

LEVELED BOOK • Z2

# Building a Nation



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Part Three of The American Revolution  
Written by Terry Miller Shannon

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## Focus Question

How did the United States develop from thirteen separate colonies to one united nation?

# Words to Know

amend  
authority  
checks and balances  
compromise  
constitution  
debates  
executive  
judicial  
incurred

legislative  
prosperity  
ratify  
rebellion  
representatives  
republic  
revenue  
sovereign  
tyranny

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## Part Three of The American Revolution

*Building a Nation* tells about the efforts of thirteen colonies to build a nation. Read *Seeds of Revolution* and *Battling for Independence* to find out what events led to the creation of the United States of America.

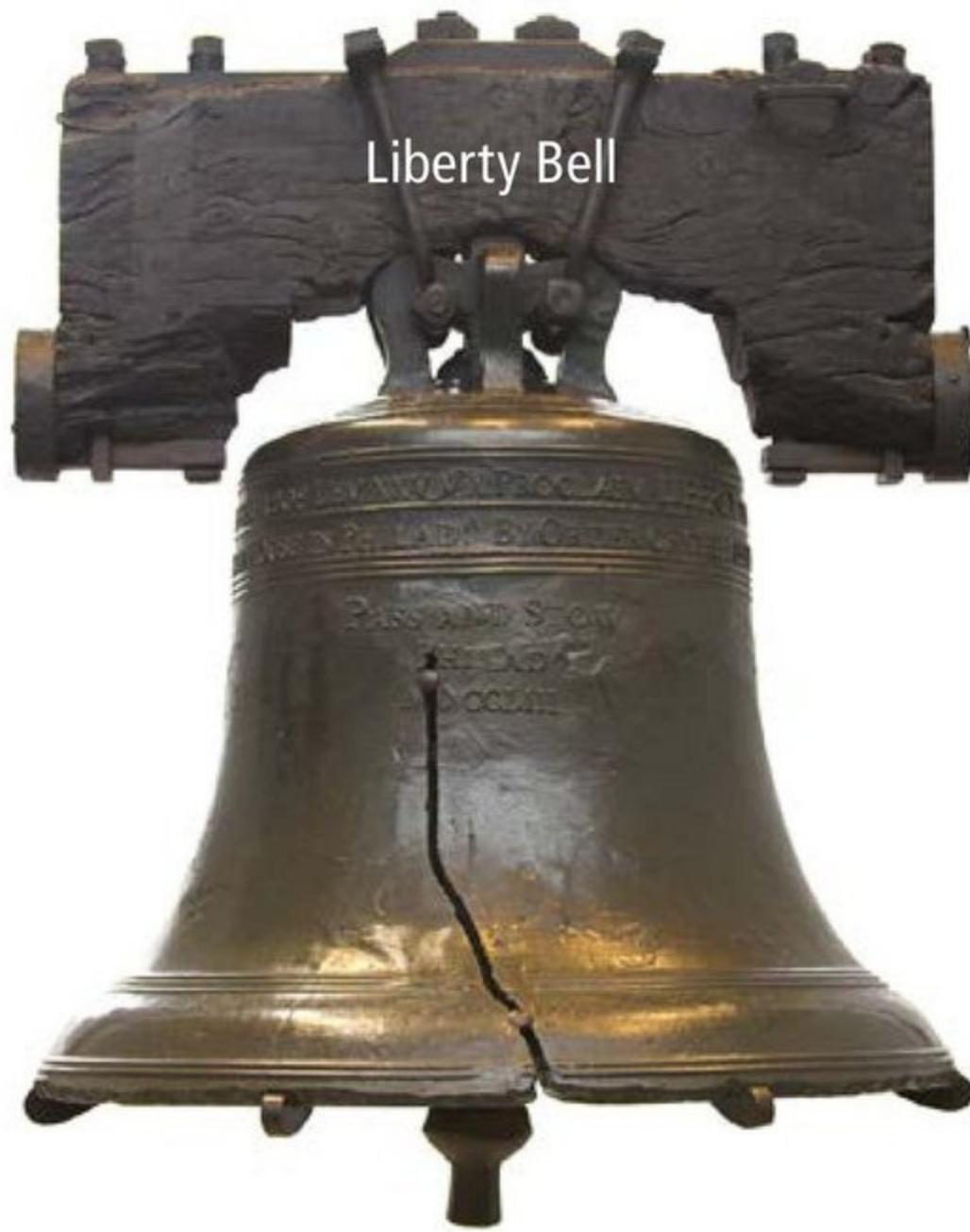
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Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



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Colonists fight British soldiers at the Battle of Lexington.

## Introduction

In 1776, delegates from the thirteen British colonies in North America signed the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming they were free and independent of Great Britain's rule. At the same time, the colonies declared themselves a confederation of states united for a common cause. They called their union the United States of America. The new union of states needed to devise a system of government.

