

The Great American Trivia Night Kit

50 questions in five rounds, a host script,
printable answer sheets, and every answer explained

A free companion to the book
250 Fascinating Facts About America
by MindGrid Books

Every question here comes out of the book's own 250 facts, so anyone who has read it will have a genuine edge - and the answer key explains each one well enough that a host who has not read a word can still run the whole night.

How to Run Trivia Night in 10 Minutes

You need one host, this PDF, and something to write with. The full five rounds run about an hour with conversation, or 25 minutes if you keep it brisk. Two rounds make a perfectly good short evening.

Setup

- Teams of two to four. Solo play works too - score against the answer key and see how you do out of 50.
- Print the answer sheet (one per team) and the scorecard, or just have each team number a sheet of paper 1 to 50.
- The host keeps this PDF. The answer key starts on the page after the questions, so don't hand it round.
- Phones away. Half these answers are one search away, and that ruins it.

The rules

- The host reads the question and all four options aloud, twice.
- Teams write a letter. One point per correct answer, no half points.
- Read the explanation from the answer key before moving on. That is where the evening actually lives - most of these answers have a better story behind them than the question suggests.
- Score at the end of each round so nobody can quietly give up.
- If two teams tie, use the numeric tiebreakers on the scorecard page. Closest guess wins; no conferring.

Three ways to change the game

- Fourth of July: play Rounds 1 and 3 only - founding, government, and the wars. It suits the day, and 2026 is the country's 250th.
- Mixed ages: let teams confer out loud and award a bonus point for the best wrong answer. It keeps younger players in the game.
- Long haul: one round per week over five weeks with a running leaderboard - works well for a classroom, an office, or a book club.

Round 1: Founding a Country

Revolution, presidents, and the machinery of government

1. Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. On what date did most of the delegates actually sign it?
A) July 4, 1776 B) August 2, 1776 C) October 19, 1781 D) September 17, 1787
2. In 1782 a group of Continental Army officers wrote to George Washington urging him to accept which title?
A) Lord Protector B) President for Life C) King D) Consul of the Republic
3. Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, was born where?
A) New York B) Virginia C) The Caribbean island of Nevis D) Edinburgh, Scotland
4. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, rivals for decades, died on the very same day. Which day?
A) December 14, 1799 B) March 4, 1801 C) July 4, 1826 D) July 4, 1831
5. How long did the 27th Amendment take to go from proposal to ratification?
A) 3 years B) 41 years C) 97 years D) 203 years
6. Which was the first place in America to grant women the vote?
A) Wyoming B) Massachusetts C) California D) New York
7. How many times in its history has Congress formally declared war?
A) Two B) Five C) Eleven D) Seventeen
8. Which president was never elected to any national office - neither president nor vice president?
A) Gerald Ford B) Chester A. Arthur C) Andrew Johnson D) Millard Fillmore
9. In what year did the federal income tax become a permanent part of American life?
A) 1861 B) 1894 C) 1913 D) 1933
10. Residents of Washington, D.C., first voted in a presidential election in which year?
A) 1920 B) 1944 C) 1964 D) 1976

Round 2: The Land and What Was Built On It

Geography, natural wonders, and American invention

11. Which single state is simultaneously the westernmost AND the easternmost state?
A) Alaska B) Hawaii C) Maine D) Washington
12. Which state borders exactly one other state?
A) Florida B) Maine C) Rhode Island D) Washington
13. The Great Lakes hold roughly what share of the world's surface fresh water?
A) 5 percent B) 21 percent C) 45 percent D) 60 percent
14. What is the longest known cave system in the world?
A) Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico B) Wind Cave, South Dakota C) Lechuguilla Cave, New Mexico D) Mammoth Cave, Kentucky
15. Which American mountain range is older than the dinosaurs?
A) The Rockies B) The Sierra Nevada C) The Cascades D) The Appalachians
16. Which president personally signed the first American patent, in 1790?
A) Thomas Jefferson B) Benjamin Franklin C) George Washington D) John Adams
17. The microwave oven was discovered when what melted unexpectedly in an engineer's pocket?
A) A stick of butter B) A crayon C) A chocolate bar D) A wax seal
18. The world's first skyscraper was built in which city?
A) New York B) St. Louis C) Philadelphia D) Chicago
19. Basketball was invented in Massachusetts in 1891 by a man from which country?
A) Scotland B) Canada C) Ireland D) England
20. Blue jeans were invented by an immigrant from where?
A) Italy B) Bavaria C) Poland D) France

