



## CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### The Continental Army & Washington

*These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman...*

Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*

#### Overview

On Christmas night 1776, the eve of the famous crossing of the Delaware River, Washington and his troops were encamped nine miles from Trenton on the banks of the Delaware preparing for a surprise offensive that, Washington hoped, would save his position as general and invigorate his troops. His soldiers were beyond weary. They did not have tents or proper winter clothing, the weather had turned bitterly cold and they were losing battle after battle. Washington's poor military record had sparked open talk in Congress about replacing him.

Hoping to inspire soldiers and save his own job, Washington ordered all his officers to read Thomas Paine's "The American Crisis" to their troops. Paine, the passionate pamphleteer, was embedded with Washington's troops and had just written a now-famous essay on the back of a drumhead. The opening refrain had a stirring beat of its own: "These are the times that try men's souls..." The next day, Washington's soldiers went on to win the Battle of Trenton. It was a small victory, but it changed the entire psychological makeup of the war.

In the winter of 1777, George Washington's Continental Army found themselves, once again, overwhelmed. After suffering several major defeats at the hands of the British, in particular the Howe brothers, American morale was at a low, and Washington was concerned that the army might mutiny entirely. Washington decided to encamp that winter at Valley Forge close to the continental capital Philadelphia, which had fallen into British hands. While it was a strategic location, the Continental Army went through a winter of cold, hunger and extreme discomfort. At Valley Forge, Albigence Waldo, a surgeon in the army, kept a diary of his experiences and observations.

In this lesson, students will use both Waldo's diary (a primary document) and the scenes of crossing the Delaware from Episode 3 of *Liberty!* which document the Continental

Army on the eve of the Battle of Trenton to better understand American soldiers' experiences as well as the significance and impact of Washington's leadership skills.

### Related Resources for the Lesson

In this lesson, students will use the following resources:

1. Episode #3 of *Liberty!* ("The Times That Try Men's Souls")
2. Excerpts from the diary of Albigenice Waldo found at <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1776-1800/war/waldo.htm>.
3. Military Journal written at Valley Forge (George Ewing) (very long) <http://www.sandcastles.net/military1.htm>
4. Valley Forge and Monmouth (<http://www.usahistory.info/Revolution/Valley-Forge.html>)
5. Letters from Valley Forge (<http://www.americanrevolution.org/vlyfrgeltrs.html>) (various sources)
6. The Winter at Valley Forge (<http://www.americanrevwar.homestead.com/files/VALLEY.HTM>)
7. Map of the Battle of Philadelphia and Valley Forge ([http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/national\\_parks/valley\\_forge\\_battle97.pdf](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/national_parks/valley_forge_battle97.pdf))
8. In addition, the teacher should also supplement the reading with various segments of "Liberty!", in particular Episode 5, which has a small discussion of Valley Forge.
9. The text of "The American Crisis" <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/paine/pframe.htm>
10. A newspaper-like description of The Battle of Trenton on The Liberty Web site, with many related links embedded at [http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle\\_trenton1776.html](http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle_trenton1776.html)
11. Question Sheet PDF (for students)
12. Question Sheet PDF (for teachers, with answers)

### Relevant Standards

This lesson addresses the following national content standards established by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>)

### US History

- Understands the major political and strategic factors that led to the American victory in the Revolutionary War (e.g., the importance of the Battle of Saratoga, the use of guerilla and conventional warfare and the importance of King's Mountain in defining the war)
- Understands the social and economic impact of the Revolutionary War (e.g., problems of financing the war, wartime inflation, hoarding and profiteering and the personal and social impact of economic hardships caused by the war)

- Understands the strategic elements of the Revolutionary War (e.g., how the Americans won the war against superior British resources, American and British military leaders and major military campaigns)

### Strategy for the Lesson

The teacher may wish to begin the lesson with a discussion of primary historic sources, explaining they are sources that come “direct from the past”, in other words, from an eyewitness who was at the scene of the event. Primary source material includes photographs, home movies, speeches, diaries, and letters. Discuss with students how primary source documents might differ from historians’ accounts.

The class should also brainstorm other instances of primary sources familiar to them in World or American History. Familiar contemporary examples might include:

- “The Diary of a Young Girl” (Anne Frank)
- “Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo”
- The “Zapruder Film” chronicling President John F. Kennedy’s assassination
- And, comparable exhibits on the National Archives and Records Administration (<http://www.archives.gov/>), Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov>) or other similar resources.
- The teacher should also highlight other primary source material from the Revolutionary period as featured in the *Liberty!* series. Several sources are available for Joseph Plumb Martin, an enlisted man in the Continental Army, including excerpts from his diary on the “History Matters” web site (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6597/>). Students can use these sources to collaborate or discount other accounts of the period.

*The teacher should note that the primary source used in this lesson not only highlights Valley Forge but the overall conditions faced by American soldiers throughout the Revolutionary war.*

Next, the teacher should ask students to discuss important issues regarding the hardships faced by soldiers at Valley Forge and on the banks of the Delaware, and the role of George Washington as commander-in-chief of the army. These include:

- The difficulty in fighting for the “abstract concept” of liberty, and the style of leadership needed to command a more egalitarian army
- Difficulty in maintaining troop morale amidst such awful conditions
- Washington’s strategy as “de facto” leader of the country to keep the army (the only symbol of the nation which existed at that point) together at all costs

- Differences between the British “professional army” and the American army (usually made up of militia and “minutemen” who participated when fighting was nearby, but then returned to their homes and farms)
- The uniqueness of the Revolutionary war as a war about ideals rather than territory or treasure

The teacher should have students view Episode 3 of *Liberty!* and note points in the film which show Washington’s “despairing mood” as well as concern about losing the war. The teacher may also wish to read (or have a student read) the famous “These are times that try men’s souls” excerpt from Thomas Paine’s *The American Crisis*.

