



25 ACTIVITIES FOR 250 YEARS

*A family activity guide for
America's 250th Birthday*



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In the Kitchen

1 Make Johnnycakes

The everyday bread of colonial America. Colonists learned to make these from Native Americans — cornmeal was one of the most important foods in the colonies because wheat was expensive and hard to grow.

What you need:

- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup boiling water
- 2 tablespoons butter or oil for the griddle

Instructions:

1. Mix cornmeal and salt in a bowl.
2. Pour boiling water over the mixture and stir until smooth. Let it sit 5 minutes.
3. Heat butter or oil in a skillet over medium heat.
4. Drop batter by spoonfuls onto the hot skillet, flatten slightly.
5. Cook 3–4 minutes per side until golden brown and crispy.
6. Serve with butter, maple syrup, or honey.

--Younger kids can stir the batter and help flatten the cakes. Older kids can manage the griddle with supervision.

Source: Recipe adapted from Colonial Williamsburg Historic Foodways program.



Did You Know?

Johnnycakes were originally called "journey cakes" because travelers carried the dry cornmeal mix on long trips and cooked them over campfires along the way.



2 Bake Indian Pudding

One of the oldest American desserts, dating back to the 1600s. English colonists adapted their traditional "hasty pudding" using cornmeal instead of wheat flour. This was a staple comfort food through the Revolution and beyond.

What you need:

- 1/3 cup yellow cornmeal
- 4 cups whole milk
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 300°F. Butter a baking dish.
2. Heat 3 cups of milk in a saucepan until it just begins to simmer.
3. Slowly whisk in cornmeal, stirring constantly to avoid lumps.
4. Cook on low heat, stirring, for about 10 minutes until thickened.
5. Remove from heat. Stir in molasses, sugar, spices, butter, and salt.
6. Pour into baking dish. Pour remaining 1 cup cold milk over the top (don't stir).
7. Bake 2–2.5 hours until set but still slightly jiggly in the center.
8. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.

--This takes a while in the oven — great to start before doing other activities and come back to it.

Source: Adapted from Durgin-Park restaurant recipe, Boston, MA — served since 1827.



Did You Know?

Colonists didn't have sugar at first — they sweetened everything with molasses, which was shipped from the Caribbean and was one of the most traded goods in the colonies.

3 Cook Succotash - The Three Sisters

The word "succotash" comes from the Narragansett word "msickquatash." Native Americans taught colonists the Three Sisters method: planting corn, beans, and squash together. The corn gives the beans something to climb. The beans add nitrogen to the soil for the corn. The squash leaves shade the ground and keep moisture in. Each one helps the others grow — a lesson in cooperation that's over 5,000 years old.

What you need:

- 2 cups corn kernels (fresh, frozen, or cut from the cob)
- 2 cups lima beans or butter beans (frozen is fine)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: diced summer squash, chopped onion, crispy bacon

Instructions:

1. If using frozen beans, cook them according to package directions and drain.
2. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat.
3. Add corn and cook 3–4 minutes.
4. Add beans (and squash/onion if using) and cook another 3–4 minutes.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Serve as a side dish.

--Talk about the Three Sisters while you cook. Ask: what's something in your life where three things help each other?

Source: Three Sisters agricultural method documented by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.



Did You Know?

The Three Sisters method is still used by farmers today. The Iroquois considered corn, beans, and squash sacred gifts and called them "De-o-ha-ko" — "these sustain us."

4 Host a Colonial Meal Night

Pick a recipe from this section (or make all of them!) and eat dinner the way a colonial family would have. This is about the experience, not just the food.

Set the scene:

- Eat by candlelight or lamplight — no overhead lights.
- Use spoons and knives only. Forks didn't become common in America until the 1800s.
- Serve from one shared bowl or pot in the center of the table.
- If you have wooden bowls or plates, use them. Colonial families ate from wooden "trenchers" — two people often shared one.
- Drink water or apple cider from shared cups.
- Kids: you might have to stand. Chairs at the table were for adults in many colonial homes.

