

# The American Revolutionary War

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# The Fighting Begins

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

By the start of 1775, more and more colonists expected the quarrels with England to lead to war. Many colonists no longer wanted to live by the rules of a government whose interests clashed with their own. By spring, the militias in many colonies were preparing to fight. Each militia was made up of citizens who volunteered to be part-time soldiers.

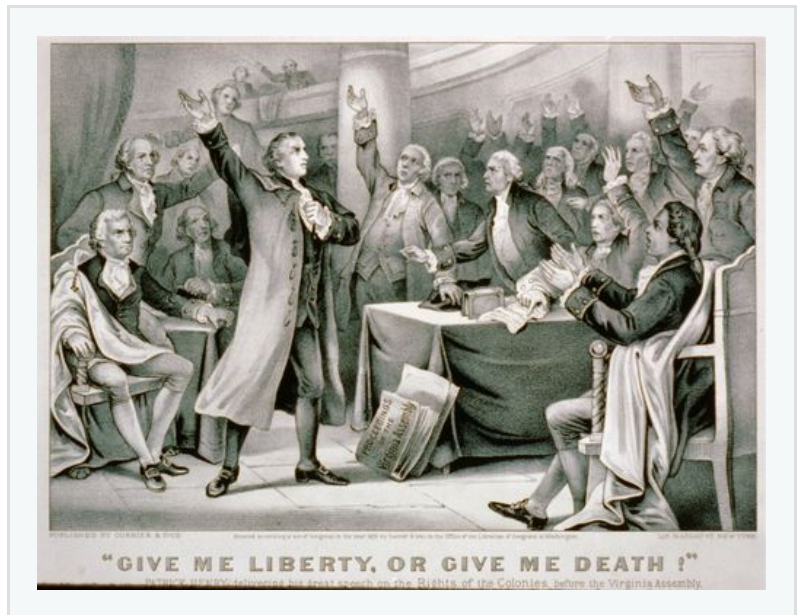
In March, members of the Virginia General Assembly debated whether their colony should prepare for war as well. Some opposed the idea, but Patrick Henry believed the time had come for action. Everyone at the meeting knew Henry was a great speaker.

When he stood to address the members, a hush fell over the room. Some of the earlier speakers had said that maybe Britain would still change its mind. Patrick Henry responded:

Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. . . . We must fight! Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field. Why stand we here idle? What is it the gentlemen wish? What would they have: Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty God!

Then Patrick Henry stood tall. He raised his arms high. His voice clear as a bell, he finished with the words that have stirred lovers of liberty ever since:

I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!



*Patrick Henry was a very persuasive speaker. Virginians responded to Patrick Henry's "give me liberty or give me death!" speech.*

Patrick Henry was wrong when he said that the war had begun. Three weeks after his speech, the real fighting began. For several months, militias in Massachusetts had been training to fight. These farmers and townspeople called themselves Minutemen because they could be ready to fight on a minute's notice. To prepare for battle, the Minutemen had been collecting guns, gunpowder, and other supplies. They hid these supplies in the village of Concord, about fifteen miles northwest of Boston.

The new governor of Massachusetts was General Thomas Gage. The British had sent him to serve as governor. General Gage learned about those hidden supplies in Concord. He also learned that two Sons of Liberty, Sam Adams and John Hancock, were hiding in the town of Lexington.

Lexington was on the way to Concord. General Gage figured he could kill two birds with one stone. He would send his soldiers to Lexington first to capture Adams and Hancock. The soldiers would then continue on to Concord and take the Minutemen's hidden supplies.

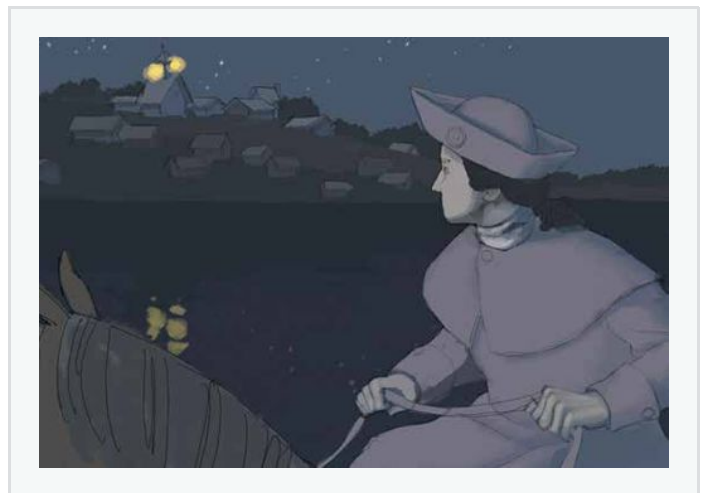
General Gage planned for his soldiers to leave Boston in the dead of night. That way no one would notice. They could take Lexington by surprise. But the Sons of Liberty found out about his plan. Two Sons of Liberty, Paul Revere and William Dawes, got ready to ride ahead of the British soldiers and warn citizens along the way.

