

# The American Revolution

*Compelling Question: Was the American Revolution revolutionary?*

## Introduction

### Revolution vs. Revolutionary: Defining Change

Introduce the compelling question to students. Explain to students that this is the question that they will grapple with and try to answer throughout the different activities/lessons. As scholars and historians it will be their job to provide evidence gathered from reliable sources (in and out of class) in order to support their claim/answer to the compelling question.

Post the following prompt for students to see: “Before we can begin answer whether or not the American Revolution was revolutionary, we need to have an understanding of the difference(s) between the terms “revolution” and “revolutionary”. In your journal/on a piece of paper, discuss the meaning of these two words. Consider any similarities and differences they might have, as well as how their meaning(s) could vary from person to person, country to country, and over the course of time (generation to generation).”

Give students adequate time to answer the prompt, then allow students to share their answers and any insight they gleaned through their writing with the class.

Once students are finished, take up their answers to the prompt. Explain to the students that they will get them back at the end of the unit, where they will be asked about their understanding/knowledge of the two terms and whether or not their answers have changed or expanded.

### **Activity #1: Guess Who...**

*Inquiry Standards: D1.5.9-12. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources. D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical context. D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.*

**Activity Overview:** In this activity students will match key figures from the Revolutionary War to corresponding a quote/authored text/idea/etc. This activity is meant to tap students’ prior knowledge, and act as an informal assessment of students’ knowledge/understanding of Revolutionary War at the beginning of the unit. This activity can also be used at the end of the unit to allow students to compare what they knew at the beginning of the unit verses what they know at the end, and to see a physical representation or their growth of understanding/knowledge.

**Activity Instructions:** Divide students into groups of two or three. Give each group one set of name cards, and one set of fact cards. Explain to students that their goal is to match the name cards to their corresponding fact cards. Once they have matched all of their cards students should discuss their choices in their groups, and be prepared to discuss what they know about the key figures, their fact cards, and their role in the Revolutionary War.

Once all groups have matched their cards and have had time to discuss their choice, ask students to share out their answers as a class. This can be done by going around group to group, or by calling out the name of a key player and asking students to share which fact card they paired them with.

After students share their matches, ask them to consider what's missing. What do they need to know? Who would they like to talk to in order to "fill in the gaps"?

### **Activity #2: Reading like a Historian**

*Inquiry Standards: D1.3 9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question. D1.5 9-12. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.. D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras. D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context. D2.His.8.9-12. Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time. D.2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary opinions. D.2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose. D.2.His.16.9-12. D2.His.17.9-12. Critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media in terms of their historical accuracy.*

**Activity Overview:** In this lesson students will be asked to analyze various primary source documents from the Revolutionary War era using the Stanford History Education Group's Reading like a Historian's reading strategies.

**Activity Instructions:** Distribute *Historical Thinking Chart* to each student. Ask students the following questions: When reading an article or primary source document for the first time, what do they pay attention to/consider/question? What makes a source reliable? What is perspective/bias? Why are ideas such as context and bias important to consider and be aware of when reading texts?

Instruct students to read over the chart individually, and annotate anything they have questions about/find interesting/think is important.

Once all students are finished, instruct the class to share their annotations with a partner and be prepared to share out at least one point with the class (question, interesting, important).

Once students have shared with the class, go over the chart with the class as a whole. Explain to students they will continue in their new roles as scholars and historians, and today they will learn to read like a historian in order to think like a historian. Go through each of the four Historical Reading Skills (Sourcing, Contextualization, Corroboration, and Close Reading).

Explain to the class that in a few minutes they will be working in groups to investigate and analyze various documents that pertain the Revolutionary War era and/or ideas surrounding it. Before working on their own, go through and practice as a class to be sure that students understand the process and expectations for this activity.

If possible, project the following: <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/preamble>

(If not available, give students a hard copy of the preamble).

As a class, go through the Historical Thinking Chart beginning with sourcing. Explain to students that we may not be able to answer all of the questions, but the goal is to gather as much information as we can with what is provided.

After completing the close reading of the Preamble with the class, and discussing the various questions on the Historical Thinking Chart, tell students to keep the chart on their desks because they will need it as they work with their groups.

Divide the students into small groups of 3-4, and give each group a different document (*Give me Liberty or Give me Death*, *Letter to Hezekiah Niles*, *Perspectives on the Constitution: A Republic, If You Can Keep It*, *Perspectives on the Constitution: Constitutions Around the World*, *Perspectives on the Constitution: Understanding Our Constitution*, *\*Common Sense*) provided in the lesson pack, and an **American Revolution Documents Graphic Organizer**.

*(\*Due to the length of Common Sense, it has been broken down by chapters. Therefore, one group would get the Introduction – Chapter 1, another group Chapter 2, and so on.)*

Each group should work together to investigate their document using their Historical Thinking Charts. Encourage students to annotate their documents as they investigate/read. Once they have completed the close reading of their document and have moved through the entire chart, they should work together to complete the graphic organizer for their document.