Next, the teacher should distribute copies of the question sheets for this lesson to the students. Direct the students to either access the Waldo diary online or copy and distribute the diary excerpts.

Allow sufficient time for students to read the diary excerpts and to answer the questions. Once students have completed the questions, the teacher should evaluate them according to the depth of answer desired, the amount of time allowed for the assignment, as well as any other criteria established by the teacher, such as spelling and grammar.

#### **Extension Activities:**

1. Have students compare conditions and circumstances which affected soldiers in other situations, such as weather affecting a battle or military maneuver. For example, the teacher might ask students to research and report on the impact of weather on the D-Day invasion or the Battle of the Bulge as well as the German advance into Russia during World War II or Napoleon’s attack on Russia during the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The teacher may decide to ask students to write essays on the comparisons or may ask the students to produce multimedia projects.
2. Ask students to further research Valley Forge, pretend they are soldiers in the Continental Army encamped there and write letters “home” describing the conditions and hardships soldiers faced there.

### Question Sheet for The Continental Army & Washington (with answers)

1. Who is the author of the source? What was his position (his duty) at Valley Forge?

The author of the source is Albigeance Waldo, a surgeon in the Continental Army who was stationed at Valley Forge.

2. What sort of military action does the source describe that occurred on December 11? What does he note as the outcome of this action?

Waldo notes, "At four o'clock the Whole Army were Order'd to March to Swedes Ford on the River Schuylkill, about 9 miles N.W. of Chestnut Hill, and 6 from White Marsh our present Encampment. At sun an hour high the whole were mov'd from the Lines and on their march with baggage. This Night encamped in a Semi circle nigh the Ford. The enemy had march'd up the West side of Schuylkill - Potter's Brigade if Pennsylvania Militia were already there, and had several skirmishes with them with some loss on this side and considerable on the Enemies...."

3. Next, look at the diary entry for December 13. In your view, is this entry critical or supportive of the commanding officers at Valley Forge? What evidence in the entry supports your conclusion?

Answers will vary, but most students will say it is critical of the officers. Waldo writes that, "It cannot be that our Superiors are about to hold consultations with Spirits infinitely beneath their Order, by bringing us into these utmost regions of the Terraqueous Sphere. No it is, upon consideration for many good purposes since we are to Winter here....," and then goes into a series of statements about what Valley Forge does *not* offer.

4. Read the diary entry for December 14. In this entry, list at least four conditions described by Waldo that either he or other soldiers at Valley Forge are enduring. In your view, are these conditions that are unique to Valley Forge, or do you think soldiers in all conflicts experience the same thing?

Answers will vary, depending on which of the conditions students identify.

5. After reading the excerpt for Waldo's diary, describe how you see his morale. List at least three examples from the reading to back up your description.

Answers vary depending on student view and examples.

6. In your view, based on your reading and viewing of episodes from *Liberty!*, would Waldo's account be fairly consistent of the experience of the average soldier during the Revolutionary War? Write a paragraph explaining your view.

Answers will vary.

7. Do you think that the conditions Waldo discusses were common of both enlisted men and officers? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

8. Assume that you were George Washington and received a copy of Waldo's diary. What concern, if any, would you have about the conditions stated in it?

Answers will vary. Some students might say that Washington would be appalled at the conditions his men were forced to endure and would want to do whatever he could to help them. Other students might note that Washington might have been more concerned about public opinion and would not have wanted information that put the military and war effort in a bad light to be released.

9. In Episode #3, Pauline Maier notes, "...this means you have a different kind of an army. A more democratical army maybe, a more egalitarian army maybe. And in some ways it was a style of leadership that was going to be much more important for a republican government later on..." In your view, would this method of leading an army be more or less effective than the opposing armies' leadership styles described by the narrator of *Liberty*? Explain your view.

Answers will vary. Some students may note that it would be very difficult to enforce discipline in an army similar to what Maier describes. Others may note that if soldiers feel as though they are "equal", it might give them more incentive to fight effectively, because they have parity with officers and commanders and are more able to share in the rights and freedoms available once the Revolution ends and a new nation is created.

10. Why do you think George Washington had his officers read *American Crisis* to troops on the eve of the Battle of Trenton?

Washington probably believed that crossing the Delaware for a surprise attack was his last chance to rally troops and save his own job as general. By reading *American Crisis* to his army, Washington probably hoped to convince soldiers they were fighting for a worthwhile "cause." If he could inspire their beliefs even for one night, his chances of success would increase greatly. Washington also probably understood that he was fighting a very different kind of war. His troops were not compensated monetarily like the professional British soldiers; they were not fighting for a tangible goal like wealth or territory. Therefore, Washington needed to take extra care that his soldiers felt empowered by the greatness of their cause – the goal of liberty for all men – and Thomas Paine's words such as, "The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph." helped to plead that case.

11. John Shy, in the end of Episode #3, looks at Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton as watershed events, noting, "From that point, he seems to be able to do no wrong. Washington, after these two little military victories, seems to exemplify the Revolution. He *is* the Revolution." Presume you are a soldier in Washington's army and are a veteran of the battles at Princeton and Trenton. Write a "letter" home to your parents describing how you see Washington's leadership in these battles. Use information from the episode as well as information from your textbook and other sources.

Answers vary.



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