

THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS



In this activity, you will be a member of the First Continental Congress. The First Continental Congress was a group of people from different colonies that met to discuss how to respond to the British taxes that you have been learning about. After filling out this worksheet, you will meet together as a Congress to discuss how to respond to Britain.

As a Congress, draft a letter to Great Britain explaining what you want them to change and what you will do if those things don't change.

Why are you at the Continental Congress? What is your goal for this meeting?

What is more important to you: reconciling with Great Britain or protecting the constitutional rights of the colonists? Why?

What do you want the colonies to do if Great Britain does not listen to what you have to say?

JOSEPH GALLOWAY

I was born in Maryland to a landowner in the Colony. I became a lawyer in Philadelphia. I am a member of the local government, the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly, and am currently the Speaker of the House.

While I am critical of the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts, I believe that the British Empire provides us with the greatest freedoms we could hope for. I want to come up with a plan to end the conflicts between Britain and the colonies. I think Britain has the right to tax and govern the colonies, but in exchange, they should help us to succeed and our voice should be heard. I have a plan for Union that would create a parliament for the colonies that would report to Great Britain. I believe this plan will help ease the tensions between us and help create a great relationship.

JOHN DICKINSON

I was born to a family of rich tobacco plantation owners in Maryland. I am a wealthy man living in Philadelphia. I am known as the "Penman of the Revolution" for my Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania that I published in 1767 and 1768.

I am one of Pennsylvania's delegates to the First Continental Congress. I believe that the British Constitution is right and fair, and our dispute is only with the Parliament. I want to make the relationship between the colonies and Britain better. I don't think that violence is the way to resolve our differences, and want to make our grievances known to the King and come up with a way for us to work together.

JOHN JAY

I was born in New York City to a wealthy family of merchants and government officials. I am a lawyer and a member of the New York Committee of Correspondence where I am the secretary.

I believe that the property rights of colonists should be protected, and that the rule of law should be upheld while we resist the British violations of the rights of the colonists. My main concern is that "mob rule" will come to the colonies, where there is disorder and violence. I think the British taxes are wrong and colonists should resist them, but I believe that we should try to improve our relationship with Great Britain and work with the Parliament to come to an agreement.

Teacher notes:

Print out the profiles on this page and the following page. Cut them out and hand one profile to each student. Students will meet in groups of 6 (one of each character per group). Before meeting in the group, each student will fill out the worksheet. Then, they will meet together and create a letter to send to Great Britain.

These are profiles for some of the Conservatives at the time of the First Continental Congress. Their main objectives were to create common policies with the goal of getting Parliament to take back their acts that they viewed as unreasonable. They wanted to reconcile with Great Britain and find a reasonable solution to do so.

PATRICK HENRY

I was born in Virginia to an immigrant from Scotland. I tried to start a business, but was unsuccessful, and became a lawyer instead.

I was elected to the House of Burgesses, the governing group in Virginia. I have fought hard against the tyrannical taxes that the British have demanded that we pay. British rights include being taxed only by our own representatives, and since we are not represented in the British Parliament, our rights are being taken away. I will do whatever it takes to make sure our rights are upheld.

ROGER SHERMAN

I was born in Massachusetts and didn't have much schooling. I started out as a shoe-maker, but my ability to learn, access to a library my father owned, and a Harvard-educated mentor allowed me to work my way up in law and politics. I became a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives. I was also a professor of religion for many years.

I believe that Parliament does not have the right to pass laws without our agreement. I declared last year after Parliament passed one such law that, "no laws bind the people but such as they consent to be Governed by". I am at this Continental Congress due to my reputation of service to Connecticut and my strong belief that our rights should be protected no matter what.

SAMUAL ADAMS

I was born in Boston to a religiously and politically active family. I graduated from Harvard and was a businessman and tax collector before I focused on politics.

I believe strongly that Britain cannot tax us without consent from the colonies, and 6 years ago, I wrote a letter for colonies not to cooperate with British taxes. I also created a system of communication for like-minded Patriots across the 13 Colonies. My actions helped lead to both the Boston Massacre 4 years ago and the Boston Tea Party last year. I think if Britain does not cooperate, we should boycott trade with them and they will see how much they need us.

Teacher notes:

These are profiles for some of the Radicals at the time of the First Continental Congress. They wanted to create a statement of the rights and liberties of the colonies, and to end what they saw to be abuses of authority by the British Parliament. They wanted to uphold the constitutional rights claimed in colonial charters and the English constitution—hoping to stay under the British Empire if possible.