

REPORTING

The Revolutionary War

Lesson Plan: *Becoming the Historian*

RATIONALE: It is said that history is written by the victors. This may be especially true of the American Revolution, in which newspapers were used throughout the war to fan the flames of rebellion. In this lesson, students will act as historians and try to reconstruct the Battle of Lexington and Concord from eyewitness accounts and other documents as they are presented in various newspapers. News of this battle appeared in newspapers in bits and pieces, and much of it was selected for its effect on the readership, both here in America and in Britain. As students read, they should also consider what facts and interpretations the account provides, as well as how those accounts may have affected the opinions of its readers in support of or opposition to the goals of the rebels.

TIME: Two 45-minute class periods

PRIOR LEARNING: Students should already understand the events that led up to the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to...

- Analyze and evaluate the role that bias and perspective plays in the way the events are reported.
- Reconstruct the series of events using information from the various accounts.
- Differentiate between fact and interpretation within each account.
- Evaluate the purpose of each account in the newspaper in which it appears.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED: (*Common Core Standards*)

Listed below are some of the Common Core Standards for Literacy in History and Social Studies addressed for grades 9-10, but teachers can easily level down to grades 6-7-8 or up to 11-12 with minor modifications. Depending on how a teacher structures an assignment and the requirements for completion, these assignments can be modified to address many of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards. You can find the reading standards broken down for history at: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>

RI: Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.10 By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

RI: Key Ideas and Details

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

RI: Craft and Structure

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4](#) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#) Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

RI: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8](#) Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9](#) Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

W: Text Types and Purposes

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

W: Range of Writing

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.10](#) Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

(National Center for History in the Schools)

- ***Historical***
 - Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage by identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.
 - Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations but acknowledge that the two are related; that the facts the historian reports are selected and reflect, therefore, the historian's judgment of what is most significant about the past.
- ***Historical thinking***
 - Compare and contrast competing historical narratives.
 - Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:

- 1775 April 21 *New-Hampshire Gazette* (first account)
- 1775 May 12 *New-England Chronicle* (exchange between Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull and British General Thomas Gage; additional accounts of the battle)
- 1775 June 1 *London Chronicle* (accounts from both sides of the conflict – see provided worksheet)

DAY 1

WARM-UP: 5-10 minutes

1. **True/False “Pretest” (quick way to review a few facts of the event.)** – Give students a green card reading “true” and a red card reading “false.” Verbally read the following “pretest” questions related to Lexington and Concord. Students should hold up the card they think correctly answers the question. When all cards are raised

for a given question, give students the right answer and then briefly explain any relevant information.

- a. Paul Revere rode from Boston to Concord, warning people along the way that the British army was coming. (*false—there were two men who rode from Boston – Paul Revere and William Dawes and dispatched by Joseph Warren, along with many other riders or expresses who helped alarm the countryside that evening. On the way, Revere and Dawes were joined by a third rider Samuel Prescott. Revere never made it all the way to Concord. He was captured by British scouts just outside Lexington, and was soon released without his horse. Revere walked back to Lexington to assist John Hancock in his escape just before British troops arrived at Lexington Green. Only Prescott made it all the way to Concord.*)
- b. Thomas Gage was the General in charge of the British Troops in Boston and gave the order to march on Lexington and Concord. (*True: His decision was partly prompted by criticism that he was doing nothing to counter the American rebels.*)
- c. The objective of the British troops was to recover weapons and ammunition stolen by the rebels and stored at Lexington and Concord (*False—their mission was to destroy the stores at Concord. However, Americans had enough early warning to move the munitions to safety, and the British troops failed to destroy enough to make a difference.*)
- d. The British fired first (*Trick question. While newspaper reports provide testimonials stating the British fired first, the theory is made in Patriot newspapers (biased) or by captured British soldiers (likely instructed on what to say), so the merits of the statement can easily be questioned. Some witnesses reported the first shot came from a colonist behind a wall or a tavern. Bottom line, who fired the first shot was and is still a hotly debated question with no certain answer!*)

2. Discuss definitions of “fact” and “interpretation” and the role that selection of facts plays in affecting the bias of a report.

- a. Fact: can be proven either true or false.
- b. Interpretation: writer’s explanation of the facts, often revealing writer’s bias.

ACTIVITY:

1. **(5 minutes) Have students read quietly the first account of the Battles at Lexington and Concord as printed in the 1775 April 21 New Hampshire Gazette.** As students read, they should annotate the text, putting a straight line underneath facts, and a wavy line underneath interpretations of those facts. When they finish reading, students should think like a Colonial American: what questions would they have related to this event? Students should list as many questions as they can think of.
2. **(5 minutes) Question time.** Randomly hand markers out to students, who each must go to the board and write one question they have about the battles at Lexington and Concord. Once each student has written a question, he/she must hand the marker to another student, who should do the same. It is suggested that markers fits be given to one or two students who might struggle to come up with more complex questions, as it will be difficult for later students to think of something that is not already up on the board. It is not necessary that all students go to the board.