A typical colonial dinner:

- A one-pot stew or pottage (thick soup) with whatever was available
- Bread — cornbread or johnnycakes, not sliced white bread
- A vegetable side like succotash
- Pudding for dessert (Indian pudding fits perfectly)

Discussion question:

What would you miss most about modern food and cooking if you lived in 1776?

Source: Dining customs from Colonial Williamsburg Foundation research and the Smithsonian's "Colonial Life" exhibit notes.



Did You Know?

Most colonial families owned just one cooking pot. Everything — breakfast, lunch, and dinner — was made in that single pot over the fire, which is where the phrase "pot luck" comes from.



Outside and Around Town

5 Colonial Games Day

Colonial children worked hard but still found time for games. Most toys were homemade from wood, rope, and scraps. Here are four games you can play with things you already have at home.

Quoits (Ring Toss):

- Make rings from rope, strips of fabric, or bendy sticks tied in circles.
- Stick a broom handle or stick in the ground as the target.
- Stand 10–15 feet away and toss. Closest to the peg wins. On the peg = 3 points.

Graces:

- Two players, each with two sticks (dowels, rulers, or long sticks from the yard).
- One player launches a hoop (embroidery hoop, or make one from a wire hanger bent into a circle) into the air by crossing and uncrossing the sticks.
- The other player catches it on their sticks. This was especially popular with girls in the 1770s.

Hoop Rolling:

- Find a hula hoop or any large ring. Roll it on the ground using a stick to keep it going.
- Race to see who can roll it the farthest without it falling. Colonial kids used barrel hoops.

Jackstones (Colonial Jacks):

- Find 6 small, similar-sized stones or pebbles and one small bouncy ball.
- Toss the ball up, pick up one stone before it bounces twice. Then two stones. Then three.
- Colonial children used pumpkin seeds, small stones, or anything uniform they could find.

Make it a tournament! Keep score across all four games. Winner gets to skip one chore (just kidding... maybe).

Source: Games documented by the National Park Service, Colonial Williamsburg, and the Holliston Historical Society.





6 Town Scavenger Hunt Bingo

Head into your town and see how many of these you can find. Take a photo of each one. Try for a row, a column, or a full blackout!

Can't find a cobblestone road? That's okay — not every town has one. That's what makes blackout hard!

Younger kids can be the photographers. Older kids can research the history of what they find.

A flag flying.	A building with a date on it.	A veteran's memorial.	A street named after a person.
A building over 100 years old.	A historical marker or plaque.	A church.	A statue or monument.
Something made out of brick.	A hand-painted sign.	A water tower.	A building with columns.
A cemetery.	A cobblestone or brick road.	A one-room building.	A cannon or historical artifact.



Almost every state has something standing from the colonial or early American era. Make it a day trip. Walk through it. Imagine what it looked like when it was new — no electricity, no plumbing, no glass in some of the windows.

Before you go:

- Look up the oldest building or historical site in your area.
- Find out when it was built and what it was used for.
- Check if there are guided tours or special programs for the 250th.

While you're there:

- Take photos.
- Count how many years old it is.
- Ask: what was happening in American history the year this was built?

We're based in Texas — here are a few of ours:

- The Alamo, San Antonio (1718) — originally a Spanish mission
- Presidio La Bahía, Goliad (1721) — one of the best-preserved Spanish forts in the United States
- Mission Espada, San Antonio (1731) — still an active parish church
- The Spanish Governor's Palace, San Antonio (1749) — the only remaining example of a Spanish colonial home in Texas

Check the National Register of Historic Places ([nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister)) to find sites near you.



Did You Know?

The oldest building in America still standing is the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, built in 1610 — that's 166 years before the Declaration of Independence was even signed.

8 Fly a Kite Like Ben Franklin

In June 1752, Benjamin Franklin flew a kite in a thunderstorm to prove that lightning was electricity. (Do NOT do that part.) But you can build a simple kite that actually flies and talk about one of America's most famous experiments.