## Paul Revere's Ride

There were two routes to Lexington. Which one would the redcoats take? The first route was longer, but it was entirely over land. The shorter route required that the troops first cross the Charles River by rowboat before starting their overland march.

William Dawes started out along the long route to Lexington. As he went, he called out to Patriot homes that the redcoats were on their way.

Paul Revere hung back, in case the British decided to cross the Charles River. He had already arranged



*Paul Revere warned colonists that the British were on the way.*

for a young man to signal to the Sons of Liberty waiting on the opposite shore. From the tower of the Old North Church in Boston, the young man would hang one lantern if the British were traveling by land. He would hang two lanterns if they were traveling by water.

When Paul Revere realized the British were planning to row across the river, he passed along the information to the signaler. That night, two lanterns burned brightly in the tower of the Old North Church. The British would be coming by water!

Paul Revere and two friends hurried to a hidden rowboat. They rowed across the water ahead of the British troops. Once on shore, Revere borrowed a horse from another Son of Liberty. He then galloped off to carry the warning to Lexington and Concord.

Stopping at every village and farm, he pounded on doors and sounded the alarm. Many people believe that Paul Revere shouted, “The British are coming!” or “The redcoats are coming!” It is more likely, though, that his warning cry was, “The Regulars are coming!” A *Regular* was another name for a British soldier. Revere never made it to Concord, but he was able to warn Sam Adams and John Hancock in Lexington. The two men escaped before the British arrived.

## The Battle at Lexington

British troops arrived in Lexington at dawn, expecting to see no one. Instead, they saw seventy Minutemen facing them on the village green. The leader of the Minutemen, Captain John Parker, told his men, “Stand your ground. Don’t fire unless fired upon.” Then he added, “But if they mean to have war, let it begin here.”

There they stood. On the one side were six hundred to seven hundred well-trained, well-armed soldiers in handsome uniforms; on the other was a much smaller group in rough dress and with fewer weapons. The British officer ordered the Minutemen to leave.

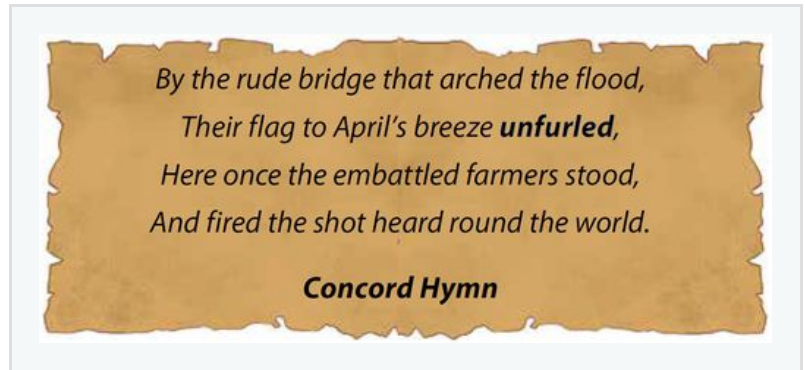
Suddenly, someone opened fire. Both sides started shooting. Within minutes, eight Minutemen were dead. Another ten lay wounded.

The British caught both William Dawes and Paul Revere before they could get to Concord. However, another Patriot named Dr. Samuel Prescott rode off with the warning of a British attack.

The British troops next pushed on to Concord. They expected to find the hidden stockpile of

weapons. However, the colonists had moved most of their supplies. This did not stop the British from destroying what little they did find.

Once again, the British were surprised to find Minutemen waiting for them. This time there were nearly four hundred of them gathered at the North Bridge, near the Concord village green.



*Many years later, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote a poem to be read at a memorial ceremony celebrating the Battle of Concord. This is the first stanza.*

Soldiers at the bridge opened fire. Minutemen fired back. After five minutes of fighting, the British decided to return to Boston.

That long march back to Boston became a nightmare for the British soldiers. Paul Revere had alerted all of the people living along the route. They had watched the British march toward Lexington in the early morning hours. Now they waited behind stone fences, barns, and trees for the British to return. In their bright red uniforms, the soldiers were easy targets. Shots rang out all along the route. Before the British got back to Boston that night, the Minutemen killed seventy-three soldiers and wounded another two hundred. That was nearly half of the number of soldiers who had set out for Lexington and Concord earlier that day. The colonists suffered losses too—nearly fifty men died. The Americans did not know it at the time, but the War for Independence had officially begun.

