The Revolutionary War: Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 6-8  Curriculum Focus: U.S. History  Lesson Duration: One class period

Program Description
For a concise and compelling look at America's birth, turn to this action-packed compilation of the best moments from Discovery's searing 10-episode series on the Revolutionary War. Join host Charles Kuralt for a searing portrait of the struggle that forged our nation. From the first rebellion of the farmers against the redcoats to the final victory at Yorktown, relive the saga in all its drama.

Onscreen Questions and Activities
Segment 1, Causes of the War
• Discuss the factors that made the American Revolution possible. Include British policies and colonial developments
• Debate whether or not the British were justified in demanding that American colonists help pay for the cost of the French and Indian War.
• Activity: Write two letters to the editor of a colonial newspaper reacting to the Boston Massacre, one from a member of the "Sons of Liberty," and the other from a Tory sympathizer.

Segment 2, The Battles of Lexington and Concord
• Interpret Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn" and Longfellow's "Paul Revere's Ride." What is the impact of these works?
• Discuss how today's state national guard is similar to and/or different from the colonial militia.
• Activity: Host a talk show in your classroom Assign the roles of Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Thomas Paine, King George the Third and General Gage. Have the class prepare questions to ask the guests.

Segment 3, The Siege of Boston and the Battle of Breed's Hill
• Discuss how environmental and geographic conditions influenced the Battle of Breed's Hill.
• Debate whether outdated military tactics, misguided strategy, and poor leadership were responsible for the British loss of its American colonies.
• Activity: Assume the role of a colonial sympathizer in Boston. Write a letter to a cousin in Philadelphia expressing your feelings about the British occupation of Boston.
Segment 4, Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence

- Discuss the conservative, radical, and hypocritical aspects of the Declaration of Independence.
- Explain how the Declaration of Independence is evident in our everyday lives.
- Activity: Stage a mock Continental Congress with students expressing the variety of views held by the delegates. After the debates, have each delegate cast a vote on the question of independence.

Segment 5, George Washington and the Continental Army

- Discuss the characteristics and qualities a successful military commander would have. Determine which of these qualities George Washington possessed.

Segment 6, Thomas Paine and Common Sense

- How was Thomas Paine different from other colonial leaders?
- Activity: Benjamin Franklin once said, "Where liberty is, there is my country." Thomas Paine replied, "Where liberty is not, there is mine." Research the life of Thomas Paine and find out why this statement helps you to understand his life and career.

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- One way to learn about the past is to read historical novels.
- Some people take one side or another in a war or other conflict; some people find themselves caught in the middle.

Materials

- The Revolutionary War video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Copies of the young adult novel My Brother Sam Is Dead by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier
- Optional: audiotaping and videotaping equipment

Procedures

1. This project is designed to help students see that in every war there are many viewpoints to consider; the issues involved are seldom cut and dried. Tell students they are going to read a novel that underscores this idea.

2. Introduce the young adult historical novel My Brother Sam Is Dead by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier. It tells the story of young Tim Meeker, the brother of a Revolutionary War
soldier. Tim is caught between his sibling’s rebel beliefs and his father’s attempts to stay neutral in a Tory town.

3. While they are reading the novel, suggest that students keep lists of reasons that both men, the brother and the father, give for the positions they take.

4. After reading and discussing the novel, ask your students to imagine themselves in Tim’s place or as someone else who has a good vantage point for assessing the conflict—for example, a soldier’s spouse or parent, a doctor or nurse, or a munitions maker’s apprentice. Would they feel and act as Tim does—or differently?

5. Challenge your students to write a monologue in the persona of the colonist they have imagined. In the monologue, each student must explain his or her unique perspective on the complex events unfolding. Each monologue should show that the sibling, spouse, parent, or other observer is noticing the details about a war that those caught up in the fighting or in supporting the king might overlook or not see objectively.