Delegates from the original thirteen colonies, now called states, began to fashion a plan for a working central government. It would take five years for this plan to be firmly established within the new union of states because the war for independence from Great Britain continued. However, it would take another forty years and another war with Great Britain for this new union to feel truly united.

## The Articles of Confederation

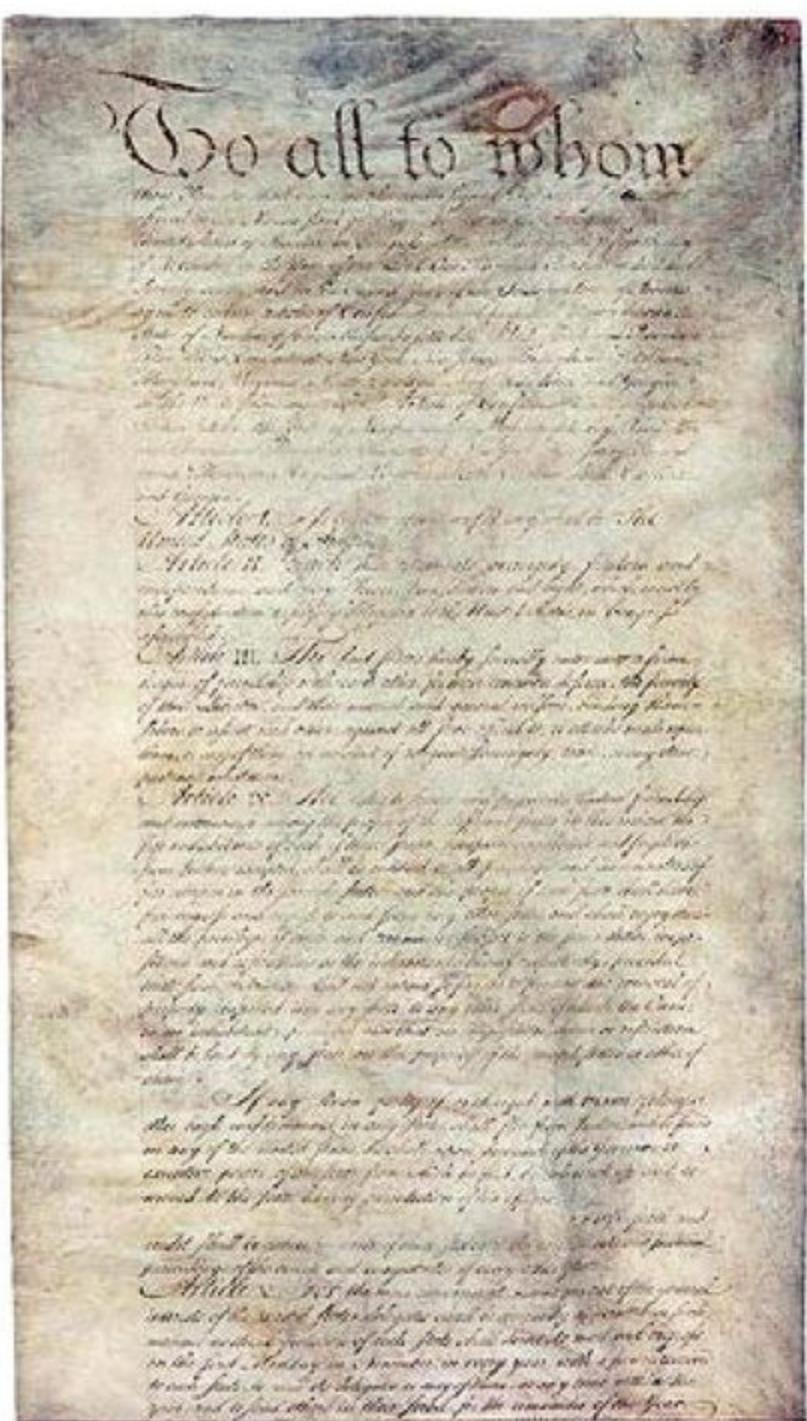
In 1777, delegates appointed by each state to the Second Continental Congress agreed to send the new plan for government to each state for review. For the plan to work, it needed to be ratified by all thirteen states. The document detailing the plan would become known as the Articles of Confederation. It did not refer to the United States as a nation, but as a “firm league of friendship” between thirteen **sovereign** states. The document outlined a weak federal government and strong state governments. The states liked the **authority** and freedom they had under the Articles. Each state drafted its own **constitution** and printed its own currency.

### Do You Know?

The first thirteen states were all located along the East Coast of the present-day United States.



