

Lesson Sixteen

They Signed For Us

LESSON IDEA

The courage, character, and sacrifices of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence.

PREPARATION

Prepare cards for each member of the family containing the first two paragraphs of John Adams' "Sink-or-swim" speech. (See last page of this lesson.)

WHEN JOHN ADAMS, stood before the Second Continental Congress to argue for independence from England, the New Englander expressed the sentiments of many of his colleagues who supported the Declaration of Independence when he thundered, "Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, I give my hand and my heart to this vote....You and I, indeed, may rue it. We may not live to the time when this Declaration shall be made good. We may die; die colonists; die slaves; die, it may be, ignominiously and on the scaffold.

"Be it so, be it so.

"If it be the pleasure of Heaven that my country shall require the poor offering of my life, the victim shall be ready....But while I do live, let me have a country, or at least the hope of a country, and that a free country...

"Sir, before God, I believe the hour is come. My judgment approves this measure, and my whole heart is in it. All that I have, and all that I am, and all that I hope, in this life. I am now ready here to stake upon it; and I leave off as I began, that live or die, survive or perish, I am for the Declaration. It is my living sentiment, and by the blessing of God it shall be my dying sentiment, Independence now, and Independence forever."

Such principled determination was not Adams' alone. John Hancock, President of the Congress, was a handsome young bachelor with a sizeable fortune and a price of £500 on his head. Do you know what a British pound is? [It is the basic money unit, like a dollar. In colonial times a British pound was equivalent to slightly more than \$3.33. So the reward for Hancock's capture was approximately \$1,665, a large amount for that time.] If captured, Hancock would have been tried for treason in England, and probably hanged. No pardon would have been possible, as it would have been for lesser rebels.

YET, HANCOCK SIGNED the Declaration without hesitation on July 4, 1776 the day it was approved by Congress. In fact, his (as President of the Congress) and that of Charles Thomson (the Secretary) were the only signatures on the original document. When the Declaration was engrossed on parchment and signed by all 56 congressional delegates on August 2nd, Hancock

joked about the large, shaded letters of his signature. "John Bull [King George]," he said, "can read my name without spectacles, and may now double his reward of 500 pounds for my head. That is my defiance!"

All members of Congress who

signed for independence were marked for special vengeance by the British. So were their families, their properties, and their businesses. The danger was greatest in New York, where English troops were gathering for battle with George Washington's fledgling army.

The four New York delegates: Francis Lewis,



The brave patriots pledge "their live, their fortunes, and their sacred honor."

