they ought to be remembered as great influences to instruct the world, to what a stretch of liberty mankind will naturally attain, when they are left to the free exercise of themselves. And, my Lords, notwithstanding my intention to give my hearty negative to the question now before you, I cannot help condemning, in the severe manner, the late turbulent and unwarrantable conduct of the Americans in general, and the riots in Boston, in particular. But, my Lords, the mode which has been pursued to bring them back to a sense of their duty in the parent state, has been so diametrically opposite to the fundamental principles of sound policy, that individuals possess'd of common understanding, must be astonished at such proceedings. By blocking up the harbor of Boston, you have involved the innocent trader in the same punishment with the guilty profligates who destroyed your merchandize; and instead of making a well concerned effort to secure the real offenders, you clap a naval and military extinguisher over their harbor, and punish the sin of a few lawless reparees and their abbetors, upon the whole body of the inhabitants.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at:

<https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/rebelln/earl.html>

**Source 3:** Excerpt from The Olive Branch Petition<sup>4</sup>

*The Olive Branch Petition was created by the Continental Congress on July, 8, 1775. It was written AFTER armed hostilities had broken out between British troops and colonial militiamen in Massachusetts.*

Your Majesty's Ministers, persevering in their measures, and proceeding to open hostilities for enforcing them, have compelled us to arm in our own defence, and have engaged us in a controversy so peculiarly abhorrent to the affections of your still faithful colonists, that when we consider whom we must oppose in this contest, and if it continues, what may be the consequences, our own particular misfortunes are accounted by us only as parts of our distress.

Knowing to what violent resentments and incurable animosities, civil discords are apt to exasperate and inflame the contending parties, we think ourselves required by indispensable obligations to Almighty God, to your Majesty, to our fellow subjects, and to ourselves, immediately to use all the means in our power, not incompatible with our safety, for stopping the further effusion of blood, and for averting the impending calamities that threaten the British Empire.

Thus called upon to address your Majesty on affairs of such moment to America, and probably to all your dominions, we are earnestly desirous of performing this office, with the utmost deference for your Majesty; and we therefore pray, that your(3) royal magnanimity and benevolence may make the most favourable construction of our expressions on so uncommon an occasion. Could represent in their full force, the sentiments that agitate the minds of us your dutiful subjects, we are persuaded your Majesty would ascribe any seeming deviation from reverence in our language, and even in our conduct, not to any reprehensible intention, but to the impossibility of reconciling the usual appearances of respect, with a just attention to our own preservation against those artful and cruel enemies, who abuse your royal confidence and authority, for the purpose of effecting our destruction.

Attached to your Majesty's person, family, and government, with all devotion that principle and affection can inspire, connected with Great Britain by the strongest ties that can unite societies, and deploring every event that tends in any degree to weaken them, we solemnly assure your Majesty, that we not only most ardently desire the former harmony between her and these colonies may be restored, but that a concord may be established between them upon so firm a basis as to perpetuate its blessings, uninterrupted by any future dissensions, to succeeding generations in both countries, and to transmit your Majesty's Name to posterity, adorned with that signal and lasting glory, that has attended the memory of those illustrious personages, whose virtues and abilities have extricated states from dangerous convulsions, and, by securing happiness to others, have erected the most noble and durable monuments to their own fame.

We beg leave further to assure your Majesty, that notwithstanding the sufferings of your loyal colonists, during the course of the present controversy, our breasts retain too tender a regard for the kingdom from which we derive our origin, to request such a reconciliation as might in any manner be inconsistent with her dignity or her welfare. These, related as we are to

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<sup>4</sup> [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/contcong\\_07-08-75.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_07-08-75.asp)

her, honor and duty, as well as inclination, induce us to support and advance; and the apprehensions that now oppress our hearts with unspeakable grief, being once removed, your Majesty will find your faithful subjects on this continent ready and willing at all times, as they ever have been, with their lives and fortunes, to assert and maintain the rights and interests of your Majesty, and of our Mother country.

We, therefore, beseech your Majesty, that your royal authority and influence may be graciously interposed to procure us relief from our afflicting fears and jealousies, occasioned by the system before mentioned, and to settle peace through every part of your dominions, with all humility submitting to your Majesty's wise consideration whether it may not be expedient for facilitating those important purposes, that your Majesty be pleased to direct some mode, by which the united applications of your faithful colonists to the throne, in pursuance of their common councils, may be improved into a happy and permanent reconciliation; and that, in the mean time, measures may be taken for preventing the further destruction of the lives of your Majesty's subjects; and that such statutes as more immediately distress any of your Majesty's colonies may be repealed.

**Step 3:** Elaborate further.

In the space below, in your notebook, or on a separate sheet of paper, make a new diagram of the factors and events contributing to American independence. As you continue to learn about the American revolution, you return to your diagram and make additions and edits as your understanding changes. Be creative and have fun.