# The Great Declaration

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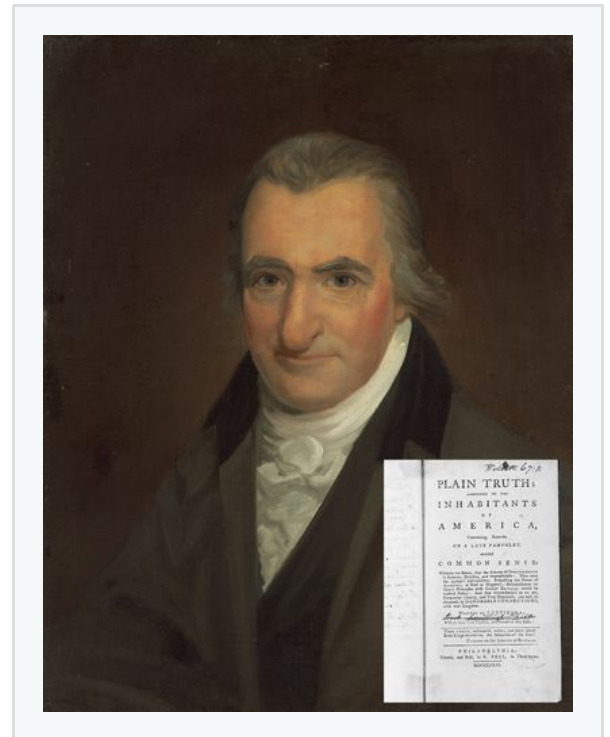
By the start of 1776, the argument between Great Britain and its colonies in America had lasted more than ten years. The actual fighting between them had gone on for almost one. The war had begun because colonists were angered and upset by the actions and rule of the British king. But still, many colonists weren't sure whether they really wanted independence.

A number of colonists opposed independence. These people were called Loyalists. Loyalists belonged to different religions and came from different social classes. They had different reasons for their loyalty. Some Loyalists made their decision for economic reasons. Some chose the British side for political reasons. Others followed religious or personal values. But all Loyalists agreed on one thing: the need to stay faithful to the king and to Great Britain.

No colony had ever broken away from a mother country. Giving up a place in the world's greatest empire and all the advantages of being part of it—was that really a smart idea? On the other hand, Patriots argued, shouldn't the colonists defend their rights and liberties? It was a very tough decision.

The decision became easier after Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*. Paine had a great and rare skill. He could write about important ideas in everyday language. If you could read at all, you could understand *Common Sense*. Paine's pamphlet was read throughout the colonies. People talked about it in their homes, on street corners, and in taverns and inns.

A lot of what Paine wrote was, in fact, plain common sense. He got readers to think about his ideas not just by telling them what he thought but also by asking what *they* thought. Did it make any sense for America to be ruled by a small nation three thousand miles away? Did it make sense for people



*Thomas Paine, a twenty-nine-year-old English immigrant, helped to persuade many colonists that the time for independence had arrived.*



to be ruled by one man, a king, just because he was born into a certain family? Wouldn't it be better if the colonists chose their own rulers?

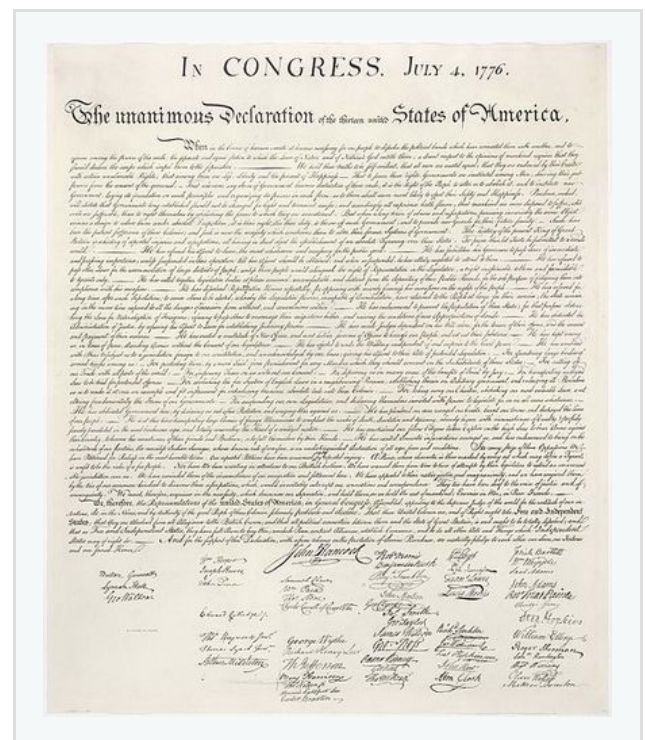
Paine said that it was common sense for Americans to cut all ties to Great Britain. It was common sense for Americans to be independent and create a government of their own. Americans didn't need a king. They could live in a land where "the law is king." The more they thought about it, the more Americans agreed. They didn't need the Parliament and the king to rule them. They had plenty of experience in choosing their own leaders and ruling themselves. Perhaps it really was time, then, to separate and go their own way.

