The Declaration of Independence drew from Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers, upholding popular sovereignty. It explained how abuses by the too powerful British Crown violated individual rights, justified the colonists' separation from Britain, and defined the newly independent states' relationship. Following are key excerpts from the declaration.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...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...

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations...He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good...He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant...He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people...He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people...

[For these reasons], these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States...And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Political Science Disciplinary Practices: Analyze the Declaration of Independence as Argument
The Declaration of Independence is widely regarded as an outstanding example of classic argument—a written or spoken effort to persuade people to adopt a certain point of view or take a certain action. When you analyze an argument, you take it apart to understand its elements. You identify the author's claims—statements asserted to be true—and the reasoning the author uses to support those claims. For example, the declaration asserts that governments derive their power from the consent of the governed, establishing the basis for popular sovereignty. The declaration also claims that people have the right to alter or abolish a government that is destructive to people's rights.

Apply: Explain how these claims relate to Enlightenment thought and republican ideals. Then read the full Declaration of Independence on pages 619–622, and answer the questions that follow it for an in-depth analysis of the argument in this founding document. You may also read it online.

During the war, Americans instituted the Continental Congress to govern the American states collectively, and they began to formalize their ideas for a permanent government. The war raged on until General George Washington's army defeated the British at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781. An official peace was negotiated in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris.

The Articles of Confederation
As soon as the states declared independence, they realized a more formal relationship among them could only assist their cause. The Continental Congress created a committee of 13 men to draft the Articles of Confederation, a series of statements that defined the initial national government and redefined the former colonies as states. Though the Articles of Confederation were not officially ratified by the states until 1781, the Continental Congress legislated during wartime with a wide array of powers to adopt commercial codes, establish and maintain an army, define crimes against the United States, and negotiate foreign affairs abroad. This document defined "the firm league of friendship" that existed among the states, which had delegated a few powers to the national government.

How to apportion states' representation in the newly designed Confederation Congress was beset with controversy. Some leaders recognized the merits of giving greater representation to the more populated states, something the Virginia delegation advocated. Leaders from smaller states opposed representation based on population. After a furious debate, the authors of the Articles created an equal representation system—each state received one vote in the Congress.

The Confederation Congress continued to meet in New York. States appointed delegations of up to seven men that voted as a unit. National legislation required the votes of at least nine states to pass. A unanimous vote was required to alter or amend the Articles of Confederation. The Articles entitled the Congress to engage in international diplomacy, declare war, and acquire territory. They provided protection of religion and speech. They provided for extradition—that is, states were expected to extradite, or return, fugitives to states where they had committed crimes and runaway slaves to states they had fled. The document encouraged a free flow of commerce among the states. It required that states provide a public, fair government and that Congress could sit as a court in disputes between states.
The Articles of Confederation provide that “each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence.” This provision was essential, since the states were wary of a centralized power that might wield the same influence over them that the British government wielded. Following are some of the key provisions of the Articles of Confederation:

- Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every Power, [not] . . . expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled . . . .
- In determining questions in the United States, in Congress assembled, each State shall have one vote . . . .
- The United States in Congress assembled, shall have the sole and exclusive right and power of determining on peace and war . . . .
- Full faith and credit shall be given in each of these States to the records, acts, and judicial proceedings of the courts and magistrates of every other State . . . .
- Congress assembled shall also be the last resort on appeal in all disputes and differences now subsisting or that hereafter may arise between two or more States.

The requirements that at least nine states must agree in order to enact national law and that all states must agree unanimously in order to amend the system of government proved daunting.

- The Congress could not tax the people directly.
- The national government could not raise or maintain an army.
- There was no national court system or national currency.
- The Congress encouraged but could not regulate commerce among the states.

**Shays's Rebellion and Response**

The lack of a centralized military power became a serious problem when a regional rebellion broke out. In western Massachusetts in 1786, a large group of impoverished farmers, including many Revolutionary War veterans, lost their farms to mortgage foreclosures and failure to pay taxes. Daniel Shays, a former captain in the Continental army, led the group, who demanded that the government ease financial pressures by printing more money, lightening taxes, and suspending mortgages. They grabbed their muskets and challenged the Massachusetts government. Massachusetts raised a small army with donations from the wealthy citizenry in an attempt to put down the uprising, but without a centralized military power, the Confederation could not muster a national army. Several skirmishes occurred, and three of Shays’s men were killed. The movement soon collapsed, but Shays’s Rebellion, along with irregularities in commerce, made leaders realize the need to revise government. A small group convened in Annapolis, Maryland, to discuss the concerns. This convention addressed trade and the untapped economic potential of the new United States. Little was accomplished, however, except to secure a recommendation for Congress to call a more comprehensive convention.

Congress scheduled the much larger convention for May of 1787 in Philadelphia. By then few Americans viewed the Articles of Confederation as sufficient. John Adams, who was serving in Congress, argued that a man’s “country” was still his state and, for his Massachusetts delegation, the Congress was “our embassy.” There was little sense of national unity.

**Debate and Compromise at the Constitutional Convention**

The Confederation Congress called the convention in Philadelphia “for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.” By the time the process was over, critics pointed to the extralegal manner—outside the law—in which the Articles were instead completely replaced by a new system of government. In May 1787, delegates from neighboring states began to arrive at Independence Hall (the Pennsylvania State House) to get an early start on improving national governance. Among the first to arrive was thirty-six-year-old Virginia lawyer James Madison, and he was well prepared for the deliberations. His friend Thomas Jefferson was serving in Paris as the U.S. ambassador to France, and he sent Madison books from Europe on ancient