The Articles of Confederation granted the federal government of the United States no authority, no freedom to act on its own, and no single leader to speak for the union. The United States had **incurred** debts from the war, but Congress, the one branch of federal government created by the Articles, did not have the authority to tax people to collect **revenue** to pay the debts. Only the states had the power to tax their citizens. The lack of power to tax would prove to be one of the fatal flaws of the Articles of Confederation. Another flaw was that no one **executive** was in charge. A president was elected to oversee the proceedings of Congress but had no power to make decisions. Congress also did not have the power to change the Articles if the union of states decided something about the plan was not working. Nine of the thirteen states had to agree to changes in the Articles for those changes to be legal. It would take several years after its approval by the states for flaws in the Articles of Confederation to become apparent.



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## The Treaty of Paris

It took almost five years for all thirteen states to overcome their differences and approve the Articles. Maryland was the last to **ratify** the document. In 1781, the major fighting of the Revolutionary War ceased with U.S. General George Washington's victory over British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, but the war itself wasn't officially over for another two years.

**Representatives** from the United States and Great Britain discussed peace terms in Paris, France, from the middle of 1782 until the Treaty of Paris, also called the Peace of Paris, was signed on September 3, 1783. Only then had the war officially ended.

The peace treaty established two important ideas:

1. It recognized the United States as a sovereign country independent of Great Britain.
2. It also set the boundaries of the new United States, which included all land from the Atlantic Ocean west to the Mississippi River with the exception of New Orleans and the Floridas, which Spain controlled. The northern boundary was set at the Great Lakes and along the borders of Quebec and Nova Scotia, both part of British-controlled Canada.



## Thinking Critically

WHY was it important for the U.S. to be recognized in the Treaty of Paris as independent of Britain?

IN YOUR MIND, what might have happened if the treaty did not recognize U.S. independence?

## Why Did It Take So Long?

The Treaty of Paris was not signed until two years after the war ended at Yorktown. Great Britain was in no hurry to please the United States. Britain also hoped a delay would increase the chances that colonists who had fled the colonies due to their loyalty to Britain would get paid for property they lost when they fled. Estimates vary on how many colonists loyal to Britain left during and after the war, but some put the number around 100,000.

## Money Problems

Once the Revolutionary War was over and the Treaty of Paris signed, the United States experienced severe financial problems. Soldiers headed home, poor and exhausted. The government had no money and no power to tax, so many of the veterans could not be paid for their service. But an even bigger financial headache faced the new nation: war debts. The nation had borrowed more than \$76 million from foreign countries, individual Americans, and state banks to finance the war.

In Massachusetts, financial issues inspired a **rebellion**. Farmers who fought for independence could not pay their debts and lost their farms; some of them were imprisoned. In 1786, Daniel Shays, a former Revolutionary War captain, and about a thousand farmers and other workers marched on Springfield, Massachusetts, and then proceeded to Boston. The U.S. Army confronted them there, and gunfire was exchanged. Some of the workers were tried and hanged, while others were not punished. Shays' Rebellion inspired similar conflicts in Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania, and persuaded many citizens and leaders that a stronger federal government was needed to address the issue.

## Constitutional Convention

To solve the many problems of the United States, fifty-five men arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for a meeting at Independence Hall in May 1787. The initial goal of the meeting was to modify the Articles of Confederation to make the federal government stronger. Instead of merely expanding the Articles, however, the delegates agreed to draft a constitution that would establish an executive to lead the union, grant Congress the power to tax, and create a way to **amend** the governing document.



Independence Hall

Twelve of the thirteen states sent delegates; Rhode Island declined the invitation. Each delegate was an influential leader in his own state and was also known as a leader in the new union. All the delegates were wealthy, educated white men. The delegates elected George Washington to preside over the meeting, which became known as the Constitutional Convention. The convention would last for several weeks.

**Debates** over revisions to the Articles of Confederation raised tempers on two issues

related to power in the new government. The first issue was representation. Under the Articles, each state had only one vote regardless of its population. Some delegates thought that was unfair. More representatives in Congress would equal more power, so two plans were proposed. One based representation on population, which meant more representatives for states with larger populations. The other plan made representation equal for all states, regardless of population.