Round 3: Culture and Conflict

Language, custom, and the wars in between

21. At the federal level, the United States has never officially adopted which of these?
A) A national language B) A national anthem C) A national motto D) A national flag
22. The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 by a Baptist minister who was also what?
A) A schools inspector B) A serving army general C) A US senator D) A Christian socialist magazine editor
23. "OK," now the most widely spoken word on Earth, most likely began in the 1830s as a joke misspelling of what?
A) "All correct" B) "Old Kinderhook" C) "Order kept" D) "Objection killed"
24. Which war killed more Americans than all other US wars combined?
A) World War II B) The Civil War C) World War I D) Vietnam
25. In the Civil War, more soldiers died of what than in combat?
A) Exposure B) Starvation C) Disease D) Friendly fire
26. How did George Washington fare as a battlefield commander?
A) He lost more battles than he won B) He won more than he lost C) He never lost a battle D) His record was exactly even
27. The Battle of New Orleans in January 1815 was fought after what had already happened?
A) Jackson had resigned his command B) Britain had surrendered its fleet C) The peace treaty had been signed D) Congress had voted for peace
28. Whose World War II code was never broken by the enemy?
A) The Navajo Code Talkers B) The Choctaw Telephone Squad C) The Tuskegee signal corps D) The Filipino Scouts
29. How long did the Spanish-American War of 1898 last?
A) Two weeks B) 113 days C) Eleven months D) Three years
30. The Korean War stopped in 1953 with what, still never replaced?
A) An armistice B) A peace treaty C) A UN trusteeship D) Unconditional surrender

Round 4: At the Table and In the Lab

Food, drink, and American science

31. Fortune cookies were invented where?

- A) Hong Kong B) Beijing C) California D) New York's Chinatown

32. In the 1830s, tomato ketchup was sold as what?

- A) A dessert sauce B) Furniture polish C) Livestock feed D) Medicine

33. The best-documented origin of the ice cream cone is at which event?

- A) The 1939 New York World's Fair B) The 1893 Chicago World's Fair C) Coney Island in 1911 D) The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair

34. Buffalo wings are named after what?

- A) The American bison B) The city of Buffalo, New York C) A chef nicknamed Buffalo D) Buffalo, Wyoming

35. Ranch dressing was created by a man whose day job was what?

- A) Rodeo rider B) Dairy farmer C) Industrial chemist D) Plumbing contractor

36. Who is most often wrongly credited with inventing peanut butter?

- A) Marcellus Edson B) John Harvey Kellogg C) George Washington Carver D) Henry Ford

37. Jonas Salk famously refused to do what with the polio vaccine?

- A) Test it on humans B) Patent it C) Publish the formula D) License it abroad

38. The world's first nuclear reactor went critical underneath what?

- A) A desert bunker B) A cathedral C) A subway station D) A football stadium

39. Who invented the World Wide Web?

- A) An American at MIT B) A British scientist C) A Swiss engineer D) A US defence agency

40. Where did the name "Silicon Valley" come from?

- A) A Stanford lecture series B) A company advertising slogan C) A 1955 government report D) A single magazine article in 1971

Round 5: Fame and Places

Sport, entertainment, cities, and landmarks

41. Despite the legend on his plaque, baseball was NOT invented by whom?
A) Abner Doubleday B) Alexander Cartwright C) Henry Chadwick D) Babe Ruth
42. The Harlem Globetrotters were originally from which city?
A) Detroit B) New York C) Chicago D) Philadelphia
43. Cheerleading began as what?
A) An all-male activity B) A marching-band role C) A women's college sport D) A halftime gymnastics display
44. Michael Jordan, as a high school sophomore, was famously what?
A) Cut from the varsity team B) Drafted straight out of school C) Banned for a season D) Undrafted by the NBA
45. Elvis Presley never performed outside of what?
A) Tennessee B) the United States C) the American South D) North America
46. Rap music is generally traced to a 1973 party in which New York borough?
A) Queens B) The Bronx C) Brooklyn D) Manhattan
47. Under the new Constitution in 1789, which city was the nation's first capital?
A) New York City B) Philadelphia C) Washington, D.C. D) Boston
48. The Statue of Liberty's torch has been closed to the public since when?
A) 1916 B) 1945 C) 1976 D) 2001
49. Chicago is called the Windy City because of what?
A) Wind funnelling between its towers B) Gusts off Lake Michigan C) A tornado in 1876 D) Its long-winded politicians
50. The Liberty Bell has not been rung since which year?
A) 1776 B) 1846 C) 1900 D) 1963

The Answer Key

Host's eyes only. Read the explanation out loud after each answer - that is the part people remember, and the part that starts the arguments.

