

PROJECT TITLE:

**Using Historical Fiction to breathe life into the Revolutionary War for
younger students**

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GRADE LEVEL & SUBJECT
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SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

1. **Primary Investigative Question(s)** – Who fought in the Revolutionary War, what was the world like, and what motivated them?

2. **Contextual Essay**

Children in 4th grade are taught to recognize some important figures of the American Revolution, typically the iconic figures, the “monument guys” – Washington, Jefferson, Franklin (the one-hundred dollar bill). Sometimes there is time to throw in Madison and Adams. Ideology may be discussed; however, it is difficult for the average 10-year-old to grasp these concepts. Freedom and independence at the government level do not impinge on children’s lives. Nor do they have a whole lot in common with old, dead, rich, privileged guys in white wigs.

Fortunately, the American Revolution was not fought by the guys in wigs (excepting Washington and Adams). It was fought by an interesting variety of people. Germans, French, Russian, Spanish, British, Americans, Native Americans, whites, blacks, women, men – we can find some of each on both sides. An individual was not immediately recognizable as belonging to one side or the other. Neighbors fought neighbors. Indian tribes split. People changed sides. In one battle, the Redcoats turned their coats inside out so they could sneak up on the Americans unrecognized. Like life in general, the war was more complicated and messy than one might expect. It can be hard to tell the good guy from the bad guy. Learning to view the world in shades of gray rather than black and white is a crucial part of the growing up process.

Woods Runner is the story of a 13-year-old boy at the beginning of the American Revolution. The War has a very real impact on Samuel and his family. He experiences loss, fear, anger, confusion, and happiness – all emotions that children can understand and connect with. This fictional character encourages children to put themselves in his

shoes. Samuel is dealt a difficult hand but emerges without becoming bitter. The story invites us to think about human character. Who was good and who was bad? Who decides?

What follows is an in-depth look at the groups that are portrayed in *Woods Runner*, namely the British soldiers, American soldiers, Hessian mercenaries, and Iroquois warriors. The purpose is to give the teacher enough background knowledge to be able to comfortably lead a classroom discussion on 1) who fought in the American Revolution, 2) what was the world like then, and 3) what motivated them to fight? In answering these questions, a clearer picture of who was good and who was bad emerges.

An abundance of information has been included; perhaps your students are of Scots heritage or Iroquois. Perhaps a student has Tories in his family tree or is descended from a deserter or from a free black slave who fought for the Americans. The teacher should not feel beholden to teach all the information but should pick and choose the pieces that work best for his or her students.

General information

On the night of April 18, 1775, following a period of discontent and growing mistrust between the thirteen British colonies of North America and the kingdom of Great Britain, General Gage of Great Britain sends 700 men to seize munitions stored by the colonial militia at Concord, Massachusetts. British troops enter Lexington on the morning of April 19, finding Minutemen (so called because they could be ready in a minute) formed up on the village green. Shots are exchanged, killing several minutemen. The British move on to Concord, where a detachment of three companies is engaged and routed at the North Bridge by a force of 500 minutemen. As the British retreat back to Boston, thousands of militiamen attack them along the roads, inflicting great damage.

With the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Revolutionary War began. The war was fought on land and sea, in America, the West Indies, and abroad, involving the French, the Dutch, Native Americans, the Colonists, and the British. It continued for eight long years before the two main players, battered, bruised, and exhausted, formally agree to peace, signing the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783.

Why was the Revolutionary War fought? Your childhood textbook talked about taxation without representation, freedom, independence from Great Britain, and the desire for self-government. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence listed the colonists' grievances against Great Britain, saying that the "History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States." Armitage said in *America on the World Stage* that the primary purpose of the Declaration of Independence was "to turn a civil war among Britons, and within the British Empire, into a legitimate war between states under the law of nations. In August 1775, George III had already turned the American colonists into rebels by proclaiming them to be outside his protection." He further stated that the colonists sought "to transform themselves from

outlaw into legitimate belligerents.” All of these and more were powerful motivating factors for a nation to begin and engage in a War; but nations do not fight wars—people do. Who were they, what was it like for them, and what motivated them? Perhaps by looking at these questions, we can understand them better and learn to see both sides of the equation, good and bad.

The Americans

“England has the most powerful army and navy in the world, and a gaggle of farmers would have to be insane to fight them” *Woods Runner*, p. 15.