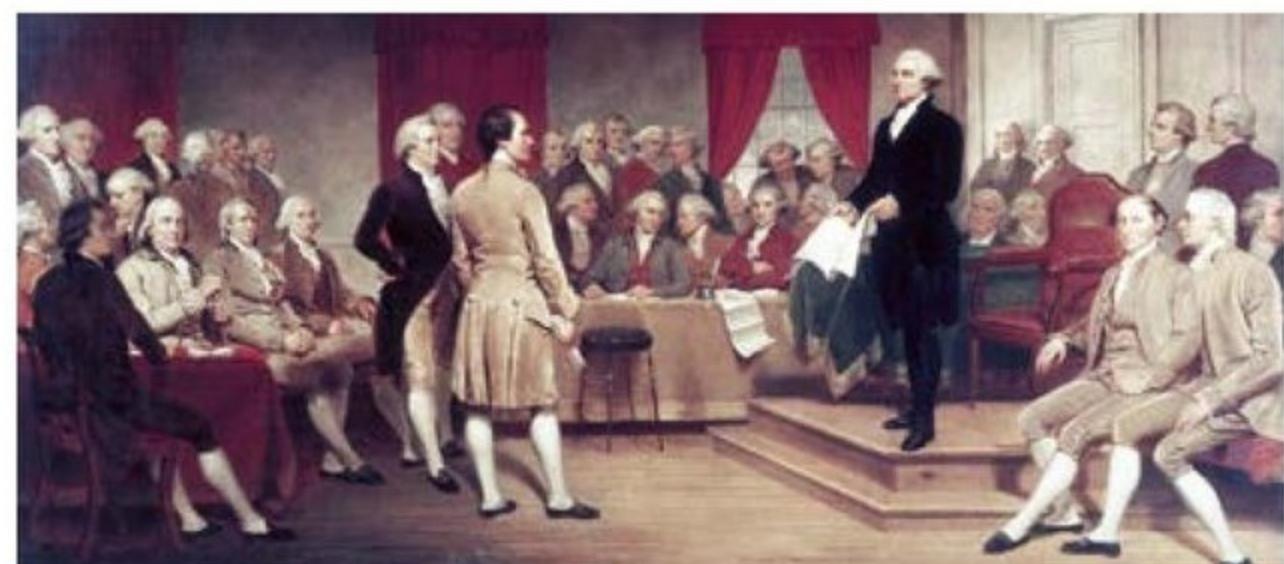
The second issue was slavery, which was important to the plantation economy in the Southern states but less important to the more industrial economy in the North. Slaves were people who were forced to work without pay. Southern states not only wanted to ensure they could retain their slaves but also that they could have slaves counted for representation—even though slaves could not vote. The delegates for the Southern states thought that by counting slaves for representation, their states would be on more equal footing with the Northern states, which had larger populations.

An editorial cartoon shows debates during the Constitutional Convention.



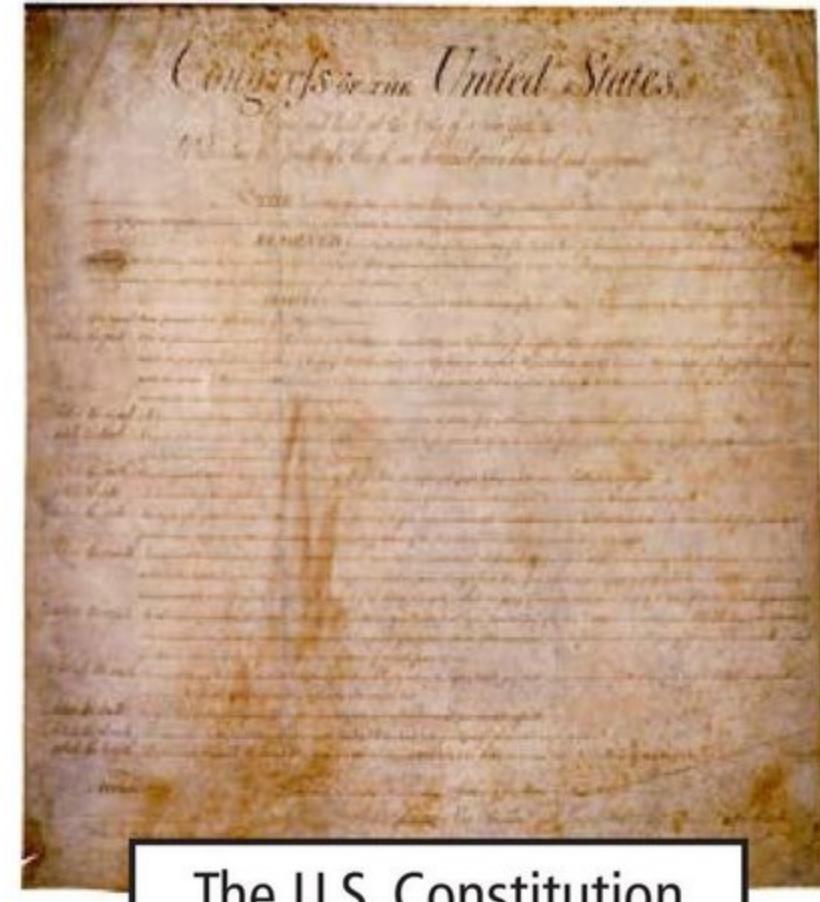
The delegates developed a **compromise** on both representation and slavery. For representation, they created two houses of Congress. In the upper house, called the Senate, each state would be equally represented by two senators. In the lower house, called the House of Representatives, each state would be represented based on its population. On the issue of slavery, the delegates prohibited Congress from making any changes regarding the institution of slavery for twenty years. They also agreed to count three-fifths of the slave population for representation purposes and as property for taxation. Delegates also debated how much power the president should have. They developed a system of **checks and balances** by which each power given to one branch of the government would be matched with equal power given to the other two branches. Three branches were proposed in all—a **legislative** branch with two houses of Congress, an executive branch with a president, and a **judicial** branch with a system of courts to enforce laws.