Simple diamond kite — what you need:

- A large plastic trash bag or newspaper (for the sail)
- Two thin, straight sticks — one 24 inches, one 20 inches (dowels, bamboo garden stakes, or thin branches)
- String or kite line
- Tape
- Scissors

Instructions:

1. Make a cross with the sticks: the shorter stick goes across the longer one, about 1/3 from the top. Tie them together tightly at the center with string.
2. Cut small notches at the end of each stick. Run string through the notches all the way around to make a diamond frame. Secure with tape.
3. Lay the frame on your trash bag or newspaper. Cut around it leaving 1–2 inches extra.
4. Fold the extra material over the string frame and tape it down.
5. Tie your flying string to the center cross point.
6. Add a tail: a 3–4 foot strip of trash bag tied to the bottom point. This keeps it stable.
7. Find an open field and run!

--The tail is the secret. No tail = spinning crash. Too heavy a tail = won't lift. Adjust until it flies steady.

Source: Kite design based on National Air and Space Museum educational resources. Franklin experiment: Franklin Institute, Philadelphia.



Did You Know?

Franklin never actually said 'go fly a kite.' But his 1752 experiment proved lightning was electrical, which led directly to the invention of the lightning rod — still used on buildings today, basically unchanged from his original design.

When Meriwether Lewis and William Clark explored the American West (1804–1806), they documented everything they saw: plants, animals, weather, terrain. Their journals are some of the most important scientific documents in American history. You're going to do the same thing — in your neighborhood.

What you need:

- A notebook or blank paper
- A pencil (pen smears in humidity)
- Colored pencils optional

What to record for each entry:

- Date, time, weather, and location
- A sketch of one plant, animal, or interesting feature
- A written description: size, color, behavior, smell, sound
- Your own observations and questions

Example entry (Lewis & Clark style):

"May 6, 2026 — Clear skies, 78°F. Observed a large red-tailed hawk perched on the dead oak at the corner of Elm and 3rd. Wingspan approximately 3–4 feet. Reddish-brown tail feathers clearly visible in sunlight. Called three times, a high raspy scream. Two smaller birds (mockingbirds?) harassing it from below. Question: do hawks always tolerate this, or do they sometimes fight back?"

Lewis and Clark's actual journals are digitized and free to browse at the Library of Congress (loc.gov). Look up a few real entries before you go — it's incredible what they noticed.



Did You Know?

Lewis and Clark's journals filled over 5,000 pages and documented 178 plants and 122 animals that were completely unknown to science at the time — including grizzly bears, prairie dogs, and the cutthroat trout.



10 Deliver a Message by Foot

Before phones, before email, before even the telegraph — messages traveled by horse, by runner, or by ship. The speed of communication shaped the entire Revolution. Here's how slow it really was.

The activity:

1. One person writes a short "dispatch" (a message on paper).
2. A runner delivers it to someone at a set distance — across the yard, down the block, half a mile.
3. Time the delivery. How fast can your family get a message across?

How long messages actually took in 1776:

- Boston to Philadelphia (300 miles): 4–5 days by horse
- New York to Virginia (350 miles): about 1 week
- Philadelphia to London (3,500 miles): 6–8 weeks by ship
- Paul Revere's ride from Boston to Lexington (12 miles): about 1 hour on horseback
- Your text message to anyone in the world: about 0.1 seconds

– For older kids: the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. It didn't reach London until August 10 — over five weeks later. Imagine fighting a war when your enemy doesn't even know you've declared independence yet.

Source: Travel times from the Smithsonian's "Colonial Communication" exhibit and the U.S. Postal Service history archives.



Did You Know?

The Pony Express, which we think of as the backbone of American communication, only lasted 18 months (1860–1861) before the telegraph made it obsolete. Riders covered nearly 2,000 miles in about 10 days — revolutionary then, but your phone does it in milliseconds now.



Creative

11 Design Your Family Flag

Every country has a flag. The first American flag had 13 stars in a circle for the 13 colonies — each element meant something. Now design one for your family.