Round 1: Founding a Country

1. **B — August 2, 1776.** The signing ceremony was August 2. July 4 stuck because it was the date printed on the first broadsides handed to the public.
2. **C — King.** Washington was furious, calling the idea the "greatest mischief that can befall my country," and demanded it be suppressed.
3. **C — The Caribbean island of Nevis.** Hamilton was born on Nevis around 1755 or 1757 and came to America as a teenager. Being an immigrant shaped his view of America as an idea rather than a birthright.
4. **C — July 4, 1826.** The fiftieth anniversary of independence. Adams's last words were reportedly "Thomas Jefferson survives" - Jefferson had died hours earlier.
5. **D — 203 years.** Proposed in 1789 and ratified in 1992. It limits when congressional pay rises can take effect.
6. **A — Wyoming.** Wyoming Territory did it in 1869 and kept it as a condition of statehood in 1890, half a century before the Nineteenth Amendment.
7. **B — Five.** Five: 1812, Mexico, Spain, World War I and World War II. Every conflict since has been fought under authorisations, resolutions or executive action.
8. **A — Gerald Ford.** Ford was appointed vice president under the 25th Amendment in 1973, then became president in 1974. The others were all elected vice president first.
9. **C — 1913.** The Sixteenth Amendment, ratified in 1913. Before that the federal government ran mainly on tariffs and excise duties.
10. **C — 1964.** The 23rd Amendment was ratified in 1961 and D.C. cast its first electoral votes in 1964. It still has no voting member of Congress.

Round 2: The Land and What Was Built On It

11. **A — Alaska.** The Aleutian Islands cross the 180th meridian, putting part of Alaska in the Eastern Hemisphere.
12. **B — Maine.** Maine touches only New Hampshire. Alaska and Hawaii border none at all.
13. **B — 21 percent.** About 21 percent - some six quadrillion gallons, the largest such system on Earth.
14. **D — Mammoth Cave, Kentucky.** Mammoth Cave, with more than 400 mapped miles and more found nearly every year.
15. **D — The Appalachians.** The Appalachians began forming over 480 million years ago - before dinosaurs existed - and were once Himalayan in scale.
16. **C — George Washington.** Washington signed it, for a potash-making process. Jefferson, as Secretary of State, signed it too - the whole patent office was three cabinet officers.
17. **C — A chocolate bar.** Percy Spencer noticed it while standing near an active radar set at Raytheon, and worked out what the magnetron was doing.
18. **D — Chicago.** Chicago's Home Insurance Building, 1885 - ten storeys, and the first to hang its walls on a load-bearing steel frame.
19. **B — Canada.** James Naismith, a Canadian, invented it to keep students active indoors through a New England winter.
20. **B — Bavaria.** Levi Strauss, a Bavarian, working with tailor Jacob Davis, whose idea it was to rivet the stress points.

Round 3: Culture and Conflict

21. **A — A national language.** The Constitution says nothing about language, and every bill to make English official has died in Congress. Around 350 languages are spoken in the US.

- 22. D — A Christian socialist magazine editor.** Francis Bellamy, on the staff of Youth's Companion - and he wrote it partly to help the magazine sell flags to schools. "Under God" was added in 1954.
- 23. A — "All correct".** "Oll korrekt," from a Boston fad for comic abbreviations. Van Buren's "Old Kinderhook" campaign then spread it nationally.
- 24. B — The Civil War.** Roughly 620,000 to 750,000 dead, out of a population of about 31 million.
- 25. C — Disease.** Roughly two died of disease for every one killed in battle - dysentery, typhoid, pneumonia and measles moving through crowded camps.
- 26. A — He lost more battles than he won.** He lost more than he won, but he kept the Continental Army in existence - which was the war-winning skill.
- 27. C — The peace treaty had been signed.** The Treaty of Ghent was signed in December 1814, but news took weeks to cross the Atlantic. The battle made Andrew Jackson a national hero anyway.
- 28. A — The Navajo Code Talkers.** Around 400 Navajo Marines used a code built on a language with no written form and almost no outside speakers. It was still classified until 1968.
- 29. B — 113 days.** About 113 days, and it left the United States holding Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines - the moment it became an overseas power.
- 30. A — An armistice.** An armistice only. Technically the war has never formally ended, which is why the DMZ is still there.