The struggle for American independence was led by prominent lawyers, merchants, and planters. “But the Revolution’s success ultimately depended on the willingness of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Americans to risk their lives and economic well-being in the patriotic cause.” [Mintz] Americans of all backgrounds answered the call to arms created by the Revolution. Over the course of the war, it is estimated that 400,000 Americans served in the fighting for at least some of the time. [Mintz]. The American forces consisted of regular members of the Continental Army and of militia. The Continental Army, authorized by the Continental Congress and led by George Washington, never numbered more than 20,000 soldiers at any one time. [Mintz] Two thirds of Washington’s forces were enlisted in the Continental Army. The other third were troops sent by individual states for a limited term of enlistment in the Continental Army. The second component of the American forces, the militia, were comprised of men who stayed close to home (farmers, laborers, etc.) and who took up arms as needed when the enemy drew near. The Minutemen were an example of this type of soldier. Most of the American soldiers were young, ranging in age from their early teens to mid-20’s. In fact, according to the first census of 1790, greater than 50% of Americans were under the age of majority. The youngest documented soldier was a mere 8 years of age. [Werner]

Other members of the army were indentured servants or slaves who were sent as substitutes for their masters. Free men sold themselves for a term of enlistment as substitutes for their wealthier neighbors or for officers to meet their quota of men. Since he had decided to enlist, Revolutionary soldier Joseph Plumb Martin reminisces in his diary “I thought, as I must go, I might as well endeavor to get as much for my skin as I could.” [Martin, p. 61] Looking just at Valley Forge, fourteen brigades from eight states made up Washington’s army. Within these brigades roughly half the men were of English and Scottish ancestry. Although it is not possible to be 100% accurate, it is commonly believed that 25% of the Regulars were of Irish descent and 12% of German [Arsenault]. The remainder were a mixture of Dutch, Swedish, Polish, African, and Native Americans. Interestingly, the German Americans did not generally speak English. These inhabitants of the Ohio and Shenandoah Valleys were hard-working, industrious farmers who kept to themselves within their communities but who also happened to excel as gunsmiths. They were renowned for their excellent long rifles and exceptional ability as marksmen. Congress called for the formation of 10 companies of rifle sharpshooters, six of which were to come from Pennsylvania, two from Maryland, and two from Virginia, all states with large German American

populations. [Aresenault] Although the Committee of Safety in May 1775 forbade the enlistment of any person who was not American born as well as the provision that no slaves be admitted upon any consideration whatsoever, these policies were soon abandoned. Approximately 5,000 enslaved and free blacks served in the Continental Army. Washington's manservant and huntsman, Billy Lee, was with him throughout the Revolutionary War. Although some blacks had been sold into service as substitutes for their masters, many free blacks chose to serve for the same reasons that the German and Irish did—the promise of food and wages at a time when steady employment was scarce. [Aresenault]

Non-Americans assisted the Americans and were also part of the army at Valley Forge and other places. Baron Von Steuben, a Prussian officer, lent his services to Washington's army and drilled the ragtag soldiers into a proper army over the course of the winter. Ironically, it was the work of the Baron and other foreigners at Valley Forge that created a new identity and confidence among Washington's soldiers, boosting their morale and uniting the Continental Army. [Aresenault] After 1778, the French officially allied with the Americans and sent troops, officers, and money. Lafayette is the best known of the French allies. Without the strong support of the French, the Revolutionary War might not have been won by the Americans.

The British

"We don't like the British," Annie said suddenly. "They're all bad. Every damn one of them" *Woods Runner*, p. 100

Common history has it that about a third of the colonists were Patriots, a third Loyalists (meaning colonists who remained loyal to Britain), and a third who preferred to stay neutral. Some 25,000 Loyalists fought on the side of the British. Thousands more served in the Royal Navy. On land, Loyalist forces fought alongside the British in most battles in North America. There was not any way to tell from looking at a colonist which side he supported. Joseph Martin notes, "There was no trusting the inhabitants, for many of them were friendly to the British, and we did not know who were or who were not, and consequently, were distrustful of them all..." Early in 1775, the British Army consisted of about 36,000 men worldwide, but wartime recruitment steadily increased this number. In 1778, the royal army consisted of nearly 50,000 regular troops. [Mintz] Recruiting in England for troops to fight in the Colonies was difficult. Because England considered the disruption in the colonies to be civil disobedience rather than a war, officers were not decorated for their service here. Some officers refused to choose sides in the conflict and would not serve. Britain turned to Hessian mercenaries to fill its muster roles.

The Hessians

"They ain't nothing good about the Hessians. They were born bad." *Woods Runner*, p. 106.