Think about:

- What symbols represent your family? (Animals, tools, books, sports, a cross, a star?)
- What colors mean something to you?
- What would someone learn about your family just by looking at your flag?

Flag design tips (real ones):

- Keep it simple. A child should be able to draw it from memory.
- Use 2–3 colors max. More than that gets busy.
- No words — a flag should communicate without language.
- Be distinctive. If it looks like another flag, change it.

These rules come from the North American Vexillological Association (yes, flag studies is a real field). Look up your state flag — does it follow these rules? Most don't!

12 Draw a “Then vs Now” Comic Strip

Pick any daily activity and draw it side by side: the 1776 version and the 2026 version. Funny is encouraged.

Example: Sending a message to a friend

- 1776 panel: A person on horseback riding through rain, holding a sealed letter, looking exhausted. Caption: "3 days later..."
- 2026 panel: A kid lying on a couch typing "u up?" on a phone. Caption: "0.1 seconds later..."

More topic ideas:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Getting dressed in the morning | • Traveling 100 miles |
| • Making dinner | • Finding out the news |
| • Completing school | • Taking a family photo |

No artistic skill required. Stick figures are great. The humor is what makes this — not the drawing.

13 Make a Punched Tin Lantern

On the night of April 18, 1775, two lanterns were hung in the steeple of Boston's Old North Church. The signal told Paul Revere and other riders that the British were coming by sea across the Charles River. "One if by land, two if by sea." Make your own lantern in the colonial style.

What you need:

- A clean, empty metal can (like from canned vegetables, coffee, or beans)
- Water and a freezer
- A nail and a hammer
- A towel
- A tea light candle
- Optional: a marker to draw your design first

Why you freeze the can:

You fill the can with water and freeze it solid overnight. The ice inside supports the walls of the can so it doesn't crush or dent when you hammer the nail through. Without ice, the thin metal collapses.

Instructions:

1. Fill the can with water and freeze overnight (or at least 8 hours).
2. Take the frozen can out. Lay it on a towel on a hard surface.
3. Draw your pattern on the can with a marker (stars, stripes, your initials, a simple picture).
4. Use the nail and hammer to punch holes along your pattern. Space holes about 1/4 inch apart.
5. Let the ice melt. Dry the can completely.
6. Place a tea light inside. Light it in a dark room and watch your design glow.

No metal can? Alternatives:

- A metal coffee can (larger, easier to work with)
- An aluminum pie tin bent into a cylinder and taped
- Any clean metal container that can take a nail punch

– Supervise the hammering, especially with younger kids. This is a real tool activity — that's part of what makes it cool.

Source: Craft technique from the Museum of the American Revolution at-home activities program.

14 Write Your Family's American Story

Every family in America has a story of how they got here — or how "here" came to them. This is yours.

Start with what you know:

- Where did your family come from originally?
- When did they come to America? (If you don't know exactly, that's fine — start with what you do know.)
- Where have they lived? What did they do for work?
- What brought your family to where you live now?

How to find out more:

- Call or visit the oldest person in your family. Ask them what they remember.
- Look at old photos together. Ask who the people are and where they were taken.
- Write it down. Even a few sentences is a record that didn't exist before.

Put it together:

Draw a simple timeline on a long piece of paper. Start as far back as you can and end with today. Mark the major moments: arrivals, moves, jobs, marriages, you being born. Hang it on the wall.

Not every family can trace their history back generations — and that's part of the American story too. Start with what you have. That's enough.



Did You Know?

The oldest known family Bible in America dates to the 1600s. For centuries, family Bibles were the only birth, marriage, and death records most families kept — they were the original family tree. Even today, the National Archives uses family Bible entries as legal evidence of birth dates when no other records exist.

15 Make a Colonial Broadside

Before newspapers, social media, or TV news, colonists got their information from broadsides — single printed sheets posted in public places or handed out on the street. They announced new laws, advertised goods, published political opinions, and shared news. Think of them as the social media posts of 1776.

