

# King George III

*A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book*  
*Word Count: 2,001*

## Connections

### Writing

How could King George III have avoided going to war with the American colonists? How would this have impacted history? Write an essay using details from the book and outside resources to support your answer.

### Social Studies

Research another world leader and use a Venn diagram to compare him or her to King George III. Summarize their similarities and differences in an essay.

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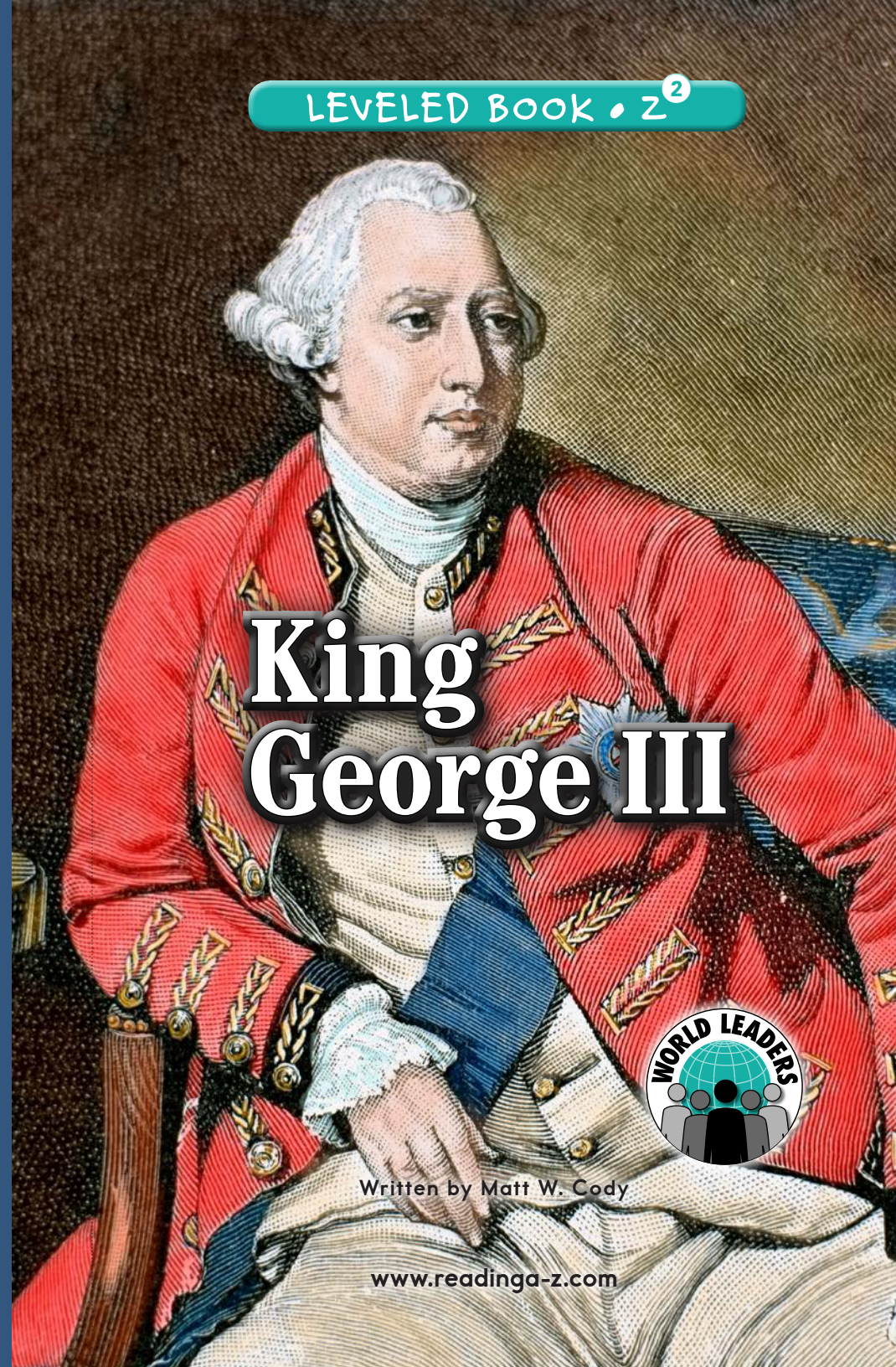
LEVELED BOOK • Z<sup>2</sup>

