

The American Crisis

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did Thomas Paine influence independence and the American army in 1776?

OVERVIEW

In late November 1776, during the Continental Army's darkest hour, Paine again picked up the pen with the hope of recreating the enormous success of *Common Sense*. "It was necessary" he later wrote, that "the country should be strongly animated." As the wrecked army crawled across New Jersey, Paine took advantage of every stop to put words to paper. He often wrote late into the evenings by the flickering light of a campfire, as exhausted soldiers slept huddled nearby. As Washington's army crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania, he put the finishing touches on his latest pamphlet – *The American Crisis No. 1*.

First published in Philadelphia on December 19th, *The American Crisis No. 1* was an appeal to the patriotism and resolution of the American people. The words electrified the demoralized army and became the rallying cry that Paine had hoped for. Within a day, copies were printed and distributed throughout the Continental Army, and officers read it to their assembled men. Militiamen who had returned home in disgust just a month before took up arms once again. Civilians up and down the Delaware River Valley reaffirmed their commitment to the cause of independence. Desertions among the Continentals slowed, and soldiers quoted *The Crisis* in their watchwords while on picket duty. On the night of December 25th, as Washington prepared to make a strike on Trenton, he ordered that Paine's words be read to the entire army as a reminder of the importance of their task.

OBJECTIVES

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

1. Knowledge
 - Briefly explain the importance of Thomas Paine's writings during the American Revolution.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Read *The American Crisis* and answer inquiry questions to better understand the document and its influence on the American Revolution.
3. Evaluation
 - Discuss findings from primary sources and how Paine's writings inspired the Americans to continue the fight to independence.

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the [Lesson Plan's PowerPoint](#) to explore the context and history.
2. As a class or in groups, reading [The American Crisis](#).
3. Distribute the [primary source worksheet](#) and have students fill out their answers. (Or use the questions for verbal discussion.) There is an answer guide [here](#).
4. Encourage a class discussion about *The American Crisis*.

- Did you find the writing inspiration? Other feelings?
- Are there other times in U.S. History that this might be inspirational?
- Have you heard the phrase “the pen is mightier than the sword”? Do you think that is true with Paine’s writings?
- Did you have a favorite quote from *The American Crisis*? Why?
- Paine’s writing brought people together to support the American cause. Do you think writing (or other forms of communication) can still unite people today? Why or why not?

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](#)
- [Primary Source Answer Key](#)

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT/ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Option 1: Comparing Common Sense and The American Crisis

Compare and contrast two of Thomas Paine’s most famous writings. *Common Sense* inspired Americans to seriously consider independence from Britain and *The American Crisis* motivated American soldiers to continue fighting for that independence.

- [Common Sense](#)
- [The American Crisis](#)
- [Common Sense Video](#)

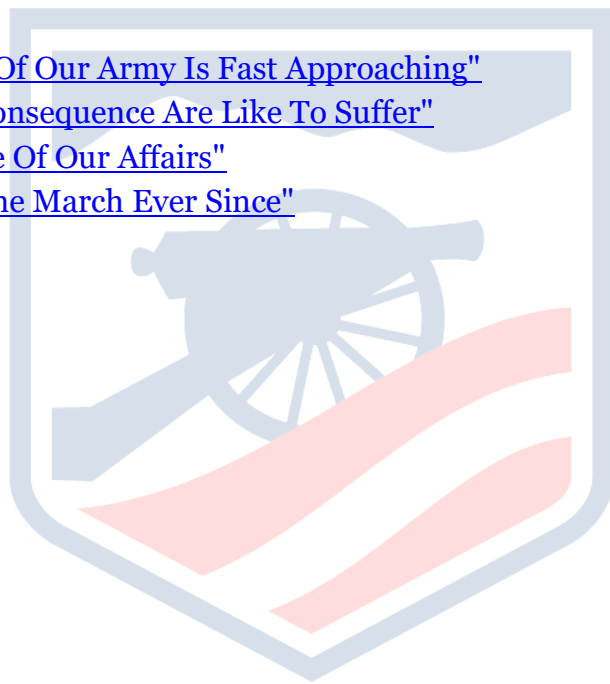
Watch the short videos and read the primary source documents (or excerpts since they are long documents). Next in groups or as a class, create a Venn Diagram. What is similar and what is different between the two documents? These questions can be used as starting points:

- Who is the author?
- What is the purpose of each pamphlet?
- When were the pamphlets first published?
- What were the results/impact of the pamphlets?
- What was happening at the same time the pamphlets were created?

Option 2: The Situation

Take a closer look at the difficult situation the American army and cause faced by the beginning of December 1776. These primary sources include details of situation before the Ten Crucial Days. Divide the students into groups and have them read one primary source, taking notes on adjectives and other descriptions included. In a class discussion, have each group share a summary of their source with who, where, when, what details and then a conclusion about the situation from this source's perspective.

- [1776: "The Dissolution Of Our Army Is Fast Approaching"](#)
- [1776: "The Troops In Consequence Are Like To Suffer"](#)
- [1776: "The Critical State Of Our Affairs"](#)
- [1776: "Have Been On The March Ever Since"](#)



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