Make your own family broadside:

- Use a regular piece of paper — white or brown craft paper.
- Write a big headline across the top ("HEAR YE, HEAR YE" or something about your family).
- Add 2–3 short "articles" — family news, a funny story, an opinion, a recipe.
- Include at least one "advertisement" — real colonial broadsides always had ads. "Wanted: Someone to do the dishes. Inquire within."
- Sign it with a date and your family name.

Look up real colonial broadsides at the Library of Congress digital collection (loc.gov) — you can see actual broadsides from the 1770s including announcements about the Declaration of Independence.

Post your finished broadside on the fridge or front door. That's historically accurate — colonists posted theirs on doors, walls, and trees.



Did You Know?

The very first item printed on a press in America was a broadside — the 'Oath of a Freeman' in 1639, printed by Stephen Daye in Cambridge, Massachusetts. By the 1770s, broadsides were everywhere. Paul Revere himself printed and sold them. The Declaration of Independence was first distributed to the public as a broadside — printed overnight on July 4, 1776, by John Dunlap. About 200 were made. Only 26 survive today.

16 Build a 1776 Playlist

Music was everywhere in colonial America — in taverns, in churches, on the march, and at home. These are real songs from the Revolutionary era. Look them up, play them, and talk about what they meant.

Military & Patriotic:

- "Yankee Doodle" — Originally a British song mocking sloppy American soldiers. The Americans took it back and sang it proudly. The ultimate reclaim.
- "Chester" by William Billings (1770) — The unofficial anthem of the Revolution. Billings was a Boston tanner with one eye and a withered arm who became America's first major composer.
- "The Liberty Song" (1768) — The first American patriotic song ever written. "Come, join hand in hand, brave Americans all."
- "The World Turned Upside Down" — Reportedly played by the British as they surrendered at Yorktown in 1781. Whether that's true or legend, it's a great song.
- "Free America" by Joseph Warren (1774) — Written by a doctor who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill. He was 34.
- "The Riflemen of Bennington" — Celebrates the 1777 Battle of Bennington, a turning point in the war.

Folk & Everyday Life:

- "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier" — A heartbreaking folk song about women left behind during the war.
- "Barbara Allen" — One of the most popular ballads in colonial America, brought over from England.
- "Springfield Mountain" — Considered the first original American folk song. (It's about a snakebite. Really.)
- "Greensleeves" — Brought from England, sung in every colony. You'd recognize the melody instantly.
- "Simple Gifts" (Shaker hymn, 1848) — Slightly later but became a defining American melody.
- "Amazing Grace" (1772) — Written during this exact era by John Newton, a former slave trader who renounced the trade.

Fun & Singalong:

- "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" — Same melody as "God Save the King" (the British anthem). Writing new American lyrics to the British national anthem? That's rebellion.
- "Hail, Columbia" (1798) — Served as an unofficial national anthem before "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- "Over the River and Through the Wood" — A song about colonial-era travel to grandmother's house.



Trivia and Table Talk

17 Who Said It?

Read each quote out loud. Can your family guess who said it? Mix of founding era and later American figures. All historical, all famous, all inspiring. After you play, pick your family's favorite quote. Write it out and hang it on the wall for the week.

The quotes:

1. "Give me liberty, or give me death!" (Patrick Henry, 1775)
2. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." (Thomas Jefferson, 1776)
3. "I have not yet begun to fight!" (John Paul Jones, 1779)
4. "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." (Neil Armstrong, 1969)
5. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." (Martin Luther King Jr., 1963)
6. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933)
7. "In the truest sense, freedom cannot be bestowed; it must be achieved." (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1936)
8. "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" (Patrick Henry — same speech! The whole thing is powerful.)
9. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." (Abraham Lincoln, 1858)
10. "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country." (John F. Kennedy, 1961)
11. "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." (Martin Luther King Jr., 1963)
12. "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed." (Neil Armstrong, 1969)



Did You Know?

