

READER'S THEATER

2ND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

written by Dorothy Fairbanks

LIST OF CHARACTERS (in order):

Mr. Thomas =
John Hancock =
Richard Henry Lee =
John Adams =
John Dickenson =
Edward Rutledge =
Benjamin Franklin =
Robert Livingston =
Roger Sherman =

Teaching Suggestions:

- Assign a small group to practice and perform this scene of the 2nd Continental Congress to the class
- Assign one of the group members to be the director
- Find costumes for the students to wear
- Block out an area of the classroom to be the stage
- Ask the class (audience) to figure out which character names go with each actor as they watch the scene--this could be treated as a quiz or form of assessment
- List the names of the characters on the board in random order to serve as a word bank

(The Congressional Secretary calls the meeting to order.)

Mr. Thomas: Here Ye, Here ye the second Continental Congress of these United Colonies will now be called to order on this the 7th day of June. The honorable John Hancock President.

John Hancock: The chair recognizes Richard Henry Lee from Virginia.

Richard Henry Lee: Thank you Mr. President. The House of Burgesses from the great colony of Virginia has instructed me to propose this resolution:

Resolved that these united colonies are, and of right out to be, free and independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign alliances; and that a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective colonies for their consideration and approbation.

John Adams: I second the motion.

John Hancock: The Virginia Resolution for Independence has been moved and seconded. Do I hear a motion for debate?

(John Dickenson raises his hand)

The Chair recognizes Mr. Dickenson of Pennsylvania.

John Dickenson: Many of us feel it is too soon to declare independence. I propose we postpone the debate and the vote.

Edward Rutledge: I second the motion for postponement. Mr. President may I make a comment.

John Hancock: The Chair recognizes Mr. Edward Rutledge from South Carolina.

Edward Rutledge: We in the south, and perhaps the middle colonies, are not prepared at the time to vote on independence. Our Assemblies and conventions are due to meet soon to discuss this matter and give instructions to us as their delegates. Postponement is needed so we can know the voice of our colonies.

John Hancock: It has been proposed and seconded that we postpone the debate and vote on independence for the space of, shall we say, the beginning of July – some 3 weeks hence. All those in favor of postponement say “Ya”. (Pause) All those against, say “Nay”.

(The motion of postpone passes.)

John Adams: Mr. President.

John Hancock: The Chair recognizes Mr. Adams from Massachusetts.

John Adams: May I just point out that none of the objections mentioned to a vote on independence argued against the policy, or the right of separation from Britain, nor did they suppose it possible we should ever renew our connection. By right, the colonies have always been independent of Parliament. The British government had refused to receive or answer the Olive Branch Petition. In August 1775 they declared the colonies out of the King’s protection, and levied war against them. Thus the colonies no longer owe the King allegiance, it being a certain position in the law that allegiance and protection are reciprocal, the one, allegiance, ceases when the other, protection, is withdrawn.

During the time of this postponement, I propose that a committee be formed to create a document that will explain to the world the necessity of our separation and our intentions as a nation.

Benjamin Franklin: I second the motion

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John Hancock: It has been proposed and seconded that we form a committee to write a declaration of independence. All those in favor say Ya, All those against, Nay. The motion passes the committee will be formed. I appoint Mr. John Adams of Massachusetts to serve,...

John Adams: Gratefully.

John Hancock: Dr. Franklin of Pennsylvania,...

Benjamin Franklin: Delighted

John Hancock: Mr. Robert Livingston of New York,...

Robert Livingston: Your servant Sir.

John Hancock: Mrs. Roger Sherman of Connecticut,...

Roger Sherman: Yes.

John Hancock: and Mr. Thomas Jefferson of Virginia.

Thomas Jefferson: Certainly Sir.

(Jefferson and Adams gather in the front of the room. They face each other and Adams says to the audience.)

John Adams: Jefferson proposed to me to make the draft. I said: (turning to Jefferson) "I will not. You should do it.

Thomas Jefferson: Oh, no! Why will you not? You ought to do it.

John Adams: I will not!

Thomas Jefferson: Why?

John Adams: Reasons enough.

Thomas Jefferson: What can be your reasons?

John Adams: Reason first – you are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second-I am obnoxious, suspected and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason third-you can write ten times better than I can.

Thomas Jefferson: Well, if you are decided. I will do as well as I can."