Once all groups have completed their portion of their chart, have the groups share out their findings to the rest of the class. Push students to consider ideas of context, perspective, evidence, personal biases, purpose, etc.

At the bottom of the graphic organizer is the question, “Which author do you find more convincing and why?” Present the question to the class, and ask them to simply think about it

for a moment – consider everything they have read, discussed, and heard today. Once they have gathered their thoughts, instruct them to answer the question and to site specific evidence to support their argument.

Once again, draw students' attention back to the compelling question. Ask them to think about their current opinion/answer to the question, and what evidence they would use to support their claim. Are their sources reliable? Is their argument sound? Have they considered multiple perspectives over time?

Links to Documents: <http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-constitutions-around-the-world>

<http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-understanding-our-constitution>

<http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-a-republic-if-you-can-keep-it>

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/revolution/Adams-Niles.pdf>

<https://www.history.org/almanack/life/politics/giveme.cfm>

[http://www.norton.com/college/history/america-essential-learning/docs/TPaine-Common\\_Sense-1776.pdf](http://www.norton.com/college/history/america-essential-learning/docs/TPaine-Common_Sense-1776.pdf)

### **Activity #3: Time, Continuity, and Change: Events and Voices of Government and Independence**

*Inquiry Standards: D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present. D2.Civ.3.9-12. Analyze the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order. D2.Civ.6.9-12. Critique relationships among governments, civil societies, and economic markets. D2.Civ.8.9-12. Evaluate social and political systems in different contexts, times, and places, that promote civic virtues and enact democratic principles. D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights. D2.Eco.8.9-12. Describe the possible consequences, both intended and unintended, of government policies to improve market outcomes. D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.*

**Activity Overview:** In this activity students will be asked to consider a number of events and ideas that took place during America's fight for independence. As students move through the

activity, they will grapple with ideas such as time, continuity, and change, the power of protests, and the voice of a nation. Students will make connections between eras, analyzing the impact of historical events/ideas.

**Activity Instructions:** Remind students of the Compelling Question: Was the Revolutionary War revolutionary? In their journals or on a blank piece of paper, students should reflect on the prior activities and what they have learned so far, and provide their current thoughts and opinions as to whether or not the Revolutionary War was revolutionary (encourage students to think about “what’s missing” – where are the holes in their knowledge/understanding of the American Revolution? What one thing would help them have a more clear understanding of its impact and importance?)

After students write, place students into groups of 2-3. Give each group timeline strips (cut prior to class – keep name of event attached to details). Instruct students to work with their group members to first arrange the events/ideas/etc. in chronological order, then read through their timeline and add any additional information that they know about each event/idea. Students should also write down any questions that they have about specific events/ideas or overall.

Once students have examined the information, distribute the **Time, Continuity, and Change** graphic organizer for students to complete. Instruct students to examine their timeline with the eye of a historian, looking for connections between events/ideas during the American Revolution and event/ideas that came before and after.

Once all groups have completed their graphic organizers, bring the class back together for a class discussion. Questions have been provided as a starting point to engage students in talking about the material they just examined:

- 1.) Which event/idea do you believe to be the most significant to the cause of the Revolutionary War? Why?
- 2.) Which event/idea do you believe to have the most powerful/lasting effect? Explain.
- 3.) Do you believe that any of the Founding Fathers were influenced by prior events or ideas? If so, who and what?
- 4.) Do you believe that any of the events/ideas from the timeline are profound? If so, which one(s) and why? If not, why?
- 5.) What questions do you have about any of the events/ideas? What do you still want to know? What do you still need to know?
- 6.) What would American look like had \_\_\_\_\_ not occurred (insert any event from timeline into blank)?
- 7.) Consider the freedoms and rights you have as an American today that are a result of the different events and ideas you have analyzed and discussed today. How have they been challenged and/or changed over time? Do you believe that any of them are under attack or in danger of being taken away today? Explain.

#### **Activity #4: Silent Vs. Silenced: Voice of Minorities in the American Revolution:**

*Inquiry Standards: D1.3.9-12: Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a supporting question. D2.His.2.9-12: Analyze change and continuity in historical eras. D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by historical context. D2.His.6.9-12: Analyze the ways in which the perspective of those writing history shaped the history they produced. D2.His.8.9-12: Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time/*

**Activity Overview:** In this activity students will examine the idea of a group/persons being silenced vs. being silent, with a specific focus on women and African Americans and their involvement/contributions to the American Revolution.

**Activity Instructions:** Ask students to answer the following prompt/question: “Is there a difference between being silent and being silenced? Provide details arguing your perspective. Can you think of a specific time in your own life when you were silenced and/or silent?”

