

## Cast:

THOMAS  
JEFFERSON

### HIS GRANDCHILDREN:

ELLEN, AGE 14

VIRGINIA, AGE 9

MARY, AGE 7

JAMES, AGE 4

NARRATOR

# A Magical Pen

(One evening at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson sits in the parlor as some of his grandchildren dance around him. Red curtains drape over the tops of tall windows. The floor is parquet—pieces of wood that fit together to make a pattern.)

**Narrator:** After two terms as president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson has retired to Monticello. Here in the parlor, Thomas loves to play games and music with his daughter Martha's children.

(Jefferson's young granddaughter Mary climbs onto his lap.)

**Mary:** Grandpapa, please tell us the story of how you wrote the Declaration of Independence!

**Narrator:** Remember, during the American Revolution, the Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and decided that the 13 American Colonies should separate from England. The Declaration of Independence is the famous document stating why America should be a free and independent country.

**Jefferson:** Why, you children have heard me tell that story many times!

**Ellen:** I never get tired of hearing it, Grandpapa.

**Jefferson:** Well, all right. (Ellen, Virginia, and James sit on the floor in front of Jefferson.) On June 11, 1776, the Continental Congress put me on a committee of five people to write the Declaration. The committee met, and we talked over ideas for the document.



**Virginia:** Ben Franklin and John Adams were on the committee, too.

**Narrator:** *Notice the paintings of famous people, such as Franklin and Adams, covering the parlor walls?*

**Jefferson:** The committee asked me to write a rough draft of the Declaration. I was one of the youngest members of Congress, only 33, but I said I would do my best.

**James:** Why did the committee choose you?

**Jefferson:** They said I was the best writer—that I had a “masterly pen.”

**Mary:** John Adams said you could write 10 times better than he could!

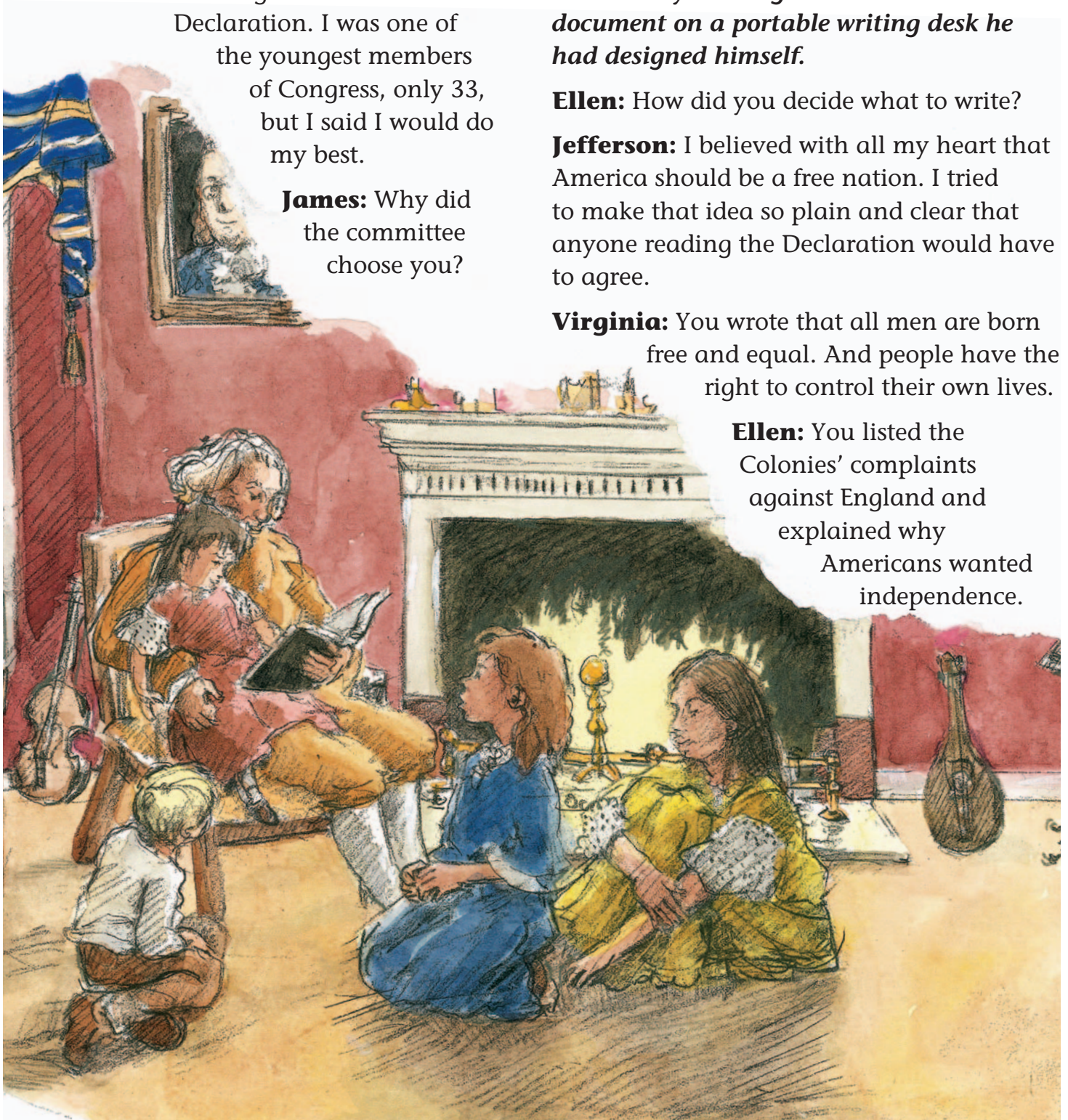
**Narrator:** *Over the next 17 days, Jefferson worked on the Declaration whenever he wasn't busy in Congress. He wrote the document on a portable writing desk he had designed himself.*