A procedure for amending the Constitution was also built into the document.



George Washington addresses the Constitutional Convention.

On September 17, 1787, thirty-nine delegates of the convention signed the Constitution and sent it out to the states for a vote. People everywhere debated whether the Constitution established a good plan for government. A group called the Federalists supported the Constitution and worked to get states to ratify it. They believed that a large **republic** would be better able to protect individuals' rights. Another group, called the Antifederalists, were critical of the Constitution because they thought the states would lose their influence and power. They worked against the Constitution becoming the law of the land.



The U.S. Constitution

The Antifederalists said the Constitution needed to list citizens' unalienable rights, which could never be taken away by the government. Eventually, all thirteen states would vote in favor of the Constitution. The agreement between the Federalists and the Antifederalists included ten amendments to the Constitution, which were called the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and other rights.

## Thinking Critically

WHY did the delegates compromise on so many issues to create the Constitution?

IN YOUR MIND, how does compromise make things stronger?



Abigail Adams was an early supporter of women's rights in America.

## Liberty for All?

Slaves were not free, and neither were women. Women weren't able to vote, and pretty much had to do as their husbands or fathers told them. John Adams's wife, Abigail, frequently mentioned this fact to her husband:

"Whilst you are proclaiming peace and goodwill to men . . . you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives," she wrote to John. In another letter, she wrote: "In the new code of laws . . . I desire you remember the ladies . . ."

Under the new Constitution, George Washington was elected president of the United States of America in a unanimous vote by the Electoral College and took office on April 30, 1789. Many people thought he was a great leader. He served two four-year terms as president.



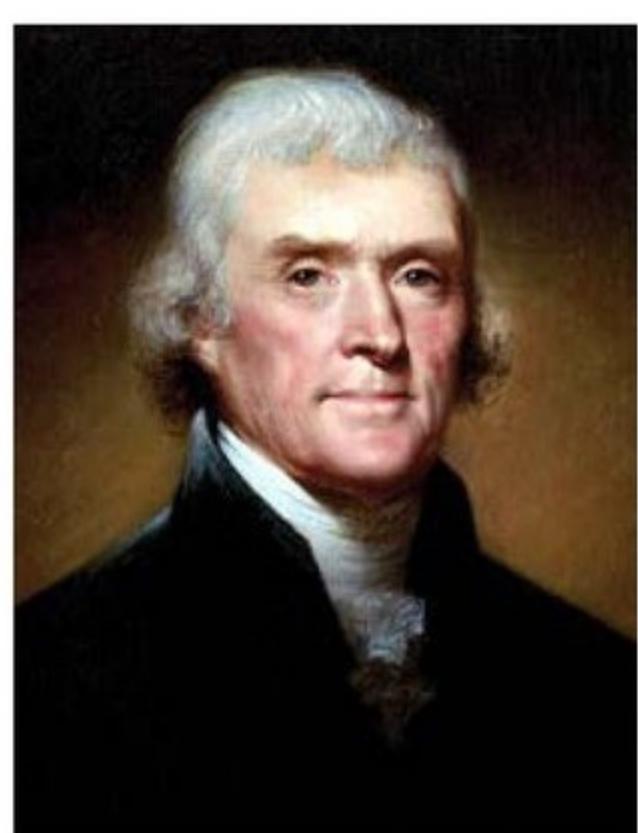
George Washington  
President 1789–1797

During his first term, Washington appointed Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury. Hamilton's plan to fix the new nation's many money problems included the establishment of a policy to tax imports and the creation of the first national bank. Hamilton's plan seemed to restore faith in the government and stimulated growth in the economy by paying down the national debt.



John Adams  
President 1797–1801

After Washington finished his second term, John Adams was elected president in 1796. Next was Thomas Jefferson, who took office in 1801.



Thomas Jefferson  
President 1801–1809

## Arguments Over Land

Another problem faced the new country—what to do with the additional land the United States was granted by the Treaty of Paris after the Revolutionary War. State governments greedily claimed the new lands. Some areas were claimed by several states at one time. The leaders of the United States had to figure out how to fairly divide up the land.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 spelled out how to divide the new property into townships and sections. The sections were to be sold to settlers with some set aside for the government and for public schools.

