

Spies in the Revolutionary War

Grade: 3-8

Time Allotment: 45 minutes

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3-8.2	Determine the main ideas of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.3-5.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Objectives

Students will:

- Understand and explain the use of spies during the Revolutionary War.
- Be able to name at least one spy that was essential to the Revolutionary War.
- Understand and use some of the spy code used by General Washington's troops.

Materials:

- Smart Board for pictures of the spies discussed and for illustrating spy code
- Lemon juice
- Cups to hold lemon juice
- Heat source (e.g., a lightbulb or iron) for invisible ink
- Paintbrushes, sticks, or cotton swabs
 - Example of swabs: <http://bit.ly/2LsyXxD>
- 1-2 pieces of paper for each student
- Copies of the Culper Spy Ring code provided

Anticipatory Set

- The teacher will inform students that they will be learning about the use of a spy network in the Revolutionary War.
 - During the Revolutionary War, the British troops created a stronghold in New York City and Washington wanted to get information out of New York City to know the British forces' plans during the war. This was how spy work became popular.

- The teacher will explain that spies sent secret messages from areas the British army was back to Washington's troops.
 - One way this was done was by sending hidden messages. Spies were known to hide messages in the soles of shoes or even in hollowed out quill pens.
 - They also sometimes wrote regular letters under pen names and put hidden messages in code or invisible ink within the letter, both which students will do today.

Teacher Presentation and Modeling

- The teacher will explain how the Culper Spy Ring was the best spy network during the Revolutionary War.
 - The spy network was based in Long Island, an area close to New York City.
 - The creator of the spy ring was Benjamin Tallmadge, a young officer who handpicked people from his hometown in Long Island to create the network. He went by the code name John Bolton.
- The teacher will now explain the inner workings of the spy ring itself using these facts:
 - Abraham Woodhull, going by the code name Samuel Culper, lead the network and evaluated what information to report to Washington.
 - Caleb Brewster would then deliver coded messages from Long Island to Connecticut, where Tallmadge would take them to Washington.
 - Woodhull then recruited a New Yorker named Robert Townsend who was the main source of information in New York City, going under the code name Samuel Culper Jr., while Woodhull kept the name Samuel Culper Sr.
 - Townsend went undercover as a Loyalist, even becoming a reporter for a popular Loyalist newspaper. As a reporter, he got lots of information regarding British activity. Even his business partner did not know he was secretly a Patriot.
 - Another key member of the Culper Spy Ring was Anna Strong, a woman who lived in Long Island and used her laundry lines as a signal to other spies when there was a new message and where to meet to obtain them
- The teacher will then explain some achievements with which the Culper Spy Ring is credited.
 - The main thing they are known for: uncovering plans that the British army was going to ambush the French as they arrived in America, which could have destroyed Washington's alliance with the French. However, historians debate whether they were the *first* to warn Washington.
 - They also apprehended a British spy: Major John André.
- The teacher will finish by introducing the spy code used by the spy ring

- The Culper Spy Ring created their own code book for secret messages, now referred to as the Culper Code Book.
- It took over 700 words from the dictionary and gave them each a number. Also, each letter actually stood for another letter.
 - Ex: 711 was General Washington, and the letter A actually meant the letter G
- They also frequently sent letters with invisible ink that Washington called “sympathetic stain.”

Guided and Independent Practice

- The teacher will now pass out some of the materials for making coded letters. Each student will need one or two pieces of paper. They should be broken up into groups of four or five each so a cup of lemon juice and a copy of the spy code can be shared between students. Instead of printing out the code, the teacher could also display it on a smart board instead.
- The teacher will explain that it is time to write their own spy letters. The teacher can either have them write one letter in invisible ink without code and another letter in code without invisible ink. They could also only have them write one letter in invisible ink using code.
- The teacher will guide the students through the invisible ink activity using the following steps:
 - Dip the paintbrush/swab into lemon juice and use this to write on the paper.
 - Write a message with the lemon juice. This can either be in code from the Culper Code Book or not
 - The teacher can suggest to students that they write a normal letter in pencil and then write an invisible ink letter between the lines, since that is how spies would do it.
 - Once the letter is written and the ink has dried, the students should hold their invisible ink letters over a light bulb or other heat source. Their letter in ink should appear.
 - Warn students not to overheat their paper so it does not burn.

Closure

- Once the letters in code are created, students should exchange letters and try to decode it using the copies of the code key provided.
 - After decoding, students should be able to explain the letter’s meaning and repeat details of it.

- At the end of the activity, the teacher can have the class come back together and instruct each student to write answers down to the following questions
 - What was one fact you learned about spies during the Revolutionary War?
 - Would you like to be a spy during the Revolutionary War?
 - What are some challenges you think a spy would have?
 - Why were spies important during the war?
- The teacher should collect the answers that the students wrote down and can take some volunteers to share their answers and have a class discussion on it.

Assessment

- The teacher will assess students' comprehension of the lesson through their question answers they collected.
- The teacher will assess the students' understanding of the codes through their ability to decode other students' letters.
- The teacher will assess the students' understanding of the code through the letters that they write.

Extension of Lesson

- The class can read the book *George Washington's Spy* by Elvira Woodruff, *The Scarlet Stockings Spy* by Trinka Hakes Noble, or *Patriots, Red Coats, and Spies* by Robert J. Skead, connecting a Social Studies lesson to an English/Reading lesson.
- Students can research more about different ciphers, another type of code used in the Revolutionary War.
- Students can learn about other spies like Nathanial Hale and James Armistead Lafayette.
- Students can make up their own secret code as if they were spies themselves.

Resources

- Shortened Culper Spy Code (PDF attached)
- Information on the Culper Spy Ring:
 - <http://bit.ly/2XUv6es>
 - <http://bit.ly/2GiU2WV>
- Copy of the Original Code: <http://bit.ly/32zUBFI>
- Invisible Ink Recipe: <http://bit.ly/2LTBY9A>
- *George Washington's Spy* by Elvira Woodruff
- *Patriots, Red Coats, and Spies* by Robert J. Skead
- *The Scarlet Stockings Spy* by Trinka Hakes Noble