Patrick Henry's famous words were never actually written down during his speech. What we know today was reconstructed from memory by his biographer 40 years later. The exact words may not be exact at all — but the spirit stuck.



18 1776 vs 2026 Comparison Questions

Read the question out loud. Everyone guesses the 1776 answer. Then reveal it. The gaps between then and now are shocking — and that's what makes it fun.

20 Questions:

1. How many people lived in America? (1776: about 2.5 million · 2026: about 340 million)
2. How much did a loaf of bread cost? (1776: about 2–4 cents · 2026: about \$3–4)
3. How long to travel from New York to Philadelphia? (1776: 2–3 days by horse · 2026: about 2 hours by car)
4. What percentage of people could read? (1776: about 60–70% of white men, lower for women · 2026: about 99%)
5. What was the average life expectancy? (1776: about 36 yrs · 2026: about 77 yrs)
6. How many states were there? (1776: 0 — they were colonies! 13 states after independence · 2026: 50)
7. What did most people do for work? (1776: about 90% were farmers · 2026: about 1.3% are farmers)
8. How fast could news travel? (1776: about 50 miles per day by horse · 2026: speed of light)
9. How many books did the average family own? (1776: 1–3, usually a Bible · 2026: about 100+)
10. How tall was the average man? (1776: about 5'8" · 2026: about 5'10")
11. How many children did the average family have? (1776: 7–8 · 2026: about 1.7)
12. What time did most people go to bed? (1776: sundown, around 8–9 PM · 2026: whenever the phone dies)
13. How far could you see at night? (1776: as far as your candle lit · 2026: city lights visible from space)
14. How long did it take to cross the Atlantic? (1776: 6–8 weeks · 2026: about 7 hours by plane)
15. What percentage of people lived in cities? (1776: about 5% · 2026: about 83%)
16. How did you keep food cold? (1776: you didn't, or used a root cellar · 2026: refrigerator)
17. How much did a horse cost? (1776: \$60–\$200, a huge investment · 2026: a used car costs about the same adjusted for inflation)
18. How many miles of roads existed? (1776: a few thousand, mostly dirt · 2026: about 4.2 million miles of paved roads)
19. What was the #1 cause of death? (1776: infectious disease · 2026: heart disease)
20. How many words could you send per minute? (1776: as fast as you could write · 2026: the average person types 40 words per minute)

Source: Statistics compiled from U.S. Census historical data, Colonial Williamsburg research, and the Smithsonian Institution.

19 Founding Fathers Trivia Night

20 surprising facts about the people who built America. Read each one as a question — can your family guess the answer before you reveal it?

20 Questions:

1. Which founding father wanted the national bird to be a turkey? (Ben Franklin)
2. How old was the youngest signer of the Declaration? (Edward Rutledge, age 26)
3. Which two presidents died on the same day — July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary? (John Adams and Thomas Jefferson)
4. Which founding father was born in the Caribbean, not in the colonies? (Alexander Hamilton, born in Nevis)
5. How many children did George Washington have? (Zero biological children, though he raised Martha's two)
6. Which founding father was a self-taught architect who designed his own home? (Thomas Jefferson — he designed Monticello and spent 40 years building and rebuilding it)
7. What did Paul Revere do for a living? (He was a silversmith)
8. How old was Ben Franklin when the Declaration was signed? (70 — by far the oldest signer)
9. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence in just 17 days? (Thomas Jefferson, age 33)
10. What did George Washington's teeth actually consist of? (Not wood! Gold, ivory, lead, and human/animal teeth)
11. Which founding father started the first public library in America? (Ben Franklin)
12. Who was the shortest president among the founders? (James Madison, 5'4")
13. Which founding father had 17 children? (Ben Franklin? No — it was William Phips, colonial governor)
14. What was the population of the largest city in 1776? (Philadelphia, about 40,000 — smaller than many high school stadiums)
15. How many of the signers of the Declaration were under 40? (More than half!)
16. Which founding father conducted the first U.S. census? (Thomas Jefferson oversaw it in 1790)
17. What animal did Ben Franklin use in his famous electricity experiment? (None — it was a kite and a key, not an animal)
18. Which founding father spoke six languages? (Thomas Jefferson)
19. Who served as president for the shortest time among the founders? (William Henry Harrison: 31 days, though he's post-founding era)
20. What was the first capital of the United States? (New York City, 1789–1790)

Source: Facts verified through the National Archives, Mount Vernon, Monticello, and the Smithsonian American History Museum.

