

People of the Revolution

Essays about People of the American Revolution Who Had to Choose Sides

After the colonies declared their independence, the military conflict between America and Great Britain developed into an all-out war, involving American, British, German, and eventually, French soldiers. The Revolution eventually became a long and brutal struggle that divided many communities and affected all Americans. After more than two centuries, the conflict that won American independence has been obscured by an aura of glory and patriotism. In reality, the Revolution created confusion, blurred loyalties, and redefined the concepts of patriotism and treason. Some Americans chose sides early on, moved by ideals such as liberty or loyalty to the king. Many acted primarily to defend their families and property, or in response to extreme mistreatment. Others simply attempted to remain neutral and uninvolved.

The war often forced individuals to choose sides whether they wanted to do so or not. As the fighting continued and the war seemed unwinnable, many Americans became discouraged or “disaffected” but others remained committed to the “Glorious Cause” – or to the King. The American Revolution acted like a crucible, dissolving the earlier colonial society and fusing together a new, more egalitarian one.

The Revolution eventually involved and affected a wide variety of people, ranging from small farmers, high-ranking military officers, housewives, Indian warriors, enslaved African-Americans, and common soldiers from several countries. The following biographical sketches tell the stories of a representative sample of just a few individuals who experienced the impact of the conflict. They include some famous figures such as the Marquis de Lafayette, but most will be relatively unknown people who have not been written about in history textbooks. Their experiences demonstrate how the war changed their lives – for better or for worse.

Included along with these short biographies are selections of what these people had to say about their experiences in their own words – taken from their diaries, letters, or other accounts, as well as suggestions for further reading for those who want to learn more.

Ideas for Educator Engagement

Inquiry – Have students reach out to active military, veterans, and their families to create a comparison between life in today’s military and what was described by the historical figures in this unit of study.

Through Their Eyes – Have students write a journal entry of letter from the point of view of the historical figure, or from the perspective of person who dealt with the historical figure.

State of the Art – Have students create a visual artistic interpretation that expresses a perspective on the source material.

For Your Consideration – Assign students historical figures from the unit of study, and have them participate in a Colonial Town Hall Debate. Students goal is to convince others to believe as they do regarding American Independence.

Think Local – Have students discuss the way(s) that the story of this historical figure represent the American Revolution on a local level?

Live in the Now – Lead students in a discussion of the following: Are there topics today that are as divisive and as dangerous as the choice of loyalty or patriotism during the American Revolution? In the 21st century are we able to remain neutral?

#Hashtag – Have students create a social media profile for one of the historical figures covered. Alternatively, create a Twitter feed surrounding one of the events of the American Revolution and include the perspectives of many historical figures.

Elizabeth Drinker	Boston King	Francisco de Miranda
Grace Galloway	Jeremiah Greenman	Bartholmew James
Samuel Lane	Johann Dohla	Phyllis Wheatley
Frances Bland Tucker	James Dick	Jacob Ellgood
Jean Francois Crevecoir	Johann Ewald	Mary Jemison
Jemima Condict	Chainbreaker	Jehu Grant
Isaac Sears	White Eyes	Bernardo de Galvez
Benjamin Gilbert	Benjamin Rush	Marquis de Lafayette
Little Abraham (Tigoransera)	Rachel Warrington	Thomas Sullivan