6. Give your students several options for presenting their monologues, each of which should begin with the speaker’s statement of who he or she is pretending to be. Options include the following:
   - A live performance before the class
   - An audiotape recording
   - A videotape recording
   - A reader’s theater presentation (with simple props and sound effects)

7. Involve the audience in critiquing each presentation.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the role of communication in determining the progression and outcome of a war. Compare the means of communication available in the 1700s to the technology available today. Then discuss how the outcome of the Revolutionary War might have been different with today’s communication tools.

2. Strong individuals are usually a key factor in determining the strategies of a war. Compare the leadership qualities of a Revolutionary War figure such as George Washington with those of figures in some conflicts in recent history, such as Slobodan Milosevic and Yasser Arafat. What similarities can you find in their strategies and leadership qualities, if any? What differences do you notice?

3. Landownership in England differed from landownership in the colonies. Land was more available in the colonies, so more colonists were landowners—in England, only 1 in 10 people owned land, but in New England, 9 out of 10 people were landowners. In what ways might this difference have contributed to rebellious sentiments on the part of the colonists?

4. What are some of the reasons that countries and colonies seek independence? Are any of these reasons more important than others? Think about some of the “hot spots” around the world where people are currently seeking independence from a controlling government. What issues
underlie these conflicts? Are they similar to the issues that led the American colonists to revolt against the English government? How?

5. The Stamp Act of 1765 required that every piece of paper sold in the colonies—from pamphlets to playing cards—have a revenue stamp on it. This revenue stamp could only be obtained by paying tax on the paper item. The colonists found this system unfair since the stamps were expensive, so they sought to have the Stamp Act repealed. More than two centuries after the passage of the Stamp Act, however, taxes are still a major preoccupation (and frustration) for many people in the United States. Evaluate the following kinds of taxes, balancing their fairness with the degree of revenue they bring in: income, import/export, gasoline, cigarette, sales, property, school, entertainment, and hospitality.

6. We use the word revolution in many contexts—think of the Industrial Revolution, for example, or the technological revolution. In reality, though, what makes a revolution a revolution? What distinguishes a revolution from mere widespread change? Brainstorm and list the criteria for a revolution, and define it in political, economic, and social terms.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students presented coherent and unified monologue with clear thesis statement; excellent speaking and nonverbal techniques (such as gesturing and eye contact)
- 2 points: Student presented mostly coherent and unified monologue with adequate thesis statement; good speaking and nonverbal techniques (such as gesturing and eye contact)
- 1 point: Student presented monologue weak in coherence, unity, and thesis statement; poor speaking and nonverbal techniques (such as gesturing and eye contact)

Vocabulary

alliances
Definition: A formal union or confederation between governments in a common cause.
Context: The colonies could negotiate alliances and receive aid.

allies
Definition: A union or confederation between governments in a common cause.
Context: The two countries were allies in the war.

boycott
Definition: To stop from using, buying, or dealing with as an act of protest.
Context: The colonists boycotted British goods.

chaos
Definition: A condition of total disorder or confusion.
Context: In the chaos, the British charged forward blindly thrusting their bayonets and ignoring their officers shouts to fall in.

debt
Definition: Something owed, such as money, goods or services.
Context: They have an enormous war debt.

rebellion
Definition: An uprising intended to change or overthrow an existing form of government.
Context: General Gage had asked parliament for 20,000 more troops to suppress the rebellion.

redoubt
Definition: A small, usually temporary defensive work.
Context: The Rebels waited while the enemy neared the redoubt.

resolution
Definition: A formal statement of a decision.
Context: After nine hours the Congress passed the resolution for independence.

siege
Definition: The surrounding of a town or fortress by an army trying to capture it.
Context: The winds of war first stirred in the Boston area during the siege of Boston and the Battle of Breed’s Hills.

stifle
Definition: To keep or hold back.
Context: They did not want to stifle their economic development.

tyrannical
Definition: The arbitrary use of power by a ruler with absolute power.
Context: They would not adhere to the tyrannical system their forefathers fled.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit http://www.mcrel.org/

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:
• History – U.S. History: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to http://www.socialstudies.org

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:
• Time, Continuity, and Change