3. **(5 minutes) Evaluating questions:** When a good number of questions (at least 10, preferably 15) have been written on the board, ask students to identify which questions are the most important. Discuss whether any questions are irrelevant. Rank the questions, then have students write down the questions in their notebook, with several lines of space left between for the answers to be found later on. They should keep these questions handy throughout the rest of the reading.
4. **(5 minutes) Have students read the account written by a British soldier from the 1775 May 12 edition of the *New-England Chronicle* which begins: “I am well, all but a wound...”** Remind students that this is an account written by a British soldier, but the account appeared in an American newspaper. As they read, they should draw a straight line under important facts, and a wavy line under potentially biased interpretations or opinions.
5. (5-10 minutes) Students should write a short paragraph explaining the purpose of including this particular account in an American newspaper. All paragraphs are due by the end of the period, completed or not. (If you choose to evaluate these paragraphs, consider evaluating how well the student is able to craft an argument, especially for those students who do not finish.)
Remind students...
 - Response should begin with a clear topic sentence responding to prompt.
 - Response should use at least two or three examples from the account to support the topic sentence, along with analysis of the examples.
 - Pay attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation.
6. **For homework:** Students should read the remaining accounts in the 1775 May 12 newspaper and try to answer as many questions as possible from list of class questions. They should also attempt to create a timeline for the Battles.

DAY 2

WARM-UP: (5-10 minutes)

- **As students come into class, the list of questions from the previous day should be on the board.** As students come into class, give them a white-board marker (or chalk) and have each student write answer one question. There can be multiple answers for each question, no two answers may be exact. Not all questions will be answered, since the articles do not provide all necessary information.
- **When all students have had a chance to answer one of the questions,** discuss the following:
 - How difficult was it to piece together what actually happened?
 - In what ways did the accounts agree?
 - In what ways did they disagree, even among soldiers from the same army? How might this make the reconstruction of history difficult?
 - What purpose did the articles serve in an American Newspaper?

ACTIVITY

1. **(10 minutes) Reading accounts given by eyewitnesses.** Divide the class into groups of three or four students and hand out the accounts that appeared in the 1775 June 1 *London Chronicle* (see provided work sheet). Explain to students that these accounts are the first ones that the British would have seen, and that General Gage’s account would follow more than two weeks later.

Assign each group a “first” and “second” account to read, making sure that all accounts are assigned throughout the class. Some accounts may be read twice. Students should read the articles quietly to themselves, underlining any important information, and drawing a wavy line under possibly biased interpretations or opinions. (All of the accounts are reprinted on the handout “Reconstruction_WS2”) Students who finish early can identify any questions that have been answered, and write those answers in their own notebooks.

2. **(10 minutes) Small group discussion.** Once all students have finished reading, have students get into their assigned groups and assign a recorder to keep track of the group’s discussion as they address the following questions:
 - What new facts have been revealed?
 - In what ways do the accounts agree?
 - In what ways do they not agree?
 - How would British readers have reacted to these accounts?
3. **(10 minutes) Whole class discussion.** Bring the class together. Ask students to fill in any missing answers to the questions on the board, based on the articles they read. Continue until the end of the period, or all possible answers have been exhausted.

SUGGESTED ACCOMODATIONS

- For students who have difficulty with comprehension, reduce the number of articles they should read. As they read, have students use comprehension techniques such as chunking, questioning and defining.
- Provide a glossary page along with the articles for ESL students or students with limited vocabulary skills.

SUGGESTED EXTENSIONS

- **Literary connection: Have students read “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere”** as well as a factually accurate account of the event. Students should then write a response to the following question: How does the poem romanticize our perception of Paul Revere’s involvement in a way that the factual account does not?”
- **Have students read the exchange between Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull and British General Thomas Gage** as it appears in the 1775 May 12 *New-England Chronicle* and consider how these official documents provide insight to our understanding of these events. Have students write an analysis of the reporting of these events based on the various accounts and letters they have read.
- **Have students apply the same questioning skills to a modern event.** Suggested events include accounts of current battles, terrorist attacks, political events, or other newsworthy events that would have multiple perspectives to evaluate. Encourage students to use a variety of news sources including outlets that are considered conservative and liberal, as well as those in foreign countries, like the BBC or Al Jazeera.

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL READING:

Reporting the Revolutionary War: Before It Was History, It Was News by Todd Andrlik