At the time of the Revolution in Hesse-Cassel, it was the custom of the Landgrave of Hesse to recruit men and sell their services to the highest bidder. Frequently, men were forcibly recruited. "Spendthrifts, loose livers, drunkards, arguers, restless people, and such as made political trouble, if not more than sixty years old and of fair health and stature, were forced into the ranks." [Lowell] Together with this mixed rabble served the "honest peasant lads of Germany, forced from their ploughs." [Lowell] The force of German mercenaries which England maintained in America from 1776 to 1783 averaged at any given time about twenty thousand men. In the course the war about thirty thousand soldiers were brought over; seventeen thousand returned to Germany when the war was ended; the remainder died, deserted, or were given their release from the military and remained in America. Some made their way to German-American settlements and were assimilated. In addition to the pay of the soldiers and to all expenses except those of recruiting and equipment, England paid in levy-money and subsidies to the princes more than £1,770,000 sterling for the services of these men.

Johann Gottfried Seume, who afterwards attained some prominence as a writer, was a victim of the recruiting system and gave an account of his adventures, was a theological student at Leipsic. On his way home he passed through Hesse and was apprehended by a recruiter. "I was brought under arrest to Ziegenhayn, where I found many companions in misfortune from all parts of the country. There we waited to be sent to America in the spring, after Faucitt should have inspected us. I gave myself up to my fate, and tried to make the best of it, bad as it might be." [Lowell] Seume says his companions were "a runaway son of the Muses from Jena, a bankrupt tradesman from Vienna, a fringemaker from Hanover, a discharged secretary of the post-office from Gotha, a monk from Warzburg, an upper steward from Meinungen, a Prussian sergeant of hussars, a cashiered Hessian major from the fortress itself, and others of like stamp." [Lowell]

The Hessian soldiers were generally reviled in America. The average Hessian spoke no English. Wasmus, a German surgeon in the Royal army, complains "Now I am sitting and sweating over English books...the English language is so difficult, it is so hard to learn; the pronunciation in particular is very difficult." [Wasmus, p. 87] A British redcoat could remove his coat and blend in with the colonists. The Hessian could not; he gave himself away as soon as he opened his mouth. By all accounts, the Hessian soldiers were generally hard-working and obedient. At the battle of Trenton, 900 Hessian soldiers were captured by the Americans. They were paraded through the streets of Philadelphia where the people screamed and threw things at them. Their American guards hurried the Hessians quickly to their barracks for their safety. Johannes Reuber, a Hessian soldier, wrote "General Washington posted broadsides all over town and in the country side stating that we were innocent and had not entered this war voluntarily but had been forced to do so. We should not be regarded as enemies, but should be accepted and treated as friends.... Because General Washington had given his word of honor, conditions improved for us." [Werner] After the surrender of the British at Yorktown, the Hessian soldiers stacked their guns neatly and in an orderly fashion; by contrast, the British soldiers jammed their weapons and threw them in a heap. [Werner]

The Iroquois

“Indians doing it because they were hired to do it. They’s Iroquois, most of ‘em work for the English, always have, always will.” *Woods Runner*, p. 71.

By the late 1700’s the Native American population was widely varied. Having endured two hundred years of exposure to Europeans, their numbers were decimated by conflict, war, disease, displacement, and land deals that somehow always favored the white man. Some Indians lived in tribal villages; some lived in villages that were Indian but of mixed tribes; some lived side-by-side with Euro-Americans. Many spoke German or Celtic inflected English tongues in addition to one or more of their native languages. Missionaries had been hard at work—many Indians were baptized, had Christian names, and some had been to school and could read and write. On the frontier, many Indians and whites had intermarried, grown up together, traded with each other, hunted in the same woods, and wore similar clothes. Adoption of prisoners was a common practice among some Indian tribes. During the Indian wars of the seventeenth century, the Iroquois adopted hundreds—even thousands—of alien captives, sometimes whole villages, thereby subsuming other tribes, replenishing their own population through adoption, and subsequently ensuring a lasting peace. [Graymont, p. 17] White women and children were commonly adopted as well. Interestingly, few of these adoptees wished to return to their former people once they became fully integrated into Indian society. A famous example is that of Mary Gemison, who was taken prisoner as a young woman during the French and Indian War. Jemison was given by her Shawnee captors to the Seneca. She later married first a Delaware Indian, and when he died, a Seneca. She was happy with Indian life and declined repatriation to white society. [Graymont, 18].

Early Americans adopted methods, lifestyles, artifacts, and ideas from the Indians. Washington was well aware of the guerilla method of warfare that the Indians practiced. During the French & Indian War, he attempted to dissuade General Braddock from marching in formation, wearing red, and announcing the army’s whereabouts with fife and drum. Braddock was ambushed, of course, and lost his life. The Indians adopted many of the white man’s ways as well. In fact, by the 1770’s, Indians had laid down their traditional weapons in favor of the gun. Graymont says that “With the acquisition of superior European metal implements, the Indians rapidly lost their old skills in fashioning stone and bone implements. The metal knives, axes, hoes, awls, needles, and kettles of the white were fast becoming necessities.” Their traditional lifestyle had changed and they became dependent on the white man.