In 1787, Virginia state delegate Thomas Jefferson designed the Northwest Ordinance. It provided rules for how states would be created in the Northwest Territory and would ultimately create six new states and outlaw slavery in those states. The ordinance ensured that the United States would expand



Tecumseh led the Shawnees to fight against American settlers moving into the Northwest Territory where Native Americans had been living for centuries.

through the creation of new states rather than by creating colonies as Britain had done.

The Land Ordinance and the Northwest Ordinance set the stage for a massive migration of settlers westward in the early 1800s. To enable this expansion, the government built new roads, canals, and railroads, and appeared to be able to keep up with the country's rapid expansion. Debts were being paid, land disagreements were settled, and a division of power for the new government was established. The outlook for the new nation had turned from the grimness that followed the war to the brightness of the future.



Settlers built homes, such as the one above, when they moved westward.

## The Louisiana Purchase

With all this **prosperity** and expansion, leaders of the United States started making plans. In 1800, France acquired the land from the Mississippi River in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west, along with the port of New Orleans, which meant U.S. westerners could not access the Mississippi River or the port of New Orleans to transport crops for trade. The United States approached Napoleon Bonaparte, France's emperor, to attempt to buy New Orleans.

Bonaparte had suffered some major setbacks in a war in Europe, and he needed troops and money. In order to fund his war, he surprised the U.S. representatives by offering to sell not only New Orleans but also the entire Louisiana Territory for \$15 million. In October 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory for France's asking price—and doubled the size of the nation. The purchase added 800,000 square miles and 200,000 new citizens to the United States.



## Exploration and War

In May 1804, President Thomas Jefferson sent two army officers—Meriwether Lewis and William Clark—plus a 45-member group to chart a water route across the continent, explore the Louisiana Territory, and report back. After more than two years of traveling, the group returned with journals, drawings, samples of three hundred species of wildlife that were previously unknown, plants, and stories of the almost fifty tribes of Native Americans they had encountered on their travels.

It seemed that the United States had a firm hold on its land in North America. However, while Lewis and Clark explored the new western territory, an old ally—France—fought a raging war with Great Britain for supremacy in Europe. President Jefferson worked to keep the United States neutral and out of the war, and when James Madison became president in 1808, he hoped to do the same.



Lewis and Clark's group travels through the Louisiana Territory.

The United States would not be able to remain neutral, however, because British and French ships began seizing and searching U.S. ships in order to keep supplies from reaching their enemies. The British also seized the British-born American sailors on the ships they took, forcing them to serve as British sailors and making U.S. citizens who had gained independence from Britain subject to Great Britain's **tyranny** again.

In 1812, President Madison told Britain to cease searching and seizing U.S. ships or there would be war. Not satisfied with the response, Madison declared war with Britain on June 18, 1812.