Round 4: At the Table and In the Lab

- 31. C — California.** Almost certainly California, in the early 1900s. When they reached China in the 1990s they were marketed as "American fortune cookies."
- 32. D — Medicine.** A physician named John Cook Bennett promoted it as a cure for indigestion and liver complaints, in pill and extract form.
- 33. D — The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.** Ernest Hamwi, selling waffle pastries next to an ice cream stand, rolled his waffles into cones when the neighbour ran out of cups.
- 34. B — The city of Buffalo, New York.** Invented at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo in 1964. No bison were involved, then or since.
- 35. D — Plumbing contractor.** Steve Henson mixed it for pipeline workers in Alaska, then served it at his California dude ranch - Hidden Valley Ranch.
- 36. C — George Washington Carver.** Carver found hundreds of uses for peanuts, but Edson patented a peanut paste in 1884 and Kellogg a process in 1895.
- 37. B — Patent it.** Asked who owned the patent, he said the people did: "Could you patent the sun?"
- 38. D — A football stadium.** A squash court under the stands of Stagg Field at the University of Chicago, in December 1942, in the middle of a major city.
- 39. B — A British scientist.** Tim Berners-Lee, at CERN in 1989. America built the internet; the web on top of it was not an American invention.
- 40. D — A single magazine article in 1971.** Journalist Don Hoefler used it in a trade-paper series and the name stuck to the whole region.

Round 5: Fame and Places

- 41. A — Abner Doubleday.** The Doubleday story came from a 1907 commission with a motive to find an American origin. The game evolved from English bat-and-ball games.
- 42. C — Chicago.** They formed in Chicago. "Harlem" was marketing - it signalled a Black team to audiences before they ever played there.
- 43. A — An all-male activity.** Men led the crowds for decades. It only became overwhelmingly female during World War II, when the men were gone.
- 44. A — Cut from the varsity team.** Left off varsity and sent to junior varsity. He grew four inches and came back.

45. D — North America. His only shows beyond the US were three Canadian dates in 1957. His manager's immigration status is the usual explanation.

46. B — The Bronx. DJ Kool Herc's back-to-school party on Sedgwick Avenue, where he looped the instrumental breaks two turntables at a time.

47. A — New York City. Washington was inaugurated on Wall Street. The capital moved to Philadelphia in 1790 and to Washington in 1800.

48. A — 1916. Since the Black Tom munitions explosion of 1916 damaged the arm. It has never reopened.

49. D — Its long-winded politicians. Nineteenth-century rivals - New York papers among them - meant windy as in full of hot air, especially while Chicago campaigned for the 1893 World's Fair.

50. B — 1846. A Washington's-birthday ringing in 1846 widened the crack past saving. It is now only tapped, gently, on rare occasions.

Team Answer Sheet

Print one per team. Write the team name at the top, then a letter in each blank.

Team name: _____

Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
1. _____	11. _____	21. _____	31. _____	41. _____
2. _____	12. _____	22. _____	32. _____	42. _____
3. _____	13. _____	23. _____	33. _____	43. _____
4. _____	14. _____	24. _____	34. _____	44. _____
5. _____	15. _____	25. _____	35. _____	45. _____
6. _____	16. _____	26. _____	36. _____	46. _____
7. _____	17. _____	27. _____	37. _____	47. _____
8. _____	18. _____	28. _____	38. _____	48. _____
9. _____	19. _____	29. _____	39. _____	49. _____
10. _____	20. _____	30. _____	40. _____	50. _____

Scorecard

Host's copy. Write each team's name in the left column and total after every round.

	R1 /10	R2 /10	R3 /10	R4 /10	R5 /10	TOTAL /50
Team 1						
Team 2						
Team 3						
Team 4						

Tiebreaker questions

Numbers, not letters. Closest guess wins - and nobody gets these exactly right.

- Roughly how many elected officials are there in the United States, at every level of government combined?

More than 500,000 - federal, state, county, city, school board and special district.

- How many rooms does the US Capitol building have?

More than 700.

- How many cities and towns in the United States are named Springfield?

27 - which is part of why The Simpsons chose it.

- How tall is the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, in feet?

630 feet - the tallest man-made monument in the United States, and the world's tallest arch.

Where These Facts Came From

Every question in this kit was drawn from **250 Fascinating Facts About America: Hidden History, Surprising Stories, and Little-Known Truths About the USA** - 250 researched facts across ten chapters covering the founding, government, geography, invention, culture, the wars, food, science, sport and the landmarks. On July 4, 2026 the country turns 250, and the book is about everything the famous stories leave out.

If tonight produced at least one argument, the book has another two hundred facts waiting.



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