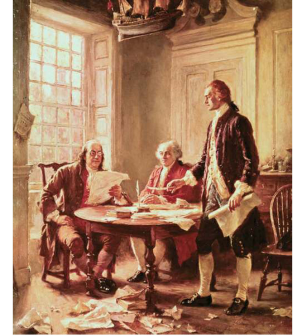


Jefferson was only 33 years old, but he was already known as a fine writer and thinker. His fellow committee members asked him to write a draft of a declaration of independence.



Jefferson set up a folding desk in his room. Then he began to write. For about a week, he wrote and rewrote his draft. Finally, he showed his draft to the other committee members. Adams and Franklin made a few changes to it. Then they gave the document to the Congress.

For a few days, the members of the Congress argued about independence. Then, on July 2, the delegates voted to separate from Great Britain.

The Congress spent the next two days discussing each word of the declaration. They voted to make a number of changes. Delegates from two southern colonies, where plantation owners used slaves, objected to statements about slavery. Several other delegates agreed. Jefferson had called slavery a “cruel war against human nature.” The Congress took out these words. Some of the changes angered Jefferson. But everyone knew that all the colonies had to agree in order for them to become a united country. Finally, on July 4, 1776, Congress approved the Declaration of Independence.

THE DECLARATION OF I...



The delegates approved a handwritten copy of the declaration. They knew that this was an act of treason toward the king. John Hancock was the president of the Congress. He warned the delegates that they must “all hang together,” or stay united. Benjamin Franklin replied, “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.” The punishment for treason was death by hanging.

When the time came to sign the Declaration, Hancock signed first, writing his name in large bold letters. His signature became famous. To this day, people call their signature a “John Hancock.” Then Jefferson and the other delegates signed, too.