

The Continental Army

Lesson #4 of the 1775 Perspectives Module

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was life like for soldiers in the Continental Army during the American Revolution?

OVERVIEW

The Continental Army was established by the Second Continental Congress on June 14, 1775, after the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord and predates George Washington's assumption of command outside of Boston in July 1775. Most men who served in the Continental Army were between the ages of 15 and 30. Those who served in the Army were merchants, mechanics, and farmers. By 1780, close to 30,000 men served in the Continental Army, which was dispersed throughout the new nation.

It is also important to note that each state raised militia units. All military aged males, aged 16 to 45, were required to serve in the militia and maintain the necessary arms and equipment for military service. During the Revolution, Patriot militias were called out to supplement the regular forces of the Continental Army.

Prior to 1777, enlistment in the Continental Army was of various durations but generally for a year of service. After 1778, Congress changed the rules and men served for either three years or the duration of the war. In some cases, bounties were paid to entice men to enlist or for men who chose to serve longer. Bounties could consist of additional money, additional clothing, or land west of the Ohio River, where many veterans would settle after the war.

Life in the Continental Army was difficult. It was mundane and monotonous. Generally, when not engaged in combat, soldiers in the Continental Army served three duties: fatigue or manual labor, such as digging vaults (latrines), clearing fields, or erecting fortifications. Supply problems constantly plagued the Continental Army, and often men simply made do with whatever arms and equipment they could bring from home.

African Americans served in the ranks of the Continental Army, and General James Mitchell Varnum petitioned Congress to permit integration. (This would not happen again until 1950, when the US Army fought in Korea.) The First Rhode Island Infantry was an entirely African American regiment.

OBJECTIVES

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

1. Knowledge

AMERICAN BATTLEFIELD TRUST: 1775 PERSPECTIVES – CONTINENTAL ARMY LESSON PLAN TEACHING GUIDE

- Briefly explain the creation of the Continental Army (U.S. Army) in 1775 and what life was like for soldiers in its ranks.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Examine multiple primary sources to gain an appreciation for the experiences of soldiers in the Continental Army.
 3. Evaluation
 - Discuss findings from primary sources and the challenges that soldiers faced in the fight for independence.

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the [Lesson's PowerPoint](#) to explore the context and history; the PowerPoint introduces context and foundational knowledge of the Continental Army and it intentionally looks beyond 1775.
2. The primary sources for this perspectives lesson plan offer multiple perspectives from different soldiers or event connected to the Continental Army; students can be divided into groups to read and fill out the worksheet.

1775 (specific)	<i>Washington's Commission</i>
1775 (specific)	<i>"General Orders: July 4, 1775"</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>1776: "Our Orders are to Take Possession of Dorchester Hill"</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>1776: "For the Cause of Freedom & Love"</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>George Washington Describes the Continental Army's Needs</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>1778: "Setting for a March"</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>"She Served as a Private Soldier"</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>"A Slave for Five Years Fighting for Liberty"</i>
Continental Army Experience	<i>Newburgh Address</i>

3. Distribute the [lesson's worksheet](#).
4. Students will read a primary source and fill out the worksheet which will guide them through exploring the document.
5. Encourage a class discussion from the worksheet, draw group conclusions, answering the questions:
 - Why did Congress form a Continental Army?
 - How was George Washington's leadership important?
 - What are some changes that the Continental Army experienced over the years of the Revolutionary War?
 - Did you learn something surprising about the Continental Army?

STANDARDS

Please visit the [Lesson Plan Page](#) and select the “Common Core and NCSS Standards for Social Studies” to view the details.

RESOURCES

Visit the [Lesson Plan Page](#) to find all resources in one convenient place. You’ll find everything mentioned or linked in this Lesson Plan along with additional videos, articles, primary sources, and biographies.

Quick Links

- [PowerPoint](#)
- [Primary Source Worksheet](#)

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT/ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Option 1: Biography

Have the students choose a historical figure who served in the Continental Army and do a biography study. (There are biographies linked on the [Lesson Plan Page](#).) Write a biography summary and include answers for the following questions:

- How did this person find out about the Continental Army?
- When did they join?
- What did they do in the army?
- Did they survive the war?
- Do we know how they felt about American independence?

Option 2: Innovations

Using Articles listed on the [Lesson Plan Page](#), research innovations that occurred in the Continental Army. Were there new military tactics used? What about medical or technology innovations? What type of leadership was valued and was this different than previous traditions?

Use a Venn Diagram to compare innovations in the Continental Army with the modern era and leadership practices.