Few Indians recognized any central authority, native or European. [Richter] An exception to this disregard for authority was the Six Nations of the Iroquois. The date of the founding of the Iroquois league is believed to have begun sometime between 1570 and 1600. It originally consisted of five tribes, the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Tuscaroras joined in 1722. The League was organized with fifty chiefs whose titles were hereditary. There were warrior chiefs and civil chiefs called sachems. These chiefs were confirmed in office by the General Council of the League. Each tribe had an equal voice. Over the years, the council became involved in matters of diplomacy, including war and peace, alliances with other tribes, and

treaties with European settlers. [Graymont, p. 14] Because the Iroquois were organized and controlled so much territory (essentially the entire Ohio valley and the waterways that linked the region), the pre-Revolution British sought to ally and create treaties with the Iroquois rather than other disparate tribes. The Iroquois had a tendency to speak for all tribes, including those that were not part of the League, and made treaties accordingly, sometimes ceding land that did not by rights belong to them.

Early in the Revolutionary War, neither the loyalists nor the patriots sought to enlist the Iroquois' support, urging the Indians to remain neutral in what was essentially a "family quarrel". [Washburn] Not until the summer of 1776 did either Americans or British formally approach the Iroquois nation. Joseph Brant, a Mohawk war chief had traveled to England with Colonel Guy Johnson, where he was feted and honored. George Romney painted Brant's portrait while he was there. Not surprisingly, upon his return to America, Brant urged his countrymen to fight against the Americans. He succeeded in getting four of the six Iroquois nations to fight against the Americans. The Oneida and Tuscarora refused and allied with the Americans instead. [Washburn] Each side believed they were choosing the side that would most likely help them maintain ownership of their land. This split decision broke the unity of the Iroquois nation. In choosing sides, they tore their confederacy apart; and in losing their confederacy, they lost their best chance at unity and preserving their land.

Conclusion

What was the world like for the common soldier of the Revolution? Regardless of which side a soldier fought for, all of them shared some common experiences. Getting supplies to the soldiers was difficult for several reasons. The British were boggled by the vast expanse of the land and the difficulty of establishing a supply line. The colonists did not have the wealth of the Crown behind them and largely depended on the countryside around them and the kindness of the locals. Hardship was the rule, not the exception. Recounts one soldier, "...we were forced by our old master Necessity, to lay down and sleep if we could, with three others of our constant companions, Fatigue, Hunger, and Cold." [Martin] Animosity was not necessarily felt toward the enemy-- "I singled out a man and took my aim directly between his shoulders. He was a good mark, being a broad-shouldered fellow. What became of him I know not; the fire and smoke hid him from my sight. One thing I did know, that is, I took as deliberate aim at him as ever I did at any game in my life. But after all, I hope I did not kill him, although I intended to at the time." [Martin]

What motivated him to fight? At the end of the day, what made him actually pull the trigger? Many times, as was the case with Samuel in *Woods Runner*, kill or be killed. Turning again to Martin for a tongue-in-cheek synopsis, "[We] wished nothing more than to have [the enemy] engage us, for we were sure of giving them a drubbing, being in excellent fighting trim, as we were starved and as cross and ill-natured as curs."

Who was the common soldier? Most of the time the common soldier was a young man far from home. He was too cold or too hot, tired, nearly always hungry, nearly always risking his life. He may have been a good, staunch, loyal citizen doing the right thing – for the

King or for the colonies. He might have been abducted and forced into the army like so many of the Hessians. He might have been fighting for his homeland like the Indians. He could come from any walk of life, from a number of different countries, speaking a variety of languages. He was everybody, really, or anybody. He could have been you or me.

Annotated Bibliography

Armitage, David. "The Declaration of Independence in a World Context." *America on the World Stage: a Global Approach to U.S. History*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008. 17-28.

Summary: Armitage clearly states that the Americans needed to turn a rebellion into a war, themselves from outlaws to legitimate belligerents. They begin this process with the Declaration of Independence and continue it with the Revolutionary War. This article is a good jump-off point for examining the confusion and hesitation of all the parties involved in the fight for independence.

Arsenault, Anne H. "E Pluribus Unum: Pluralism in the Continental Army." *Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Home : Historical Society of Pennsylvania*. May 2002. Web. 14 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.hsp.org>>.

