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## The Fourth of July

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Fireworks! Hot dogs! Parades! What a wonderful day for a family picnic! The Fourth of July holiday is all of these things. But why do we have a special celebration for a day in July? We usually have a party to celebrate somebody's birthday. Well, the Fourth of July is a special birthday. It is the birthday of our country. The official name for the Fourth of July holiday is Independence Day. Let's see if we can discover some of the reasons it has become such a special day in our country.



A long time ago, over four hundred years ago to be exact, there were some very unhappy people living in Europe. Europe is a continent across the Atlantic Ocean, almost 4000 miles from where we live now. England is joined together with other countries in the area to form Great Britain. In the 1500's and 1600's, the person in charge of Great Britain was a king or queen. A king or queen is sometimes called a monarch. Kings and queens can make their own rules and tell people what to do and what to think. Many people in Great Britain did not like the king or queen telling them what to do, especially when it came to how they were to worship God. These people were so unhappy with the monarch that several groups of them decided to leave Great Britain to find new homes somewhere else. They wanted to be free to worship however they pleased. There weren't many places that they could go to.

Traders and sailors told these people about an area of land west across the Atlantic that was full of opportunities for a new life. It offered land and jobs to the poor. It offered the opportunity for people to start their own colonies with their own rules. It would be a new beginning for criminals. It would be the chance to become rich. Europeans started coming to this new land in groups, in families, and by themselves.

The people loved their new home. They began businesses. They built homes. They created farms to grow food. They formed their own communities with their own laws. Life was surprisingly good in this new land so far from their home. By the 1700's these people in the new America felt that they could take care of themselves, without the help of the king. The king still expected them to pay him money, called taxes, for the protection he sent to them in the form of soldiers. The people of America could not vote about these taxes, nor did they have any success talking to the king about his laws. They sent letters to the king asking him to let them make their own laws, but he ignored their letters. The American colonists finally got so tired of being taxed and ignored, they got together and wrote a document called the Declaration of Independence. This document told the whole world that the people in America wanted to be free to rule the colonies and explained the reasons they thought the king should let them separate themselves from Great Britain. The Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson with the help of many other men who believed in this cause. When representatives to the meeting agreed that the words said what they wanted, a large bell was rung in Philadelphia bringing interested citizens to the center of the city to hear the good news. The date was July 4, 1776, a day that will forever be celebrated as our country's birthday. So watch the

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fireworks and "ooh and aah" at the beautiful colors. Eat watermelon and hot dogs and hamburgers and ice cream. Play games with your cousins. But don't forget to stop and say, "Happy Birthday, America."

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## Questions

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\_\_\_\_\_ 1. What holiday is discussed in this article?

- A. Christmas
- B. Easter
- C. Fourth of July
- D. Halloween

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Who made the rules in England?

- A. a poor man
- B. a judge
- C. a monarch
- D. a doctor

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Why did people want to leave England?

- A. They wanted to worship the way they wanted.
- B. They didn't like the temperature.
- C. They liked to sail.
- D. They wanted to see the world.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. The colonists liked paying taxes to the king.

- A. False
- B. True

5. Name the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence.

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\_\_\_\_\_ 6. What does independence mean?

- A. monarchs
- B. taxes
- C. freedom
- D. parties

7. Do you think the king was happy when the colonists wanted to separate themselves from Great Britain? Why or why not?

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Why do we celebrate on the Fourth of July?
- A. That's the day the fireworks arrived.
  - B. That's the day the colonists picked.
  - C. That's the day the king let us be free.
  - D. That's the day the Declaration of Independence was finished.

