Words Before the Vote

How Congress prepared a declaration while debating independence

8.C.1.4.C "Summarize the decision to appoint a committee to draft a declaration of independence."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the problem Congress faced, circle the committee's job, and number the steps that show who made the final decisions. Use your marks to explain why Congress appointed the committee.

A Draft Before a Decision

1 In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress faced a difficult choice. The thirteen colonies were fighting Britain, but Congress had not yet formally declared independence. On June 7, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee proposed that the colonies become free and independent states. Delegates disagreed about whether the time was right, so they continued discussing his proposal. Yet if Congress chose independence, it would need to explain that decision to the colonies and to other nations. A written declaration could make the reasons public.

2 On June 11, while delegates continued to consider Lee's proposal, Congress appointed five members to prepare a draft declaration. The group included Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. Appointing a small committee let work on the written explanation begin before the full Congress reached its final decision. The committee's job was to put the case for independence into words, not to decide independence on its own. Congress would still debate and vote on the question.

3 The committee chose Jefferson to write the first draft. The other members reviewed his work, and the committee sent a revised draft to Congress. On July 2, Congress voted for independence. Delegates then discussed and changed the declaration before approving its final text on July 4. The committee's appointment was therefore a step in preparing a public statement, not the moment independence was decided. A few delegates could draft the words, but the full Congress held the power to approve the declaration.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize the situation that led Congress to appoint a drafting committee.

2. Summarize what Congress decided on June 11 and what the appointed members were asked to do.

3. Why did appointing the committee not settle the question of independence? Summarize the difference between the committee's job and Congress's job.

4. Summarize how the committee's appointment helped move the declaration toward approval on July 4.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a delegate writing a three-sentence note to a newspaper reader on June 12, 1776. Explain what Congress just decided, why the timing mattered, and what the decision did not settle. Do not mention events after June 12.

ANSWER KEY

Words Before the Vote

GRADE 8 · 8.C.1.4.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the problem Congress faced, circle the committee's job, and number the steps that show who made the final decisions. Use your marks to explain why Congress appointed the committee. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize the situation that led Congress to appoint a drafting committee.	**Congress was debating Lee's proposal for independence and needed a written explanation ready if it chose to separate from Britain.**
2	Summarize what Congress decided on June 11 and what the appointed members were asked to do.	**Congress appointed five members to draft a declaration that put the case for independence into words.**
3	Why did appointing the committee not settle the question of independence? Summarize the difference between the committee's job and Congress's job.	**The committee prepared a draft, but the full Congress still had to debate and vote on independence and approve the declaration.**
4	Summarize how the committee's appointment helped move the declaration toward approval on July 4.	**The appointment let a small group prepare a draft while Congress debated independence. After voting for independence, Congress revised and approved the declaration.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Yesterday, Congress appointed five delegates to draft a declaration explaining why the colonies might separate from Britain. Starting the draft now gives Congress words to consider while delegates continue debating independence. This appointment does not mean Congress has voted for independence or approved a final declaration.

Accept summaries in students' own words that distinguish preparing a draft from voting for independence. For Part 3, the note should stay within what a delegate could know on June 12.