## The Declaration of Independence

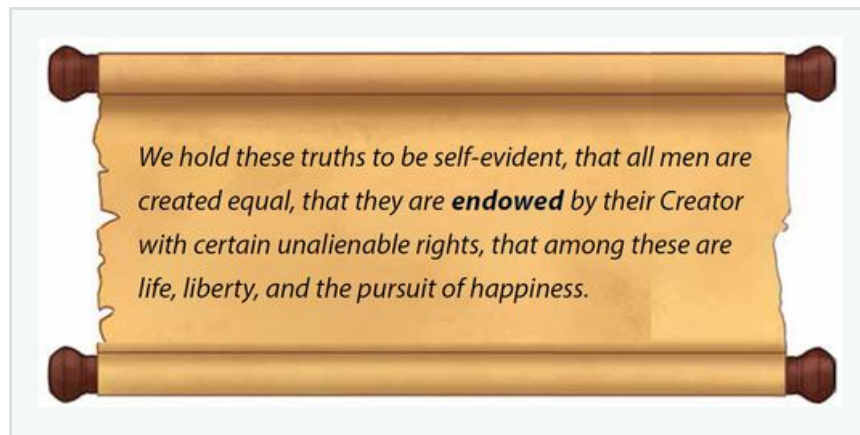
In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress took up the question of independence. Congress agreed that the time had come to separate from Great Britain. The Congress chose a committee to write a declaration, or statement. The purpose of the declaration was to explain why the colonies were breaking away from Great Britain.

The committee chosen to write the declaration included John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. Which committee member should do the main writing? Benjamin Franklin and George Washington were probably the two most famous Americans alive. John Adams was one of the first leaders to speak out in favor of independence. Thomas Jefferson, however, was known as a fine writer. Franklin and Adams chose him to write the declaration.

What Jefferson produced became the most famous document not only in American history, but also in the history of the entire world. Jefferson wanted the world to know all the bad things this king had done and all the rights he had taken away. So he listed each of them. He also explained why the king's actions made it right for the colonists to break away from Britain.



The Declaration of Independence formally announced the colonists' separation from Great Britain.



Jefferson also stated, “*That to secure these rights, governments are instituted [created] . . .*” In other words, the reason we have governments is to protect our rights.

What if a government doesn’t protect those rights? What if it takes them away? Then, said Jefferson, people have the right to create new governments for themselves. That’s what the people of the thirteen colonies were now doing.

On July 4, 1776, Congress adopted this Declaration of Independence. On that day the American colonies became independent states. Together, they made up the United States of America. Today, Americans celebrate July 4th as their Independence Day.

During the next month, in towns and cities across the states, crowds gathered to hear the Declaration of Independence read aloud. Everywhere in the new United States of America, church bells rang out. Soldiers fired cannons and shot off guns. Citizens lit great bonfires in celebration.

Meanwhile, back in Philadelphia, the delegates to the Second Continental Congress were more serious. The fifty-six men who signed the Declaration knew that if their revolution failed, the king would probably put them to death. Benjamin Franklin explained the need for all of the new states to work together. “Gentlemen,” he said, “we must all hang together, [or] else we shall all hang separately.”



# A Discouraging Start

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

The colonists and the British had already been fighting the American Revolutionary War for over a year when Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. On that day the American colonies became independent states. Together, they made up the United States of America. The fifty-six men who signed the Declaration knew that if their revolution failed, the king would probably put them to death. Benjamin Franklin explained the need for all of the new states to work together. “Gentlemen,” he said, “we must all hang together, [or] else we shall all hang separately.”

When you look at some of the problems the Americans faced, you can see that their chances of winning a war against Great Britain were not that great.

For one thing, the thirteen new states may have been united against Great Britain, but their people certainly were not. While some Loyalists stayed quiet, others helped the British. Some wrote letters of support for the British cause. Some worked as spies. About fifty thousand Loyalists actually fought in the war on the side of Great Britain. Many of them moved to Great Britain or Canada after the Revolution.