**Ellen:** How did you decide what to write?

**Jefferson:** I believed with all my heart that America should be a free nation. I tried to make that idea so plain and clear that anyone reading the Declaration would have to agree.

**Virginia:** You wrote that all men are born free and equal. And people have the right to control their own lives.

**Ellen:** You listed the Colonies' complaints against England and explained why Americans wanted independence.



**Jefferson:** I hoped to inspire my countrymen with my words, but I had to work quickly. Congress was in a hurry to get the document.

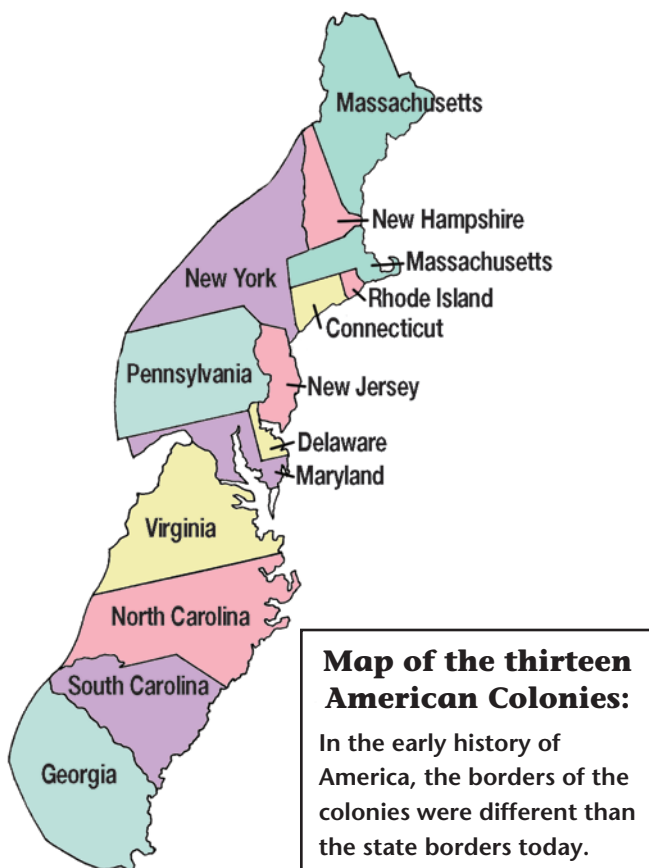
**James:** What happened next?

**Jefferson:** I showed my rough draft to the committee, and they made a few changes. Overall, I think they were pleased with my work.

**Narrator:** *Jefferson presented the Declaration to Congress. On July 2, Congress voted for independence from England. Then the delegates began to go over the Declaration, line by line.*

**Mary:** The delegates thought your writing was beautiful, didn't they?

**Jefferson:** Well, they certainly argued about it—for almost three days! They changed words and cut out some parts, but most of the wording was still my own.



### Did You Know?

- In 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. He was the first secretary of state, the second vice president, and our third president.
- Jefferson's home was Monticello, which he designed and lived in his whole life.
- Jefferson invented many things, including a plow and a simple copying machine.
- Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, fifty years to the day after the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

**Virginia:** Did the changes hurt your feelings, Grandpapa?

**Jefferson:** It was painful to listen as the delegates criticized the document I had worked so hard on.

**Narrator:** *On July 4, Congress approved the final version of the Declaration. That's why we celebrate America's birthday on the Fourth of July.*

**Ellen:** You should be proud—the Declaration of Independence inspired people to fight for freedom.

**Virginia:** With your pen, you took ordinary words and turned them into something special—almost like magic!

**James:** Grandpapa, you must have a magical pen!

*(Everyone laughs.)*

**Jefferson:** Now children, let's light the candles and find a book to read. You know I just can't live without books!

**Adapted from an article by Ruth Spencer Johnson  
Illustrated by Mark Mitchell**