# King George III

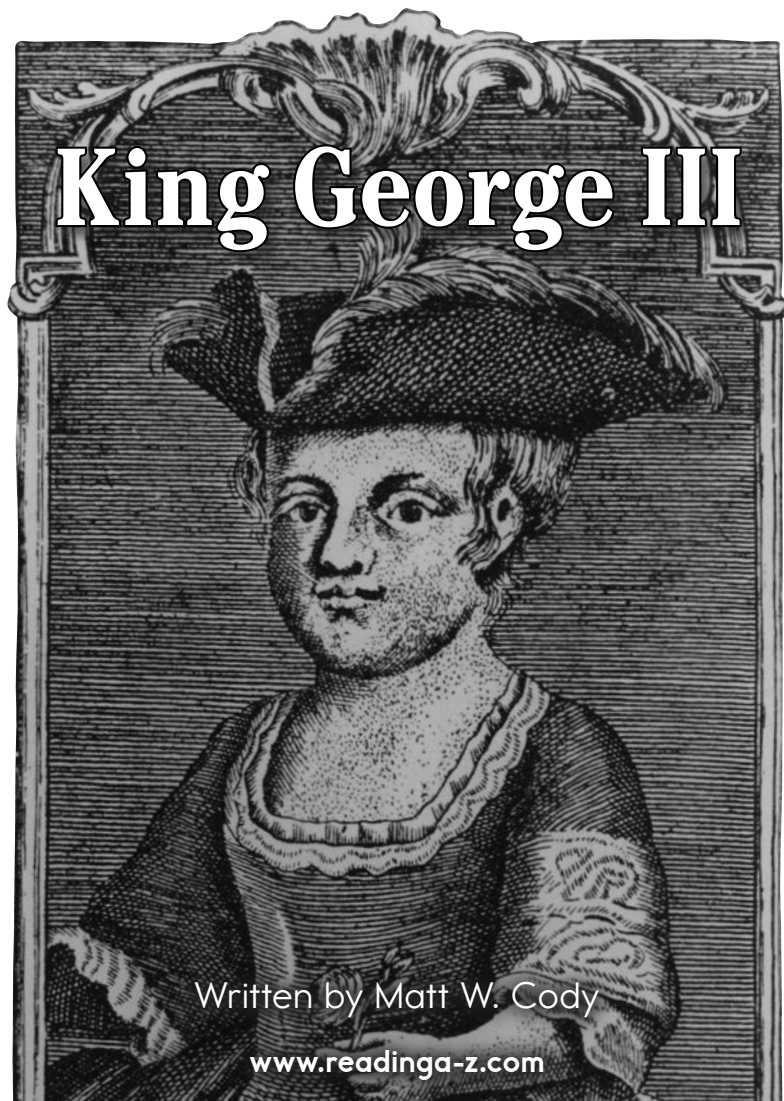


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## Focus Question

What influence did King George III have on England, and how can his influence still be seen today?

## Words to Know

ambassador	mercenaries
banishing	ministry
boycotts	overture
ethic	Parliament
expansion	proclamation
figurehead	tenacious

Front cover: King George III, king of Great Britain and Ireland

Title page: George III as a very young boy

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### Correlation

#### LEVEL Z2

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



## Table of Contents

A Determined Leader .....	4
Childhood .....	5
Seven Years' War .....	7
A Family of His Own .....	10
Angry Colonists .....	11
American Revolution .....	13
Illness and More Revolution .....	15
Decline .....	17
Reconsidering a King .....	18
Glossary .....	20

## A Determined Leader

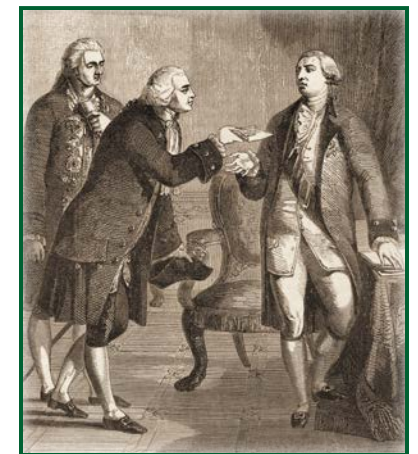
King George III of England looked at John Adams, the American **ambassador** standing before him. Adams had traveled to England in 1785 to give the king a message.