Great Britain had one of the largest armies in the world. In addition to having fifty thousand Loyalist soldiers, the British hired about thirty thousand professional soldiers from other countries. Soldiers for hire are called mercenaries. Counting the mercenaries, Great Britain’s army was five times larger than the Continental army. The British could also count on their Native American allies in the West.

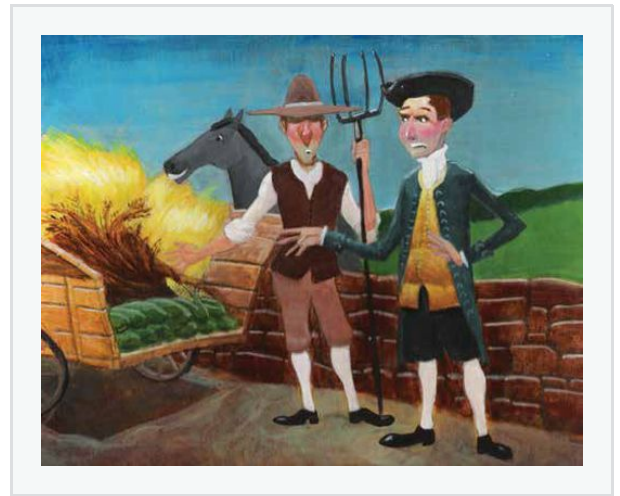
The British soldiers were well-trained fighters. Commanders could count on having their soldiers for a certain number of years. They had time to train their soldiers for battle.

General George Washington, leader of the Continental Army, had to build an army from scratch. His army was made up mainly of farmers, not professional soldiers.



*The British army had many more trained soldiers than the Continental Army.*

Washington also never knew how many soldiers he could count on at any one time. Some joined the Continental army for a three-year term. Most volunteered to serve for less than a year. Some signed up for only three months. Others joined the Continental Army when the fighting got near their villages or farms. Then they would leave the army once the British troops moved on. Soldiers would often return to their farms at planting and harvesting time. With all these comings and goings, training an army was nearly impossible.



*Most soldiers in the Continental Army were farmers who volunteered to fight.*

In addition to having a powerful army, Great Britain was one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The British could supply their army with whatever it needed. The Continental army was often short on cannons, gunpowder, food, and other supplies. It didn't even have enough uniforms. Throughout the war, most American soldiers fought in their own clothes. Several times during the war, General Washington wrote to the Continental Congress. If it didn't come up with money for supplies and pay the soldiers soon, "the army must absolutely break up."

As for a navy, the British had the greatest in the world. They had a hundred times as many warships as the Americans had.

None of that looked very good for the Americans. The Americans did have a few things going for them, though. For one, they were fighting on their own land. Fresh soldiers and supplies were often available nearby. The British had to ship everything—including soldiers—from three thousand miles away. The Americans were also fighting to defend their homes, families, and freedom. Many soldiers on the British side were just fighting for money. That made a difference.

The size of the country was another advantage for the American side. If the British won in one part of the country, American armies could move to another. Thomas Paine wrote that the American plan would be like a game of checkers: "We can move out of one square to let you come in," he said to the British, "in order that we may afterwards take two or three for one." Since the Americans could keep moving around, he said, "we can always prevent a total defeat."

## Support from Women and African Americans

The British could count on its professional soldiers, mercenaries, and Loyalists—including African Americans. In fact, most African Americans at this time supported the British cause. The British actively sought help from the African American community. They promised freedom to any enslaved person who fought for the king.

The Patriots had their own sources of help. The Patriot side also had support from African Americans. It had important support from women, too.

Women played many roles in the American Revolution. Working in army camps, they washed, cooked, sewed, made gunpowder, and nursed the wounded. Sometimes women went into battle, even though they weren't supposed to. In one battle, Mary Ludwig Hays brought her husband's cannon crew water from a nearby stream. Pitcher carriers brought water to cool off the cannons, which would overheat in battle. She carried so many pitchers that they called her Molly Pitcher.



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*Women played an important part in supporting the Patriot cause.*

According to legend, Molly's husband became ill during the battle. The other members of his cannon crew had been killed. Molly loaded and fired the cannon by herself until other soldiers arrived to take over.

Another woman who helped the Patriot cause was Deborah Sampson. Sampson dressed in men's clothing and joined the army. She was a talented soldier. It was only when she was wounded that doctors found out she was a woman. A number of other women served as messengers and spies.

