



NSDAR Educational Resources Committee

African Americans in the Revolutionary War

Contributor: Darla Arndt **Grade Level:** 3-5th grade

1. Identify the standards to be addressed:

California State Standards:

CA Standards grade 5 #5.6. 1 *Identify and map the major military battles, campaigns, and turning points of the Revolutionary War, the roles of the American and British leaders, and the Indian leaders' alliances on both sides.*

2. Statement of the objective and lesson outcomes:

- Students will learn about the contributions of African Americans during the American Revolutionary War.
- Students will understand the challenges and obstacles faced by African Americans during this time.
- Students will appreciate the importance of diversity in the fight for independence.

3. Materials, resources, and technology to be used by teacher/students:

1. Whiteboard and markers
2. Printed images and maps of the American Revolutionary War
3. Books and online resources about African Americans in the Revolutionary War
4. Copies of the "African Americans in the Revolutionary War" worksheet (see attached)

4. Introduction of the topic:

The history of Black men's involvement in the American Revolutionary War is a complex and multifaceted story. Over 5,000 free and enslaved black men fought in the revolutionary War. Despite the challenges they faced, many Black men played significant roles in various capacities during the war. Here is an overview of just a few of their contributions:

1. Enlisted Soldiers:

- Black men served as both free and enslaved soldiers in the Continental Army. They joined for various reasons, including the promise of freedom, monetary incentives, and their belief in the American cause. Among the most famous Black soldiers was Crispus Attucks, who is often considered one of the first casualties of the American Revolution during the Boston Massacre.
- Peter Salem, was an African-American from Massachusetts who served as a U.S. soldier in the American Revolutionary War. Born into slavery in Framingham, he was freed by a later master, Major Lawson Buckminster, to serve in the local militia is famous for his role at the Battle of Bunker Hill.
- Lemuel Haynes: Haynes was reared as an indentured servant in a pious white Massachusetts family. He served in the American Revolution in 1774 and 1775 as a Minute Man and in 1776 as a soldier in the march to Fort Ticonderoga. a prominent New England Congregational minister, and the first African American in America to receive an honorary college degree.

- Salam Poor – bought his freedom in 1776, and then joined the colony fight. He was one of 100 Black men who fought at Bunker Hill. Poor received many accolades from both colonists and British for his dedication to the war for freedom.
2. **Black Loyalists:**
 - Not all Black men supported the American patriots. Some joined the British forces, known as Black Loyalists, in exchange for the promise of freedom and protection. The British Governor Lord Dunmore of Virginia issued a proclamation in 1775 offering freedom to enslaved people who fled and joined the British ranks.
 - Colonel Tye was perhaps the best-known of the Loyalist black soldiers. An escaped bondman born in Monmouth County, New Jersey, he wreaked havoc for several years with his guerrilla Black Brigade in New York and New Jersey. At one time he commanded 800 men. For most of 1779 and 1780, Tye and his men terrorized his home county -- stealing cattle, freeing slaves, and capturing Patriots at will.
 3. **Spies and Informants:**
 - Some Black men served as spies and informants, providing crucial intelligence to the Continental Army.
 - One of the most famous spies was James Armistead Lafayette, who worked undercover as a servant in the British camp and provided vital information to General Lafayette. Born enslaved in Virginia, the French General Marquis de Lafayette recruited him to spy for the patriots in the summer of 1781. With the permission of his owner, James infiltrated General Charles Cornwallis' camp at Yorktown. James may have pretended to be a runaway slave seeking his freedom with the British army. He earned Cornwallis' trust and found himself able to look at the General's papers, took note of troop size and the health and morale of the soldiers, and communicated all he learned back to Lafayette. In turn, Lafayette wrote all of this to Washington, who would eventually defeat Cornwallis at the Siege of Yorktown in October. Some historians believe that James was acting as a double agent, leading Cornwallis to believe he would spy for the British army, all the while giving Cornwallis false intelligence about the patriots.
 4. **Laborers and Non-Combat Roles:**
 - Enslaved Black men often served as laborers, cooks, and servants for both the British and American armies. Their contributions, while not on the battlefield, were essential to the functioning of the military.
 5. **Challenges Faced:**
 - Black soldiers faced discrimination and unequal treatment. They were often paid less than their white counterparts and had limited opportunities for promotion.
 - Many Black soldiers who served in the Continental Army did not receive their promised freedom after the war ended.
 6. **Legacy:**
 - The service of Black men during the American Revolutionary War helped pave the way for the eventual abolition of slavery in the Northern states and the recognition of the importance of Black soldiers in the fight for American independence.
 - Their contributions laid the groundwork for the gradual recognition of civil rights and the ongoing struggle for equality for Black Americans.

5. **Procedure for instruction:**

1. Begin by asking students what they know about the American Revolutionary War. Write down their responses on the whiteboard.
2. Explain that today's lesson will focus on a specific group of people who played a crucial role in the war— African Americans
3. Show a map of the United States during the Revolutionary War and point out key locations where important battles took place.
4. Present information about the contributions of African Americans during the Revolutionary War. Read Story above, use visuals and examples to make it engaging and accessible.
5. Highlight key figures such as Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem, and James Armistead Lafayette.
6. Discuss the various roles African Americans played during the war, including soldiers, spies, and laborers.

7. Explain that despite their significant contributions, African Americans faced many challenges and discrimination during this time.
8. Distribute copies of the "African Americans in the Revolutionary War" worksheet to students. (attached)

Closure: Have them complete the worksheet independently or in pairs, answering questions about what they've learned.

6. Assessment of Understanding:

1. Ask students to share one thing they learned about African Americans' contributions during the Revolutionary War.
2. Emphasize the importance of recognizing the diverse groups of people who helped shape the nation's history.
3. Encourage students to think about the significance of unity and working together to achieve a common goal.
4. Review the answers as a class to ensure understanding.

Further Reading:

- *Black Patriots in the American Revolution* By: Patrick G. Cabral
- *African Americans in the Revolutionary War* By: Michael Lee Fanning
- *The American Revolution Reborn* By: Michael Zuckerman & Patrick Spero

African Americans in the Revolutionary War Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Read the information provided and answer the questions.

1. Who were some key African American figures who played important roles during the American Revolutionary War?

2. What were some of the roles that African Americans played during the Revolutionary War?

3. Why is it important to learn about the contributions of African Americans during the Revolutionary War?

4. True or False: African Americans faced no challenges or discrimination during the Revolutionary War. Explain your answer.

5. Can you think of any ways that unity among different groups of people, including African Americans, was important during the Revolutionary War?

6. Imagine you were an African American living during the Revolutionary War. What role do you think you might have played, and what challenges might you have faced?

7. Draw a picture or write a short story about a moment during the Revolutionary War where African Americans played a significant role.

8. List two facts you found interesting or surprising about African Americans in the Revolutionary War.

9. What do you think we can learn from the contributions of African Americans during this period of history?

10. If you had the opportunity to meet one of the African American figures from the Revolutionary War, what would you ask or say to them?