Adams came to soothe relations between the United States and England—countries that were recently at war against each other. Britain had suffered humiliation with the loss of its American colonies in 1783. Adams spoke, humbly offering the United States' hand in friendship. Speaking sincerely and using words like *honor* and *affection*, he offered best wishes.

The king's demeanor softening, he managed a smile and replied that he would "receive with pleasure" the **overture**. Adams bowed and exited.

Alone with his thoughts, the king hoped he had fulfilled his royal duty. He had fought to hold his country's empire together, but in the end he lost the American colonies. He was determined to never lose again.

John Adams (left), the first U.S. ambassador to England, extends an offering to George III (right) in 1785.





A portrait of young George

## Childhood

On June 4, 1738, Princess Augusta of Wales gave birth to George, the man who would one day rule the most powerful empire in the world. George was born into a royal family headed by his grandfather, King George II.

Young George's father, Frederick, Prince of Wales, was the king's eldest son.

The king and Frederick detested each other, which created tremendous tension in the family. Frederick once went so far as to lead a group to oppose his father politically. King George II responded by **banishing** his son from his court.

In this stressful environment, young George grew to be an emotional boy and rather slow to learn. He could not read until the age of eleven, even though George's parents provided him and his siblings with the best tutors. His father anxiously hoped George would grow up to be a great king—greater than his own father.

At age twelve, George became heir to the British throne when his father, who was first in line, died of a lung ailment. As the future king, George leaned heavily on his teacher and advisor, Lord Bute, whom he trusted and admired. Bute taught him to be aware of the fierce political battles happening around him—battles that George would someday fight as king.

Most of the battles were between the monarch, who kept his own **ministry** of advisors, and **Parliament**—the British legislature. Today, the British monarch is a **figurehead** who conducts mainly ceremonial duties, but in George's time the monarch held considerable power.

In the mid-1700s, Britain was a major player on the world stage and ruled colonies in India and North America, both of which provided natural resources and new markets in which to sell British goods. Britain was a wealthy nation unafraid to go to war with other countries to protect its interests.



Scottish nobleman John Stuart, the third Earl of Bute, known as Lord Bute, was a main advisor to King George III.



