

Revolutionary War Homefront

Lesson #2

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is a homefront?

What were some of the experiences of people on the homefront of the Revolutionary War?

How did these experiences affect their decisions about the war and independence?

OVERVIEW

When there is an army, there is a homefront. During the Revolutionary War, many people with different experiences and ideas lived within the homefront — civilian men and women, loyalists and patriots, enslaved and free people. The conflict for independence forced many people on the homefront to make decisions about what they believed and which side they supported in the war.

During the Colonial and Revolutionary War eras, men and women had different roles in their communities. Men typically managed the heavy work on a farm, worked at a trade, or owned a business to provide trading goods and income for their family. White men who owned property were usually eligible to participate in the government system and many left their civilian status to join militias or enlist in other military units based on their political beliefs. Women typically cared for their home and small gardens, raised their young children, and may have operated a small business enterprise alongside their husband or to support themselves, particularly if they were widowed. Generally, women did not participate in voting or other forms of government, but many women did follow the political news of the day and formed opinions. When they were old enough to assist, children usually worked alongside their parents; some attended schools or had tutors, and some were apprenticed to learn skilled trades. African Americans' experience during the Revolutionary War varied. All thirteen colonies/states allowed racial slavery, but there were also communities of free men and women.

The taxation from Great Britain fired the political divide in American communities during the 1760's and 1770's. Supporters of the Tory party (sometimes called Loyalists) kept their allegiance to Britain, Parliament, and King George III. Supporters of the Whig party in America were generally dissatisfied with the way England treated the colonies, but the degrees of dissatisfaction varied from grumbling dissent to open rebellion. The differences of opinion pitted civilians against each other within the cities or smaller communities within the colonies, frequently spilling over into armed conflict — particularly in the Southern Colonies. This has led some historians to point out that the Revolutionary War actually had elements of a civil war.

The armed conflict of the Revolutionary War and military occupations directly impacted the civilians, creating military interaction with the homefront. Particularly during the winters, the British occupied major American cities: Boston (1775-1776), New York (1776-178?), Philadelphia (1777-1778), Charleston (1780-1782). Most the battles were fought in the countryside, frequently through farms, communities, or settlements; sometimes the villages were even targets, particularly in the the Carolinas.

The hardships of military occupation, struggling economy, and other difficulties left some civilians homeless or at least desperate for protection. Some women and families followed the army, seeking food and protection. This situation occasionally led to civilian women coming under fire during a battle; the most famous story involves “Molly Pitcher” (probably Mary Ludwig Hayes) who fired her husband’s cannon after he was incapacitated. Some civilians influenced battles behind the scenes as spies. Both Americans and British had spies operating on the homefront and impacting military operations.

Communication between the civilians on the homefront and the military was important and also created many of the primary sources we can study today to learn about their experiences.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
 - Describe homefront life during the Revolutionary War.
 - List ways civilians supported the war effort.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Identify and appropriately discuss items used by women to create or collect needed supplies for the American Continental Army.
 - Read and discuss primary source documents about the homefront.
3. Evaluation
 - Evaluate and discuss the importance of civilians in the cause for independence during the Revolutionary War.

TRUNK MATERIALS

- Woman’s Dress
- Woman’s Cap
- Pocket
- Candle/Candle-holder
- Corn
- Drop spindle
- American Flag and British Flag

- Quill Pen
- Reproduction documents

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the Lesson's PowerPoint to explore the history of the Revolutionary War and homefront. (There are teaching notes with the slides.)
2. The PowerPoint introduces Essential Questions and lays foundational knowledge about the conflict and the choices that civilians had to make as they experienced division in their communities.
3. The PowerPoint also includes foundational details about communication and homefront experience which will help in the following activities.

[Homefront PowerPoint](#)

Motivational Activity:

1. Communication was important between the army and the homefront — for encouragement, sending supplies, and making decisions.
2. Have the students fill out or verbally guide them through discovering the methods of communication in [Handout #1](#). An [Answer Key for Handout #1](#) is also available.
3. On their own or as a class, read George Washington's letter to his wife, Martha Washington. Use Handout #2 to consider the details of the letter. How did he think his wife would feel about him going to war? What did he tell her she might have to do while he was away? [Handout #2](#) (The letter is included in Handout #2.)
4. Next, have the students write their own letters, guided through Handout #3. The students may want to include details they have learned about the homefront or descriptions of homefront items.

Procedure:

1. Next, have the students discuss items that were used by the homefront or worn by women during the Revolutionary War.
2. Discuss the types of choices that people made during the Revolutionary War. These questions may help to guide the discussion:
 - a. What were the roles of non-combatants? (Farmers, nurses, merchants, camp followers)
 - b. What was at stake staying near one of the armies? (Risk of catching a disease such as influenza, smallpox, typhoid, etc. The armies could take your livestock, food, or other belongings. Freedom for slaves located close to an army through either enlistment in an army or the emancipation promised by the British army.)
 - c. What difficult decisions had to be made during the Revolutionary War that particularly affected the homefront?
 - d. How do we know about these decisions? (Primary Sources)
 - e. How do you think you might have decided?

3. Distribute [**Handout #3**](#) which includes prompts for students to write letters from the Revolutionary War homefront.

Summary Activity:

At the conclusion of this lesson, you may choose to have students share their letters with the class. If you would like, have the students send their letter to the “loved one” addressed to in their letter. This will also provide an opportunity for students to recall information learned at the beginning of the lesson and be able to appropriately discuss it with someone outside of the classroom.

Homework/Assessment:

Students can finish and edit the writing portion of their letter.

STANDARDS**Common Core State Standards- ELA & History/Social Studies**

- Key Ideas and Details:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Craft and Structure:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Social Studies - National Council for the Social Studies

- Theme 1: Culture
- Theme 3: People, Places, or Environments
- Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Resources**Teacher:**

- [**PowerPoint - Homefront**](#)
- [**Handout #1**](#)
- [**Handout#1 – Answer Key**](#)
- [**Handout #2**](#)
- [**Handout #3**](#)

Students:

- [Handout #1](#)
- [Handout #2](#)
- [Handout #3](#)



AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST ★ ★ ★