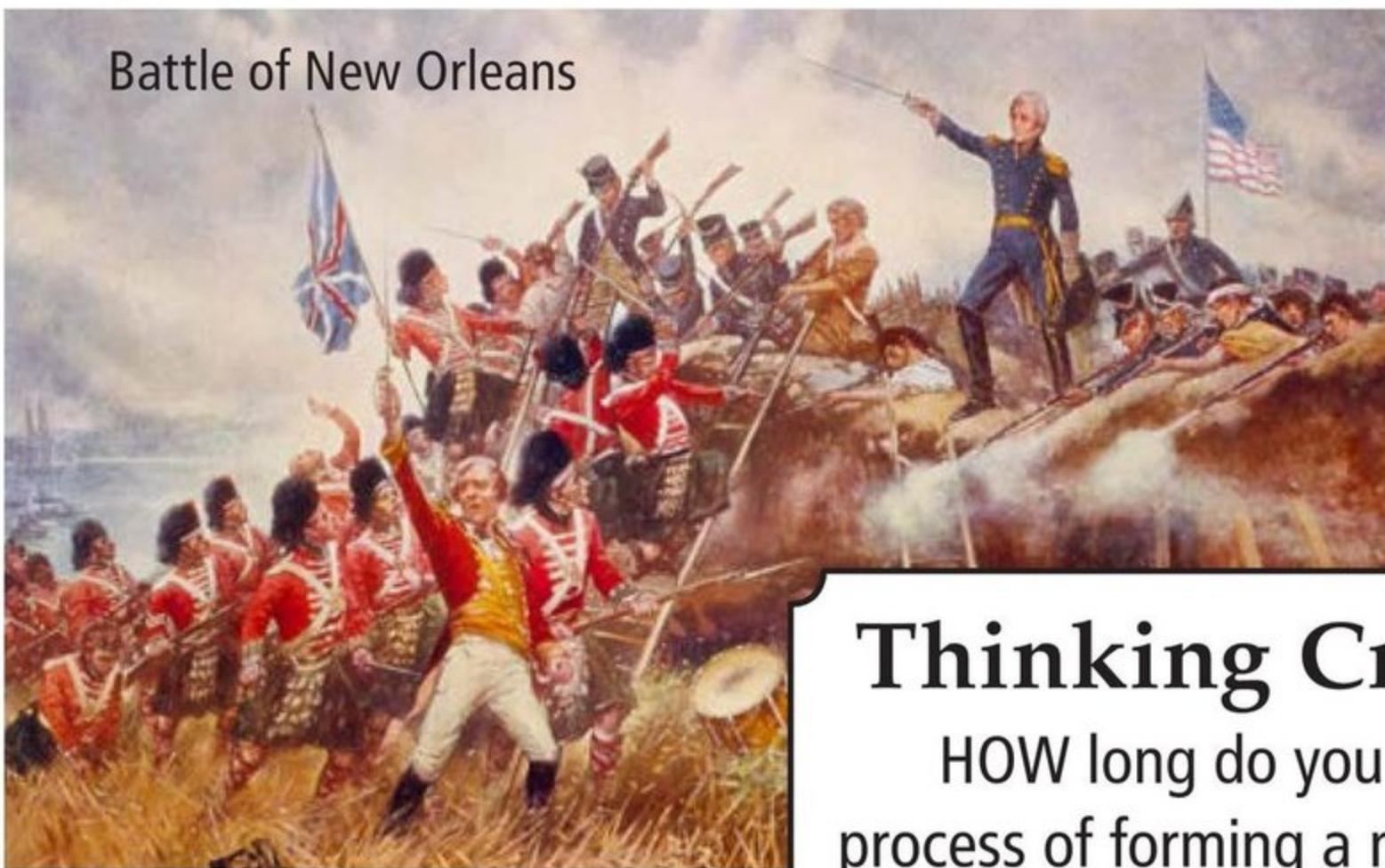
The United States did not have the navy to fight Britain on the seas. An invasion to conquer British-controlled Canada failed, proving the army was not ready to take on the powerful nation again. For two and a half years, the United States remained at war with Britain. On

December 24, 1814, the two countries signed the Treaty of Ghent, agreeing to end the war.



The U.S. ship *Constitution* defeats the British ship *Guerriere* on August 19, 1812.

Battle of New Orleans



Even though the war had officially ended, the United States engaged in one more battle against the British. On January 8, 1815, Americans decisively won the Battle of New Orleans under General Andrew Jackson, who was unaware a peace treaty had been signed. Almost three hundred British soldiers died in what was one of the worst defeats suffered by the British. The U.S. death toll was less than twenty men.

## Thinking Critically

HOW long do you think the process of forming a new nation takes—a long time or a short time?

IN YOUR MIND, what does this tell you about new governments being formed today?

The victory at the Battle of New Orleans made it clear that the United States, not Great Britain, truly controlled the western portion of the country. It also made U.S. citizens feel as if their new country had won the War of 1812, although, in truth, neither country was victorious. Maybe the most important outcome was that the late victory made the new United States of America feel truly united as one nation.

# Timeline of the American Revolution

**1754–63** French and Indian War



**1764–65** Sugar Act, Quartering Act, and Stamp Act

**1767** Townshend Acts

**1770** Boston Massacre

**1774** Coercive (Intolerable) Acts; First Continental Congress meets

**1775** Revolutionary War starts; Second Continental Congress meets

**July 4, 1776** Declaration of Independence signed

**1781** Revolutionary War ends; Articles of Confederation approved by all thirteen states

**1786** Shays' Rebellion

**1787** Constitutional Convention held

**1791** Constitution ratified by all states; Bill of Rights ratified

**1812** War with Britain begins again

**1814** Treaty of Ghent signed to end War of 1812

## Glossary

<b>amend</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to make a change that will improve something (p. 10)
<b>authority</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the power, or those with the power, to govern, give orders, or make decisions (p. 5)
<b>checks and balances</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the division of power among branches of government so that no one branch can dominate the others (p. 12)
<b>compromise</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a decision between parties in an argument where both sides give up something to reach an agreement (p. 12)
<b>constitution</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the basic laws of a state or nation that tell how the government is run (p. 5)
<b>debates</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	discussions between people or groups who have different opinions on an issue (p. 10)
<b>executive</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to a branch of government that leads a nation and carries out the laws of the land (p. 6)
<b>judicial</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the branch of government that makes sure laws agree with the constitution (p. 12)
<b>incurred</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	earned or brought upon oneself negative or unwanted results (p. 6)
<b>legislative</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the branch of government that makes laws (p. 12)
<b>prosperity</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	success, wealth, or good fortune (p. 18)
<b>ratify</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to approve through official means (p. 7)
<b>rebellion</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a fight against authority or power (p. 9)