Of course, women didn't have to be on a battlefield to help the Patriot cause. One of their greatest contributions was at home. In addition to doing their usual work, they also did the work of the men who had gone off to fight. There were many women who kept the family farm going or the family business running.

As you have learned, in addition to women, African Americans also played a role in the American Revolution. About five thousand African Americans fought on the American side of the Revolutionary War. Most of them were free men from the northern states. They took part in nearly every battle, starting with the very first at Bunker Hill. Several African American regiments came from New England states.

# Raising America's Spirits

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Things went badly for the Continental Army during the early part of the American Revolutionary War. Hardly three months after Americans celebrated the Declaration of Independence, a large British army assembled in New York City to do battle with George Washington's still untrained army. He was the leader of the Continental Army.

The British defeated the Continental Army easily. It almost trapped them. That might have ended the war then and there. Led by Washington, however, some of the American forces escaped.

It was during that battle for New York City that a twenty-four-year-old Connecticut schoolteacher named Nathan Hale became famous. Hale was caught serving as a spy for the Americans and was hanged by the British. His last words were, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." His words inspired the Patriots. His words are still quoted today.

After the Continental Army's narrow escape from New York, the Americans retreated across New Jersey and into Pennsylvania. The British stayed close behind. Luckily, it was getting late in the year. Winter was a hard time to fight battles. The British were satisfied to take control of New York and New Jersey, and settle in for the winter. They could finish off the Americans in the spring. It was at this moment that Washington's leadership began to pay off. Other generals might have panicked after such a setback, but not Washington. Whether he won a battle or lost, he remained steady. Soldiers admired him and were willing to follow him into battle. Battle, however, was not what Washington wanted. He knew his untrained troops were no match for the experienced British army head-on in a battle. Washington's plan for winning the war required



*Nathan Hale was executed by the British for spying for the Americans.*



patience. Instead of taking on the British directly, Washington's strategy was like Thomas Paine's checkerboard. He would keep the Continental Army moving. They would stop and fight the British now and then, but they would not get into a major battle. This way, Washington could buy time to build and train his army.

Washington's plan meant the Continental Army would not win many battles. They wouldn't lose many battles either. Meanwhile, as the war went on, the British people might tire of paying for it. After a few big American victories, who knew? Maybe the British would stop supporting the war altogether!

## A Surprise Attack

Washington realized that the American people could tire of the war too. So could his army, if it kept suffering defeats. Washington needed a quick victory, or two, to raise the spirits of his soldiers and of the rest of the nation.

Washington planned a surprise attack on British mercenaries, the soldiers the British hired from other countries. The mercenaries were called Hessians, because many came from the German state of Hesse. The Hessians were camped in Trenton, New Jersey, just across the Delaware River from Pennsylvania.

Washington planned to take the Hessians by surprise. After all, who would suspect the Continental Army to row across the ice-filled Delaware River in the dead of winter? On Christmas Night, 1776, shivering American soldiers stepped into the rowboats that would carry them across the river. By four o'clock in the morning, all 2,400 of Washington's men were on the New Jersey side of the river.

The Continental Army marched the



*This famous painting by Emmanuel Leutze of Washington crossing the Delaware River was painted many years after the event.*

nine miles to Trenton hidden by the darkness of night. As day broke, they attacked the sleeping Hessians. Caught off guard, the Hessians were surprised and confused. After a short fight, nine hundred Hessians surrendered.

The Continental Army captured not only the enemy soldiers, but also their weapons and supplies.

Eight days later, Washington won another victory. Again, he used the element of surprise, this time to defeat British soldiers in Princeton, New Jersey. Just as Washington hoped, the victories at Trenton and Princeton raised American spirits, especially for the men fighting in the Continental Army.

# Saratoga

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

General George Washington proved himself to be a very strong and tactful leader of the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. In late 1776 and early 1777, he organized surprise attacks on British mercenaries and British soldiers, giving the Americans a much needed lift in spirits.

American spirits wouldn't stay high for very long, though. Not if the British could help it. In fact, British generals had a plan to knock the Americans out of the war before the year was over.

The Hudson River runs north and south in New York State. The British aimed to win control of the entire Hudson River Valley. If the British controlled the Hudson, they could cut off New England from the other states, dividing the Americans in two. The British would then be able to defeat the rebels one part at a time. They would defeat New England first and then the rest of the states.



*The Hudson River Valley was an important part of Britain's plan for victory.*

That summer, General John Burgoyne (/bur\*goyn/) led a large British army southward from Canada into New York State. The plan was for the main British army in New York City to start moving north soon after Burgoyne entered New York State. At about the same time, a third, smaller British force in western New York State would move east. The three British armies would meet near Albany, on the Hudson River. At that point, it would be all over for the upstart Americans.