20 Invention Timeline

America has invented a LOT in 250 years. But can your family put these inventions in the right order from oldest to newest? Harder than it sounds.

The inventions (in scrambled order):

- The cotton gin
- Blue jeans
- The telephone
- The lightbulb
- The airplane
- The chocolate chip cookie
- The assembly line (for cars)
- The microwave oven
- The internet
- The iPhone
- The zipper
- Air conditioning
- The electric guitar
- GPS

How to play:

1. Write each invention on a slip of paper (or just use this list).
2. Each person arranges them from oldest to newest.
3. Reveal the real order. Closest to correct wins!

Answer key (oldest to newest):

1. Cotton gin (1794) — Eli Whitney
2. Blue jeans (1873) — Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis
3. Telephone (1876) — Alexander Graham Bell
4. Lightbulb (1879) — Thomas Edison
5. Zipper (1893) — Whitcomb Judson
6. Airplane (1903) — Wright Brothers
7. Assembly line (1913) — Henry Ford
8. Television (1927) — Philo Farnsworth
9. Chocolate chip cookie (1938) — Ruth Wakefield (an accident!)
10. Microwave oven (1945) — Percy Spencer (also an accident!)
11. Electric guitar (1950s, mass-produced) — Leo Fender
12. Air conditioning (1902, but widely adopted 1950s) — Willis Carrier
13. GPS (1978, civilian use 1983) — U.S. Department of Defense
14. Internet (1983, ARPANET to TCP/IP) — Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn
15. iPhone (2007) — Apple

Debate starter: which of these inventions changed daily life the most? The family will not agree — and that's the point.

Source: Dates verified through the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and the U.S. Patent Office.



Celebrate

21 What does 250 Look Like?

America is 250 years old. But what does the number 250 actually look like? Here are some ways to wrap your head around it.

250 in perspective:

- 250 miles is roughly Dallas to San Antonio, or New York City to Washington, D.C.
- 250 pennies stacked is about 16 inches tall.
- A blue whale's heart weighs about 250 pounds.
- 250 steps is roughly the length of a football field and a half.
- The Statue of Liberty's torch is about 305 feet above the ground — 250 feet gets you to her elbow.
- 250 days is about how long it takes to grow a pumpkin from seed to harvest.
- If you read one book a week, 250 books would take you almost 5 years.
- 250 seconds is about 4 minutes — roughly one song on the radio.
- 250 acres is roughly the size of 190 football fields.
- Light travels about 250,000 miles in 1.3 seconds — almost to the moon.
- The oldest living trees on earth are over 5,000 years old — 250 years is just their teenage years.
- If you earned \$1 per year starting in 1776, you'd have \$250. That would buy about 4 tanks of gas today.

Pick your favorite fact and share it with someone who isn't in your family. Spread the wonder.

Source: Distance and measurement data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Population and historical statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Smithsonian Institution.



Did You Know?

The number 250 in Roman numerals is CCL. If the founding fathers had written "Happy 250th Birthday," they would have written "Happy CCLth Birthday." Try writing your age in Roman numerals — it's harder than it looks.



22 Time Capsule for the 275th

Write a letter to your family 25 years from now. Seal it. Open it on July 4, 2051 — America's 275th birthday.

What to include:

- A letter from each family member about their life right now.
- Your ages, your grade levels, what you're studying.
- Your predictions: what will the world look like in 2051?
- Your current favorites: song, book, food, game.
- A photo of your family (print one out!).
- Something small that represents 2026: a receipt, a movie ticket, a drawing.