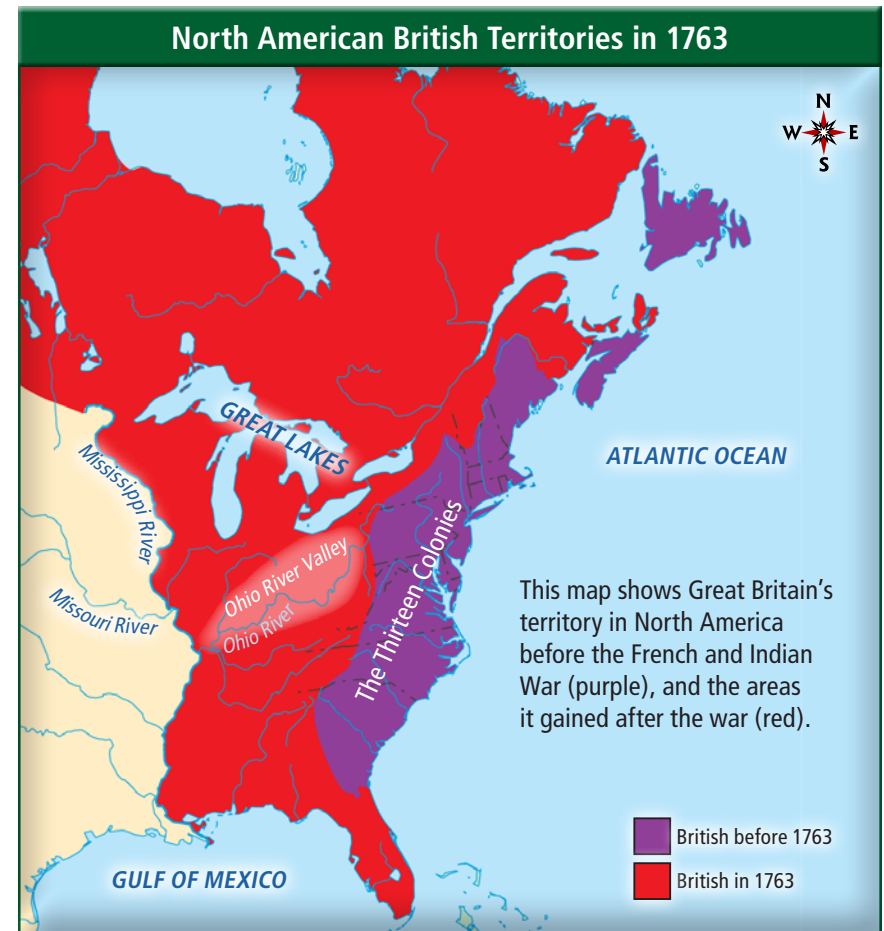
## Seven Years' War

It was in the midst of one such war that King George II died suddenly. In 1760, George III became king of Great Britain and Ireland at age twenty-two. Since 1756, Britain had been engaged in the Seven Years' War. The war could be divided into two parts: the battles in Europe against France and other countries, and the battles in North America against France. The Seven Years' War conflicts involved control of land.

In North America, the Seven Years' War (called the French and Indian War there) involved control of land in the Ohio River Valley region of North America. French claims to the land blocked Great Britain's colonial **expansion**. Britain's control would establish it as the major colonial power in North America.



George Washington (on horseback) earned his reputation as a fine military commander during the French and Indian War. During that war, he fought on the side of the British.



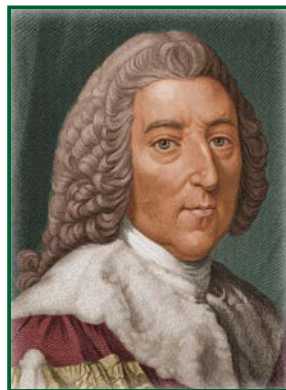
George III relished each battle victory over the French in Europe and North America, but he could claim little credit. The praise instead went to William Pitt, who served as war minister to King George II. Pitt planned Britain's successful military strategy for the war. He was wildly popular with the public, but as a member of the powerful Whig political party, he was strongly disliked by Lord Bute.

The Whig party was intent on giving more power to elected members of Parliament and the British government, and taking power away from the king. Bute, a staunch monarchist, advised George III to oppose the Whigs—especially William Pitt—at every turn.

Lord Bute and William Pitt argued vigorously over whether to bring the war to a close. Waging war was expensive, but Pitt actually wanted to expand, not end, the war. The king sided with Bute, and Pitt resigned his post in 1761.

The British people were outraged to see their beloved Pitt go, and they took their anger out on Lord Bute. At one public event, the ousted Pitt was cheered, while Bute was attacked. In response, George III stayed stubbornly loyal to Bute, appointing him prime minister, the leading position in his ministry. In that position, Bute negotiated a formal treaty that ended the Seven Years' War in 1763, giving Britain unprecedented world power. Bute found the negotiations emotionally draining and promptly resigned. King George III was on his own.

William Pitt was largely responsible for Britain's victory against France. Even so, Lord Bute opposed him and urged George III to do the same.



## A Family of His Own

George III may have lost his closest political advisor, but he had gained a partner for life.

George reviewed a list of eligible princesses, chose a young German princess named Sophia Charlotte, and married her in 1761. Though they barely knew each other, George and Charlotte got along very well. She would eventually bear fifteen children during their fifty-seven-year marriage.