That never happened. General William Howe was in charge of the main British army in New York. Howe wanted to capture Philadelphia first before moving north along the Hudson. Philadelphia was America's largest city. It was the meeting place of the Continental Congress. What a blow to American spirits if the British were to take it!

Howe was sure he could capture Philadelphia and still have time to meet Burgoyne. He was wrong. By the time he captured Philadelphia, there was no time left to get back to New York. Howe didn't even try.

Meanwhile, the third British force — the one moving eastward across New York State — ran into Continental Army soldiers along the way. This British force, which included a large number of Native American allies, never made it to Albany either.

That left Burgoyne and his army alone, moving south in New York State. The only ones there to meet him were General Gates and thousands of soldiers of the Continental Army. In October 1777, the British and Americans fought at Saratoga, north of Albany. The Americans won. Six thousand of Great Britain's best soldiers surrendered.



*It was a great moment when General Gates accepted General Burgoyne's surrender after the Battle of Saratoga.*

## New Allies

The victory at Saratoga was a great turning point of the war. Not just because it was a great victory but also because it brought the Americans a new ally—France. The French and the English fought for a hundred years in the Hundred Years' War. Furthermore, the French lost all their North American colonies to Great Britain in the French and Indian War. Ever since, they had been burning for revenge.

One way for France to get revenge on Great Britain was to help the American colonies break away. Soon after the colonies declared their independence, France secretly started sending them money and supplies.

The money and supplies helped, but the Americans hoped for more. They wanted France to jump

into the war with both feet. Every time they asked the French to join in the fight, however, they got the same answer. France would not enter the war unless the Americans proved that they had a real chance of defeating the British.

The victory at Saratoga showed France that America could win. Several months after the Battle of Saratoga, the French entered the war on the side of the Americans. France sent money, equipment, and soldiers. Most importantly, France also sent a large naval fleet to help the Americans. It's quite possible that without help from the French, the Americans would not have won the war.

Eventually, Spain and the Netherlands also declared war against the British. This turn of events happened because three British armies failed to meet as planned in Albany.



# Valley Forge

This text is excerpted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

The winter of 1777–1778 was the worst time of the war for the Continental Army. The British had taken Philadelphia.

Twice, General Washington had sent his soldiers into battle near Philadelphia. Twice the British had defeated them. With cold weather coming on, Washington had to choose a place to camp for the winter. The place he chose was called Valley Forge, an open field about twenty-five miles northeast of Philadelphia.

Snow was already on the ground when the soldiers arrived in Valley Forge. They put up their tents and began building huts with whatever wood they could find. Before long, they had built two thousand of them. The huts were drafty, dirty, and cold but they at least put a roof over the soldiers' heads. Each hut had a fireplace but no windows. The smoke from the fires made men cough as if their lungs would burst.

The winter in Valley Forge was terrible. Supplies did not arrive. Blankets were scarce. There was not enough food. With no boots or shoes, the men wrapped their feet in rags.



*The winter at Valley Forge could have broken the spirit of the Continental Army.*

General Washington later said, “You might have tracked the army to Valley Forge by the blood of their feet.”

An officer from Connecticut explained how bad conditions were in his journal:

It snows. I’m sick. Eat nothing. . . . No forage. Lord, Lord, Lord . . . cold and uncomfortable. I am sick, discontented, and out of humor. Poor food. Hard lodging. Cold weather. Fatigue. Nasty clothes. Nasty cookery. . . . Smoked out of my senses. . . . I can’t endure it. Why are we sent here to starve and freeze?

At least 2,500 soldiers died of disease or from exposure at Valley Forge that winter. That means that every single day, soldiers had to bury twenty-five or thirty of their comrades. Some men deserted, which means they simply sneaked out of camp and went home. At the start of winter, Washington's army numbered about seven thousand men. By the end of winter, there were only about four thousand left.

## A Man of Character

What did people mean when they said that George Washington was a man of great character? They meant he was honest. They meant that he cared for his men, and that he was fair with them. They meant that people always knew where Washington stood and that he kept his word. They meant that he respected others. They meant that Washington was someone you would want on your side.

Washington also knew enough to put able men in charge of important tasks. For example, in February, when things were at their worst, a balding, red-faced man appeared at Washington's headquarters to offer his services. His name was Baron Frederick von Steuben (/stoo\*bun/). Washington could tell that von Steuben knew how to train men to be soldiers. That was exactly what Washington needed. He hired von Steuben. The German officer taught the men about soldiering. He drilled them over and over. By spring, General Washington had a well-trained army for the very first time.



