

Life as a Soldier in the Revolutionary War

Grade: 6-8

Time Allotment: 40-60 minutes

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6-8.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6-8.2	Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6-8.1	Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6-8.8	Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6-8.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6-8.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Objectives

Students will:

- Understand and explain the conditions that soldiers had to go through during the Revolutionary War
- Be able to analyze primary documents and understand the definition of a primary document

Materials

- Primary documents provided (annotated and not annotated)
- Smart board for presentation and reference photos
- Highlighters
- Larger paper to use for posters
- Markers, pens, and other writing supplies

Anticipatory Set

- The teacher will explain to the students that they are going to look at documents relating to soldiers in the Revolutionary War. They will then ask the students if they know what a diary, photographs, and artifacts all have in common.
- After some students guess, the teacher will explain that they are all primary documents or primary sources. The teacher can then ask if anyone knows what primary sources are.
- The teacher should explain to the students that primary sources are the best type of sources to use in regard to researching history.

Teacher Presentation and Modeling:

- The teacher will define and explain what primary sources are.
 - Primary sources are first-hand accounts of a historic event or something in the past. This means that the author was actually there to witness whatever content is being discussed.
 - Examples include recordings, photographs, journals, videos, and interviews.
- The teacher could also create a PowerPoint with pictures of different types of sources and quiz the students on if the source is primary or not to help them better understand the examples.
- The teacher will then ask students why primary sources are useful and the first type of sources that should be used when learning about the past.
 - They are the most accurate sources of the topic since they witnessed the event happening or lived in the time of history being researched.
- The teacher will then explain that one example for how primary sources are useful is figuring out the conditions for soldiers throughout the Revolutionary War. There are many journals from soldiers and letters from officers to help people today figure out their conditions.
- The teacher will give the students some facts below about the Continental Army and how it compared to the British Army before the students begin the primary sources activity.
 - The British Army was regarded as one of the best armies in the entire world and were powerful and well-supplied.

- The Continental Army had no financial support from any government, making it challenging to raise money to supply the army. As the war got longer, funding was more challenging
- States each formed their own unit, meaning different units got funded differently
- Britain's soldiers were paid and trained while the Continental Army took volunteers that had little or no experience fighting and being a soldier.
- The Revolutionary War happened from April of 1775 and lasted for many years, meaning they fought battles during every season. The famous act of Washington crossing the Delaware River occurred in winter of 1776.
 - The teacher should tell the students to think about how weather impacted conditions and how cold temperatures would make soldiers
- Also setting up camp in different locations and being outside often could lead to unsanitary conditions
- After going over this information, the teacher will read aloud the first primary source, a letter from George Washington, and go over it with the class.
 - The teacher will inform students that the process they are modeling currently is what they should do when reading their own primary sources.
 - The teacher can use the annotated copy of Washington's letter provided as a guide for what information to go over in the letter. Students can write down their own notes about the letter as the teacher reads it.

Guided and Independent Practice

- After receiving some information from the presentation, the teacher will tell students that it is time to learn more information through primary sources of the army.
- The teacher will divide students up into groups of 2-4 students each. Each group should be provided with some writing and coloring supplies as well as the primary sources and one poster paper.
 - They should receive a print out of Washington's letter that the teacher went over so they can reread it and they should also receive a copy of Joseph Plumb Martin's journal excerpts.
- They will be instructed to read the primary source provided and highlight for certain information:
 - What supplies do the soldiers seem to have? What may they be missing? What challenges could come from those missing supplies?
 - Are there any challenges demonstrated in these primary sources?
 - How do the soldiers react to these conditions?

- After finishing the sources, they will be instructed to make a poster about what they have learned from the class presentation and the information from the primary sources. The poster can have different categories like supplies, conditions, challenges, disease, etc.
 - The teacher could also assign groups each an individual topic to make a poster on.

Closure

- After giving the students enough time to complete the posters, the teacher and students will come back together to compare what they learned from the primary sources and what they may have inferred.
- The teacher can either have students present the information from their posters or have students hang them up around the classroom for everyone to walk around and see them all.
 - If students present their posters, the teacher may want to limit students to sharing one or two facts so information does not get repeated.
- As students share and present information, they must say which source they got the information they share.

Assessment

- The teacher will collect the posters that students created and assess those for information from primary sources and class to make sure they understood the struggles and challenges of the Continental Army
 - The teacher may also collect the primary sources used to make sure they highlighted information that was useful.

Extension of the Lesson

- Students can research more into the British forces and make a chart comparing the two different armies' strengths and weaknesses in the war.
- Students can be given a primary source letter and assigned to write a reply to that letter.
- Students can analyze different works of art drawn of the army and debate if it is factually accurate or not.
- Students can write a diary entry as if they are a soldier in the Revolutionary War

Resources

- <https://umb.libguides.com/PrimarySources/secondary>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/continental-army/>

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw3a.005/?sp=189>
- Additional Info: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/fighting-man-continental-army>
- *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier: Some Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of Joseph Plumb Martin* by Joseph Plumb Martin

Document #1

Letter from General George Washington to Continental Congress, May 27, 1780

Sir:

It is with infinite pain I inform Congress, that we are reduced again to a situation of extremity for want of meat. On several days of late, the Troops have been entirely destitute of any, and for a considerable time past they have been at bet, at half, a quarter, an Eighth allowance of this essential article of provisions...Accordingly Two Regiments of the Connecticut line mutinied and got under Arms on Thursday night...

I have been informed by the Two Colonels of the Pennsylv. Line in whom I have the utmost confidence, who were called to assist Colo. Meigs to suppress the mutiny on Thursday, that in the course of their expostulations, the troops very pointedly mentioned besides their distresses for provision, their not being paid for Five months; and, what is of a still more serious and delicate nature in our present circumstances, they mentioned the great depreciation of the Money, it's being of little or no value at all, and yet if they should be paid, that it would be in this way and according to the usual amount, without an adequate allowance for the depreciation...

Document #2

Excerpts from Joseph Plumb Martin's Journal

"We are absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals into my mouth for four days and as many nights, except for a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood. I saw men roast their old shoes and eat them."

His uniform was "what laughingly could be called a uniform, and possessed a blanket thin enough to have straws shoot through it without discommoding the threads."

"I was soon relieved from this guard, and with those who were able, of our two regiments, sent to reinforce those in the fort [Mifflin], which was then besieged by the British. Here I endured hardships sufficient to kill half a dozen horses. Let the reader only consider for a moment and he will still be satisfied if not sickened. In the cold month of November, without provisions, without clothing, not a scrap of either shoes or stockings to my feet or legs, and in this condition to endure a siege in such a place as that was appalling in the highest degree."