King George prided himself on being a simple man, despite the power he held. “Farmer George,” as he soon came to be nicknamed, was interested in agriculture and often visited the farms that spread out across the royal lands.

His personal life was taking shape, and the slow learning tendencies he endured in his youth were replaced with a strong work **ethic**. By all accounts, George III was a determined and **tenacious** man. He continued to study earnestly the details of government and politics.



Sophia Charlotte arrived in England, met the king, and married him the next day.

## Angry Colonists

King George's government planted the seeds of revolution when it approved a series of acts that offended the American colonists.

First, in 1763, Britain signed a **proclamation** declaring certain North American lands off-limits to colonial settlement. Then, drowning in war debt, Britain passed a series of colonial taxes. The Sugar Act taxed imported molasses. The Stamp Act required colonists to affix a paid stamp to all printed materials. The Townshend Acts of 1767 taxed goods such as paint, glass, and tea. Making matters worse, George III ordered British troops into colonial cities to enforce the taxes.

The colonists were incensed and issued **boycotts** of British goods. Violent protests broke out, and tax collectors feared for their lives.

### John Wilkes

One of King George III's fiercest political opponents was John Wilkes, a member of Parliament and an outspoken critic of the government. In a 1763 article, he lashed out at the king's ministry, calling for their overthrow. With his unceasing call for liberty for the British people, Wilkes would become a hero to America's Founding Fathers.



The colonists were angry that they were not represented in Parliament. They declared, "No taxation without representation!"

The turning point in the sour relationship between the colonists and their king occurred late one night on December 16, 1773. A group of colonists disguised as Native Americans boarded two British ships docked in Boston Harbor that were stocked with crates of tea. In a dramatic act of protest, the colonists cracked open the crates and dumped the tea into the harbor.

Upon hearing the news of the Boston Tea Party, King George, angry and determined, swore to punish the American rebels: "The die is cast. The colonies must either triumph or submit." To get the colonists to submit, the king ordered Boston Harbor closed and declared martial law on Massachusetts, which meant the British military was in control. War was inevitable.



The Boston Tea Party rallied the colonists who felt oppressed by British taxes.



American Founding Fathers drafted the Declaration of Independence in 1776, a document that outlined the freedom of the colonies from British rule.



## American Revolution

Soldiers fired the first shots of the American Revolution in 1775 at the Battles of Lexington and Concord, in Massachusetts. British troops engaged with a local militia, a group of armed soldiers who were not part of the nation's army.

Back in Great Britain, King George III needed more men to win the war, so he hired about thirty thousand well-trained German **mercenaries** called Hessians. With the Hessians' support, the British scored some crucial early victories when they pushed colonial forces, led by General George Washington, back into New York and New Jersey. A surprise attack by Washington on the Hessians on Christmas night in 1776 greatly challenged British forces, however.

The battles went back and forth. In 1777, the British captured the colonial capital of Philadelphia but were soundly defeated at the battle of Saratoga in New York.

The French, seeking revenge against the British for their loss in the French and Indian War, joined the colonists' side in early 1778. The British continued to fight, but after unsuccessful attempts to defeat the Americans in the southern colonies, British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia, on October 19, 1781.

George III, receiving the news of surrender, stubbornly refused to believe it and wanted to continue the fight. His ministers and Parliament, however, knew the war was over. Lord North, the prime minister and an ally of the king, couldn't support the king's position to continue to fight. To



those who tried to blame him for the loss of the colonies, the king declared, "I am innocent of the evils that have occurred."

American colonists tore down a statue of King George in New York upon declaring their independence from Britain.



## Illness and More Revolution

King George III lost the thirteen colonies, but by the late 1780s there was great concern that the king might also be losing his sanity. He was often anxious and acted strangely. He lashed out physically, shouted at people, and said nonsensical things. Physically, his symptoms were even more alarming. His eyes bulged and were yellowish in color, and his urine turned purple.