*Baron von Steuben helped train American troops.*

Von Steuben was only one of a number of Europeans inspired to help the American cause. Another was a nineteen-year-old Frenchman named the Marquis (/mar\*key/) de Lafayette. As soon as he heard that fighting had begun in America, Lafayette joined the Americans. "I am persuaded," he said, "that the human race was created to be free, and that I am born to serve that cause." Washington took a liking to this daring Frenchman. Lafayette quickly became one of his most trusted aides.

# Fighting Shifts to the South

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

The Continental Army spent the very hard winter of 1777–1778 in Valley Forge. The men had to deal with freezing temperatures, poor shelter, and supply shortages. The conditions were so bad that they could have broken the spirit of the Continental Army. Yet, the Army survived the brutal winter despite having lost three thousand men to death and desertion.

While the Continental Army regrouped at Valley Forge, the British generals made another plan to win the war. For three years, the British had been fighting the Americans in the North. They had won nearly all of the battles, so they weren't losing the war. But that didn't mean they were winning it either.

To win, the British would have to beat down the rebellion. They would have to really defeat the Continental Army. Every time the British had a chance to do that, though, General Washington and his army managed to slip away.

The British generals thought: Suppose we shift the battle to the South?

That would give us several advantages. For one thing, most of the Continental Army is in the North. We will catch them off guard. Also, there are many Loyalists in the South, including enslaved African Americans. They will help us with food and supplies. After we take the South, we'll have the Continental Army squeezed between our forces there and our forces in the North.

The plan was pretty successful for a while. The British navy brought soldiers from their base in New York to Savannah, Georgia. The soldiers quickly captured the city. Within a year, they controlled the whole state of Georgia. Soon after, the British took Charleston, South Carolina, and handed the Americans their worst defeat of the war. From there, British troops successfully went on to control a large part of the South.

However, the British were still not able to crush their enemy. American military commanders in the South followed George Washington's strategy. Small battles, yes. Big battles, no. Never risk the



*British military leaders were frustrated in their efforts to defeat the Continental Army.*

whole army in one big fight. Also, Southerners knew their land better than the British did. They set up secret bases in the swamps of South Carolina. They came out of the swamps to attack small groups of British soldiers. Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, they were gone. Even though there were no large-scale battles, the fighting was at times fierce, with many casualties and some acts of cruelty.

This kind of hit-and-run fighting is called guerrilla warfare. A general named Francis Marion was so successful at it that he became known as the Swamp Fox. The British armies won many small battles, but they could never catch up to the American forces to defeat them in a big one. In time, the Americans began to win their share of the battles.

## War in the West

Meanwhile, in the West, a young Virginian named George Rogers Clark attacked several British forts that had been built near tributaries of the Ohio River. The British had used their presence and their interest in trade in the West to gain support from Native Americans. However, American settlers saw the British and the Native Americans as a threat.

On July 4, 1778, Clark and a company of 175 Virginia militiamen captured the first of the British forts without firing a single shot. Later, Clark captured two more. His victories drove the British out of part of the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River.

## A Victory at Sea

The tiny American navy, of course, was no match for the great British fleet. Still, American warships put up a good fight when they met one British ship at a time. John Paul Jones was the commander of the American ship *Bonhomme Richard* (/bahn\*um/) when it came upon the British warship *Serapis* off the coast of Great Britain. The two ships opened fire. Soon the deck of the American ship was in flames. The British commander then demanded that Jones



*The sea battle between the Bonhomme Richard and the Serapis took over four hours.*

surrender. Jones replied, “I have not yet begun to fight!”

And fight he did. His own ship, the *Bonhomme Richard*, sank, but not before Jones and his men climbed aboard the *Serapis* and took it over. This became one of the most famous naval battles in United States history.

## **Benedict Arnold**

During this time, George Washington suffered one of his greatest disappointments. It was not a defeat on the battlefield. It was a defeat of the spirit. One of the Patriots’ bravest and finest generals, and one of Washington’s favorites, went over to the enemy.

His name was Benedict Arnold. Arnold had helped win the Battle of Saratoga. He had been promoted to general. His future in the American army was bright. In 1780, General Washington placed Benedict Arnold in command of West Point, a fort on the Hudson River.

Despite his success, Benedict Arnold did not feel appreciated enough. He also liked to spend more money than he could afford on luxuries. So in exchange for a large sum of money, Arnold agreed to turn over West Point to the British.

The plot was discovered in time, but Arnold himself escaped and joined the British forces. Americans were shocked to learn of Benedict Arnold’s treason.