How to seal it:

- Put everything in a gallon zip-lock bag inside a sturdy box or jar.
- Tape it shut. Write "DO NOT OPEN UNTIL JULY 4, 2051" in big letters.
- Store it somewhere dry and unlikely to be disturbed — a closet shelf, the attic, with important documents.

The hardest part is actually not opening it. 25 years is a long time. But imagine the moment when you do.

23 Family Photo in 1776 Style

Take a family portrait the way they did it in the colonial era. No smiling. Stiff posture. Serious expressions. Then take a normal one right after and put them side by side — 250 years of difference.

How to pose:

- Stand or sit very still. Colonial portraits took hours to paint — nobody smiled because they couldn't hold it.
- Hands folded or resting on something (a book, a chair, a table).
- Look slightly to the side, not directly at the camera.
- If possible: use natural window light from one side. This mimics the candlelight painters used.
- Optional: dress the part using only what's in your closet. Button-up shirts, long socks, scarves as bonnets.

For inspiration, look up the portraits of George and Martha Washington by Gilbert Stuart — they're in the National Portrait Gallery and you can view them free online at npg.si.edu.

24 Draw a Birthday Card to America

America is turning 250. Make it a birthday card! Sidewalk chalk on the driveway, poster board on the wall, or a regular piece of paper — whatever works for your family.

Ideas for what to draw:

- A giant birthday cake with 250 candles (just draw a LOT of candles)
- A map of the U.S. with a party hat
- Your family flag (from Activity 11!) with a birthday message
- A "Happy 250th!" mural on the driveway in sidewalk chalk
- A timeline from 1776 to 2026 with pictures at each century mark

Fun fact about sidewalk chalk:

Chalk has been used since the colonial era. Colonial schoolchildren wrote on slate boards with chalk — no paper, no pencils. Slate and chalk were the original whiteboard.

Take a photo of your creation – post it and tag @homeschoolace — we'd love to see it!



Did You Know?

The first birthday celebration for America happened on July 4, 1777 — just one year after independence was declared. Philadelphia marked the day with bonfires, bells ringing, and a 13-cannon salute, one for each state. Fireworks didn't become a regular part of the tradition until the 1800s. Congress didn't even make July 4th an official federal holiday until 1870 — nearly 100 years after independence. The first big centennial celebration in 1876 was held in Philadelphia, right where it all started.

25 What Would You Pack?

Imagine you're a colonist leaving England for America. You get one trunk — about the size of a large suitcase. The voyage takes 6–8 weeks. You may never come back. What do you bring?

The activity:

- Each family member picks exactly 5 things they'd pack.
- Write them down. Defend your choices to the family.
- Then look at what colonists actually brought (below) and compare.

What colonists actually packed:

- Seeds — you couldn't buy them in America. No seeds = no food next year.
- Tools — an axe, a saw, a hammer, nails. You'd be building everything from scratch.
- A Bible — often the only book a family owned.
- A cooking pot — cast iron, the most versatile tool in the kitchen.
- Candles or candle molds — no electricity, no street lights, no flashlights.
- Wool blankets — American winters were brutal and there were no stores.
- A musket and ammunition — for hunting, not war (at first).
- Fabric and sewing supplies — you'd make and repair all your own clothing.
- Medicine — herbs, tinctures, whatever you could carry. No pharmacies, no doctors for miles.
- Letters, family records, or a journal — the only connection to the life you left behind.

Discussion:

How many of your 5 items matched the real list? What does this tell you about what mattered most when you couldn't bring everything?

Source: Packing lists documented by Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Patuxet Museums, and the Smithsonian.



Did You Know?

The average voyage from England to America in the 1600s took 66 days. Passengers were allowed one small trunk per person. Some families sold everything they owned to afford the crossing — and arrived with nothing but what they could carry.



Sources & References

All facts, recipes, and historical details in this guide were compiled from reputable sources. Here are the primary references used:

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