Give students 5-10 minutes to answer the question, and then share with a peer/group before bringing the class back together as a class. Engage the class in a discussion where students share their responses. You might also ask them to consider the following questions as they engage in class discussion:

1. Can you think of any person/groups today who are silenced?
2. Is there power in being silent?
3. Is there power in being silenced (hint: for who?)
4. Can you think of specific examples throughout history when groups or individuals have been silent/silenced? What was the outcome?

Say to students, “There is a popular saying that history is written by the victors. Who, if anyone does that exclude? Is that a fair statement to make? What perspectives and experience are most often shared, and who is often included? Today we are going to examine the role of minorities in the American Revolution.”

Split the students up into small groups, and handout copies of the documents listed below. Explain to the class that they will be reading through the material with their groups, and comparing prior knowledge to what they read (it may be helpful to have students complete KWL charts individually prior to the activity to determine prior knowledge).

Once groups have finished reading, they should think back to the question posted at the beginning of class. Were these groups silenced or silent? Which parts of their stories aren’t commonly told/known? Did your prior knowledge of the American Revolution include the involvement and contributions of women and African Americans? Be prepared to share details.

Give each group a handout of the New York Times article (link provided below). Ask each group to read the article, and as a group they must decide if the idea of the article is “revolutionary”. Each group should be prepared to support their claim.

Allow each group to share their responses with the class. The following questions/prompts may be helpful in supporting classroom discussion:

- 1.) What is ironic about the NYT article?
- 2.) Can you think of other events/eras throughout history where a minority group’s full story wasn’t told? Provide details...
- 3.) Why are some groups silenced when others are silent?
- 4.) How can a group combat being silenced, if at all?
- 5.) How should historians ensure that “full histories” are told?
- 6.) What can we do to ensure that we are well-informed citizens?
- 7.) Can you think of any people/current events today in which the full story isn’t being told? What/who are they? Why do you believe we aren’t hearing/seeing the full story? What do we do now?
- 8.) During the American Revolution – Native Americans, African Americans, and women were of the largest minority groups whose stories were silenced and many remained silent for years to come. How do you feel these groups and their histories are represented currently?

Ticket out the Door: Take a moment to imagine what your life would have been like if you lived during the American Revolution. Would you have been a part of one of the groups we have discussed today? Would you have been a part of the white majority? Write a brief description of what obstacles you might face, and then include any advice/information you would give to the people of the American Revolution.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/04/nyregion/for-daughters-of-the-american-revolution-more-black-members.html> (New York Times article)

[http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/images/reference\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/images/reference_sheet.pdf)

<https://cmswarriorsteam.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/women-and-minorities-in-the-revolutionary-war.docx>

### **Activity #5: We the People...**

*Inquiry Standards: D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives. D2.His.6.9-12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced. D2.His.7.9-12. Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past. D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and*

*complex causes and effects of events in the past. D3.4.9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both. D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.*

**Activity Overview:** In this final activity students will take into consideration all of the information they have examined in the previous activities in order to answer the Compelling Question: Was the Revolutionary War revolutionary?

**Activity Instructions:** Ask students the following question: What are the first three words in the Preamble to the Constitution? Once answered, ask students who are “the people”? Does it exclude anyone, or include everyone? Students should support their answers with sound evidence.

At the beginning of this unit, students were asked about the difference between the words “revolution” and “revolutionary”. Ask them to think back to that opening activity and the conversation that followed, and then ask them to consider “We the people...” and what inferences are made in those three words. Who are the people? Who are they giving power to/taking power away from in those three words? Is the Preamble revolutionary?

These questions are meant to push students to a place of uncertainty where they recognize that the Revolutionary War could arguably be revolutionary (ideas and rights that have withstood time, the power of individuals standing up to government(s), and the strength of shared ideals and interests), while also recognizing that those rights and freedoms gained weren’t distributed evenly to *all* people.

On opposite side of the classroom post signs that say “AGREE” and “DISAGREE”. Inform students that today they will take a stand, and choose a side – similarly to what many Americans did during the Revolutionary War. They will hear a series of statements, and after each statement they will need to decide if they agree or disagree with what was said. They **MUST** choose a side, and then they must defend their opinion – why do you agree? Why do you disagree? As scholars and historians, they need to back up their opinion with sound evidence.

Below are some statements to begin the activity. As you move throughout the activity and have discussions with the class, you may begin to form your own statements based on those interactions. The final statement for this activity should tie back to the Compelling Question – posed either as, “The Revolutionary War *was* revolutionary”, or, “The Revolutionary War *was not* revolutionary.”

Statements for Activity: The Revolutionary War could have been prevented. Breaking ties with England was the right thing to do. Our Founding Fathers considered all people of the United States when writing the Constitution. Because of the people and ideas of the American Revolution, I feel like I am protected by the American Constitution and Bill of Rights. I feel a



sense of civic duty and responsibility because of the events and ideas of the Revolutionary War. Our government should consider updating the Constitution because the context in which it was created is drastically different from today. The Constitution protects all Americans. The American Revolution was revolutionary.