<b>representatives</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people chosen to speak, vote, or otherwise act on behalf of an individual or group (p. 7)
<b>republic</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a nation whose leadership and representatives are elected by its citizens (p. 13)
<b>revenue</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	money received from the sale or taxation of investments, goods, or services (p. 6)
<b>sovereign</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	independent, with the ability to self-govern (p. 5)
<b>tyranny</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	harsh or cruel acts by a person or a group in power (p. 20)

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# Building a Nation

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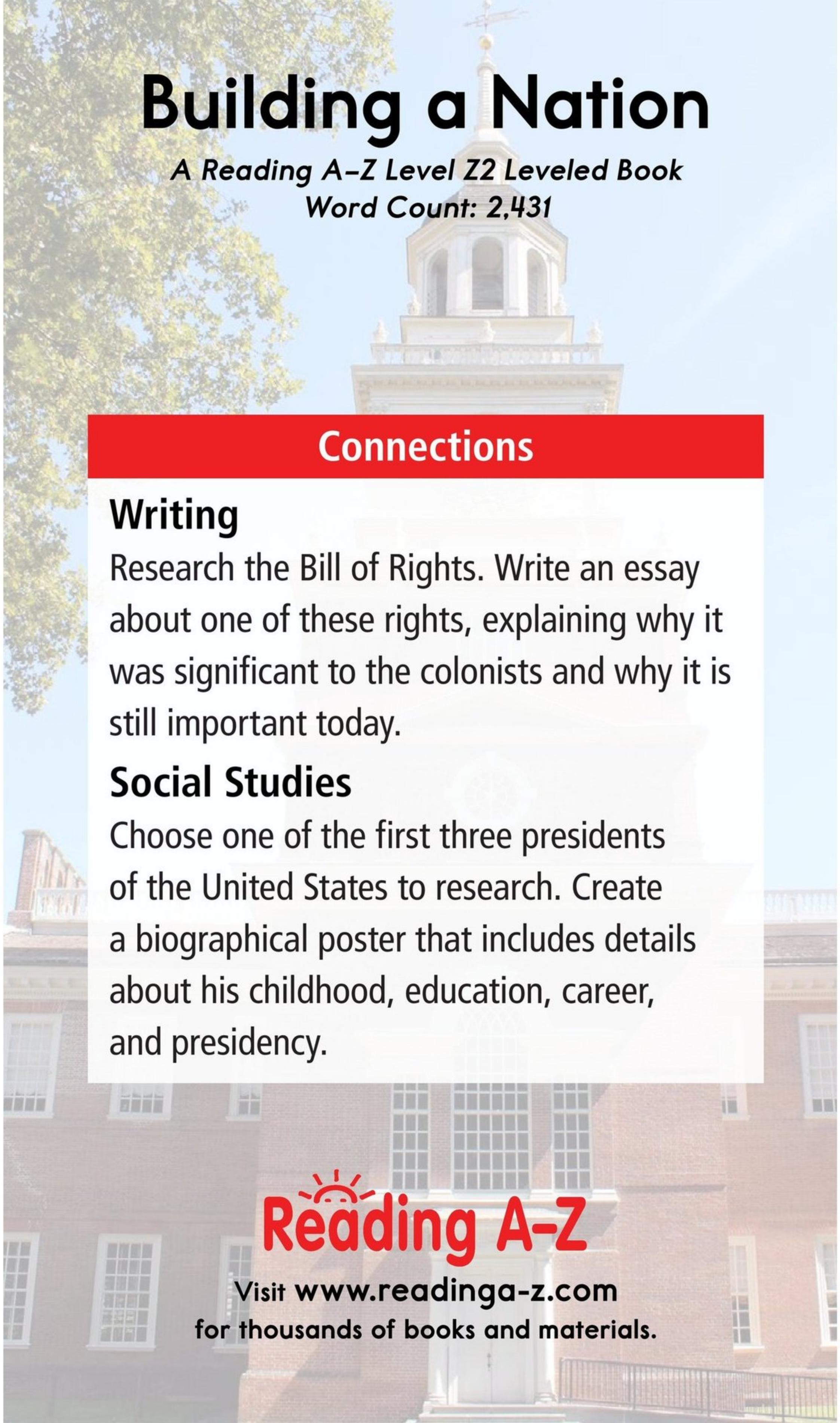
## Connections

### Writing

Research the Bill of Rights. Write an essay about one of these rights, explaining why it was significant to the colonists and why it is still important today.

### Social Studies

Choose one of the first three presidents of the United States to research. Create a biographical poster that includes details about his childhood, education, career, and presidency.



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