Summary: Originally appearing in the semi-annual *Pennsylvania Legacies* published by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, this electronic article discusses the challenge of thirteen disparate colonies trying to find common ground. Arsenault centers on the winter in Valley Forge and the multiple cultures and countries of origin represented at Valley Forge and their contributions to the Revolution.

Glatthaar, Joseph T., and James Kirby Martin. *Forgotten Allies: the Oneida Indians and the American Revolution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Glatthaar and Martin look at the period surrounding the Revolutionary War focusing on the Continental Army's allies, the Oneida Indians. It provides a good counterpoint with Alan Taylor's book, which looks at the Iroquois Indians in general, spending more time on the British-allied tribes. This book presents a sympathetic view of the Oneidas, their efforts to help the Americans, and what became of them after the War.

Graymont, Barbara. *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*. [Syracuse, N.Y.]: Syracuse UP, 1972.

Summary: As Graymont notes in her preface, Indians were mostly without a means of writing; the majority of their history was oral. As a result, any history of the Indians is confined almost wholly to documents written by whites and from the white point of view. Nevertheless, Graymont combs the personal letters, memoirs, and council records that have survived to piece together a chronological history of the

Iroquois in relation to the American Revolution. The most useful aspect of this book proved to be the introduction to the reader of numerous important Indian figures, such as Red Jacket, Joseph Brant, Cornplanter, Blacksnake, and others whose leadership shaped the lives of the Iroquois and the whites who came into contact with them.

Henriques, Peter R. "A Kind of Inevitable Necessity: The Presidency of George Washington." *Realistic Visionary: a Portrait of George Washington*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2006. 45-66.

Summary: This chapter shows that Washington's leadership was the glue that captured and held together the thirteen colonies during the War and in the first decade of this country. Written in the eloquent style and with the depth of knowledge that one associates with David Henriques.

Lowell, Edward J. "Chapter 4: The Soldiers." *The Hessians: and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1975. Print.

Summary: Posted on the web by www.americanrevolution.org, much of the irreplaceable source material that the author consulted was destroyed by Allied bombs during World War Two. This is a perfect for gathering the numbers and basics of Hessian participation in the Revolutionary War.

Martin, Joseph Plumb, and George F. Scheer. *Private Yankee Doodle; Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1962. P

Summary: One of the best surviving first-person accounts of the life and times of a private soldier of the Revolution, Martin's memoir shows the human side of soldiering : the fright, pain, deprivation, loneliness, and boredom but also the diversions, celebrations, odd good meal and billet, even tyrsts with the odd saucy miss. Martin was there at Valley Forge and even meets the great Washington himself. A wonderful, readable work to pique the interest of a nascent historian.

Mintz, S. (2007). The American Revolution. *Digital History*. Retrieved 04/16/2010 from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>.

This Web site was designed and developed to support the teaching of American History in K-12 schools and colleges and is supported by the Department of History and the College of Education at the University of Houston. It is a good source for recalling general information.

Richter, Daniel K. "Gloomy and Dark Days." *Pennsylvania Legacies*. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Web. 15 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.hsp.org>>.

Although it focuses mostly on the time period before, during, and immediately after the French and Indian War, this article brings an important point to the question of Indian and settler relations. Both sides committed atrocities, but whereas Indians chose specific targets for retaliation, whites found "any Native American an appropriate target." Richter asserts that the on-going war between Indians and whites was essentially a race war.

Taylor, Alan. *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

In clear, simple, and easily accessible language, Taylor tells the story of the Joseph Brant and Samuel Kirkland and the struggle for ownership of land before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. This book is most useful for highlighting for the reader the major actors and events of the time. It also has more than 120 pages of notes and bibliography--rich resources!

Washburn, Wilcomb E. "Indians and the American Revolution." *Americanrevolution.org*. Web. 16 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.americanrevolution.org>>.

A straight-forward article from the late Wilcomb E. Washburn, one of America's most versatile and accomplished historians, who received his Ph.D. (American Civilization) from Harvard University in 1955. This is the annotated text of a presentation he made in Riverside, CA, during the time he was Director of American Studies at the Smithsonian Institution.

Werner, Emmy E. *In Pursuit of Liberty: Coming of Age in the American Revolution*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006.

Summary: According to the first census in 1790, over half over the new country's population was under the age of 16. This wonderful work is based on the eyewitness accounts of 100 boys and girls who were between the ages of 5 and 16 at the time of the Revolutionary War--white, black, boy, girl, slave, free, hostage, loyalist, pacifist, city and country dwellers. Chronologically organized, Werner's book explores the Revolution from multiple angles, clearly and honestly, tempered by the voices of children.