His doctors were perplexed. All they could do was treat him with the medical conventions of the era. The king was bled, his back was blistered, and he was forced to drink castor oil. Finally, an even more radical treatment was enacted in which the king was isolated and severely punished if he spoke out of turn. The harsh discipline slowly appeared to help, and the king recovered in 1789.

At times, King George III's illness resulted in violent outbursts, and he was restrained.



The political cartoon "The Rival Gardeners" expresses how both George III and Napoleon had their own gardens (lands) to attend to.

Another revolution tormented King George, this time in Ireland, a nation that was mainly Catholic. Britain, which was Protestant, passed laws limiting the rights of Irish Catholics. General Cornwallis stopped the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and a union of the two nations' parliaments took place in 1800, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Britain was fighting yet another war with France, George's old nemesis. In 1789, a revolution in France resulted in the overthrow of the king. By 1799, the country was being led by a young general named Napoleon Bonaparte, who was eager to conquer Europe—including Great Britain. George III began to prepare his country for another war. The Napoleonic Wars lasted until Great Britain finally defeated Napoleon in 1815.

## Decline

In 1809, at the age of seventy-one, King George III was in his fiftieth year on the throne. He attained more popularity in his old age than he ever knew previously.

A terrible personal tragedy befell him the following year, when his youngest daughter, Princess Amelia, died of tuberculosis. She was just twenty-seven, and her death seemed to trigger a decline in his health, both mental and physical. Nearly blind and very thin, King George relapsed into the mental illness that had tortured him decades earlier. His violent mood swings became more common.

In 1811, his son George, Prince of Wales, became regent, or temporary ruler, of Great Britain by an act of Parliament. In January 1820, the king died, and his son became King George IV. Tens of thousands attended the royal funeral.



George IV served as king for ten years, from 1820 to 1830.

## Reconsidering a King

King George is remembered as a strong yet complicated man. Some historians think of George III as the king who lost important colonies in America and defeated Napoleon. Others often focus on his mental health issues. However, many historians have begun to rethink their opinions of him. Many historians now believe symptoms of his mental illness could be linked to a rare physical disease.

As a leader, George III always put his country first. He led his nation to victories in the Seven Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars. He also fought to keep Great Britain's colonies in America. The king's personal life has been given more consideration, and history has shown that George was a hard worker, a loyal husband, and a loving father.



King George reigned for sixty years—longer than any monarch before him.



## The Life of George III



1751: Frederick, Prince of Wales and George's father, dies

1756: Seven Years' War begins

1763: Seven Years' War ends

1775: First shots of the American Revolution



1798: Britain stops the Irish Rebellion

1809: The king celebrates fifty years on the throne

1815: The British defeat Napoleon

1730

1738: George is born on June 4

1740



1750

1760

1760: King George II, George's grandfather, dies, and George becomes king

1770

1781: The British surrender to the American colonists at Yorktown

1780

1788: George III shows signs of a serious mental illness; resumes duties a year later, appearing to be cured

1790

1800



1810

1820: Thousands attend George III's funeral

1820

## Glossary

**ambassador** (*n.*)

an official who travels to or resides in a new location to represent his or her country or population (p. 4)

**banishing** (*v.*)

forcing to leave (p. 5)

**boycotts** (*n.*)

refusals to buy or take part in something in order to make points or force change (p. 11)

**ethic** (*n.*)

a moral principle that guides a person's behavior (p. 10)

**expansion** (*n.*)

an increase in the size, amount, volume, or scope of something (p. 7)

**figurehead** (*n.*)

a leader in name only who has no actual power (p. 6)

**mercenaries** (*n.*)

soldiers who fight for any armies that will pay them to do so (p. 13)

**ministry** (*n.*)

a government department led by a minister, or the building in which it is housed (p. 6)

**overture** (*n.*)

an act or offering that is meant to introduce something more significant, such as a friendship (p. 4)

**Parliament** (*n.*)

the lawmaking body of the government of the United Kingdom (p. 6)

**proclamation** (*n.*)

an official public announcement (p. 11)

**tenacious** (*adj.*)

stubbornly determined or persistent (p. 10)