

Document-Based Activities

U.S. History

Book 1

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION • WESTWARD EXPANSION • WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Implementing CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2

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Background Information

The story of the American Revolution began in the New England colonies and spread to the Middle and Southern colonies. Although the colonies were independent of each other when the war began, they all rallied together for the common goal of defeating British tyranny. The ragged Patriots believed that they could win the fight with Great Britain, at the time the most powerful nation in the world. With determination and wise leadership, they accomplished their goal, and the thirteen colonies became the United States of America.

The Sons of Liberty—This secret organization was founded to oppose taxes such as those imposed by the Stamp Act. The most famous and active group was located in Boston. Among the members of the Boston Sons of Liberty were Paul Revere, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams. Their symbol was the cone-shaped hat.

The Stamp Act of 1765—Colonists protested the unfair British tax that required them to buy stamps printed in England and to use them on newspapers, pamphlets, and a variety of other business and legal papers. The act was repealed in 1766.

Committees of Correspondence—Throughout the colonies, the leading men formed groups known as Committees of Correspondence. Their function was to coordinate the various actions taken against Great Britain.

The Boston Massacre—On March 5, 1770, a mob of colonists with snowballs agitated British soldiers on patrol. A shot was fired by the British. This led to the deaths of five colonists and the first fight of the Revolutionary War.

The Boston Tea Party—Boston colonists rebelled against the Tea Act, passed by the British Parliament. On December 16, 1773, a group of men disguised themselves as Native Americans, boarded British tea ships, and threw the chests of tea into the harbor.

The Declaration of Independence—This document was a formal statement by the colonists of their intention to be free from the rule of Great Britain. Thomas Jefferson is credited as the author, but many others contributed their ideas. It was adopted on July 4, 1776. The Declaration of Independence is recognized as one of the greatest documents in the history of humankind.

The Battle of Trenton (December 26, 1776)—General George Washington knew the troops needed a victory to give them confidence. The Hessian soldiers were stationed in Trenton, New Jersey. Washington felt sure that they would be celebrating on Christmas. Hoping to catch them off-guard, he and his men left Valley Forge and marched to Trenton on Christmas night. Small boats ferried about 2,500 men and equipment across the icy Delaware River to New Jersey. The Americans surprised the Hessians and captured many prisoners.

The Battle of Monmouth (June 28, 1778)—General Washington ordered Major General Charles Lee to attack the British troops near Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey, as they retreated from Philadelphia toward New York City. Lee attacked but after some fighting ordered a retreat. The British, led by Sir Henry Clinton, counterattacked. Washington arrived in time to lead the men back

into battle, but the British forces escaped and the battle was indecisive. Some good did result, however. The Americans showed that they could use their new skills and fight well with their muskets and bayonets.

The Battle of Yorktown (September 28–October 19, 1781)—British general Cornwallis and his troops were trapped by General George Washington and French general Rochambeau on the ground and by the French fleet on the Chesapeake Bay. Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown after the last big battle of the Revolutionary War.

The Treaty of Paris—Signed on September 3, 1783, this treaty between the United States of America and Great Britain recognized America as an independent nation and was generous to America in many ways.

Famous Patriots

Benjamin Franklin—Franklin was born in Boston, but he settled in Philadelphia in 1723 at the age of sixteen. Seven years later, he owned his own publishing business. But Franklin's career took many turns. He became an author, statesman, scientist, and diplomat. Franklin took an active role in the fight for independence and in the formation of our new nation.

Patrick Henry—Born in Hanover County, Virginia, Henry became a lawyer in 1760. In 1764, he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses and soon became one of its leaders. Henry served as a delegate to both the First Continental Congress and the Second Continental Congress and was the first elected governor of the state of Virginia. He was a skilled orator, and his fiery speeches helped the cause of independence.

John Paul Jones—One of the great Revolutionary War heroes, John Paul Jones is known for his daring attack on a large British ship, the *Serapis*, on September 23, 1779. When his ship, the *Bon Homme Richard*, drew close to the British ship, Jones was asked if he was ready to surrender. "I have not yet begun to fight," he replied. Jones captured the British ship and sailed it back to France.

Thomas Paine—As a former Englishman, Paine was well acquainted with the corruption of the monarchy. He was self-educated and attracted to politics, writing, and debating. Paine used his writing ability to persuade other colonists that it was important to be independent from Great Britain. He is best known for his pamphlet *Common Sense*.

Paul Revere—On April 18, 1775, Paul Revere, a Boston Patriot and silversmith, took on the dangerous task of warning the colonists of the impending arrival of British troops. His famous midnight ride helped to summon the Minutemen to fight and allowed John Hancock and Samuel Adams to avoid being captured by the British.

George Washington, Commander in Chief—As a soldier, he had distinguished himself during the French and Indian War. As commander in chief of the Continental forces, Washington proved to be a trusted, smart, and compassionate leader. He led the American troops through the battles of the war and sought to alleviate the dire situation at Valley Forge. In 1789, he was unanimously elected the first president of the United States.

The Boston Massacre

The event known as the Boston Massacre took place on March 5, 1770. It began when some boys began taunting the British troops and one of the boys threw a snowball at a British soldier. The soldier became frightened and called for help. Other people became involved, and soon the British began to fire on the crowd. Five people died and many others were wounded. It was the opening fight in the Revolutionary War. Below is a copy of an engraving representing the tragic event.



Boston Massacre

