

## The Battle of Trenton & Revolutionary Christmas

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the Battle of Trenton change the Revolutionary War?  
How was Christmas celebrated in 18<sup>th</sup> Century America?

### OVERVIEW

By December 1776, American troops huddled along the western banks of the Delaware River, with the waterway and winter weather helping to keep the British at bay. Thomas Paine's *The American Crisis* was passed around campfires, reigniting a passion for the revolutionary cause and helping to steady the soldiers' spirits and resolve. On Christmas night, December 25, 1776, Washington implemented an audacious plan that would improve the fortunes of the American forces. The general daringly led his men across the icy Delaware River and on a ten-mile march into Trenton, New Jersey, where they surprised a garrison of 1,500 Hessians. The Battle of Trenton, fought on December 26, was a much-needed American victory and launched the Ten Crucial Days Campaign which gave the Americans more battlefield victories in their fight for independence.

### OBJECTIVES

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

1. Knowledge
  - Briefly explain the outcome of the Battle of Trenton.
  - Briefly explain Christmas celebrations in 18<sup>th</sup> Century America.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
  - Examine multiple primary sources to gain perspectives on the battle and its outcomes.
3. Evaluation
  - Discuss findings from primary sources and how the Battle of Trenton inspired the Americans to continue the fight to independence.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Use the [Lesson Plan's PowerPoint](#) to explore the context and history; the PowerPoint introduces context and foundational knowledge about the Battle of Trenton and some details about 18<sup>th</sup> Century Christmas.
2. The primary sources for this perspectives lesson plan offer multiple perspectives from different people who fought or observed the battle; students can be divided into groups to read and fill out the worksheet.

|          |                                                      |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------|
| American | 1776: "I Hope The Next Christmas Will Prove Happier" |
| American | 1776: "On Christmas Night We Marched"                |

AMERICAN BATTLEFIELD TRUST: 1776 PERSPECTIVES – TRENTON LESSON PLAN  
TEACHING GUIDE

|                      |                                                                  |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| American             | <i>Trenton: "A glorious day for our country"</i>                 |
| British              | <i>1776: "Dare To Attack Regular Troops In The Open Country"</i> |
| British              | <i>1776: "Revive The Drooping Spirits of the Rebels"</i>         |
| Christmas Traditions | <i>1773: Christmas - An Essay</i>                                |

3. Distribute [the lesson plan'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:
  - Who won the Battle of Trenton? Depending on who wrote a particular document, what reasons were given for the outcome of the battle?
  - What were some reactions to the Battle of Trenton in these primary sources?
  - What did people think would happen next after the Battle of Trenton?
  - What have you previously heard about the Battle of Trenton or Washington's Crossing of the Delaware River? Have you heard some myths about these events?
  - How did Christmas celebrations (or lack of celebrations) affect the Battle of Trenton?

## 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](#)
- [Battle of Trenton Map](#)

## OPTIONAL HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT/ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

### ***Option 1: Revolutionary Christmas***

This is an inquiry activity! How was Christmas celebrated by different communities in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century? Have the students use the secondary source "Colonial and Revolutionary Christmases" to create a list of ways that Christmas was celebrated. Then, as a class or in groups read George Washington's letter

(primary source) and note the difficulties around Christmas 1776 for the Continental Army. Reference “George Washington’s Christmases” to discover if Christmas did get happier for Washington later in the Revolution or afterwards.

- [Colonial and Revolutionary Christmases](#) (secondary source)
- [George Washington’s Christmases](#) (secondary source)
- [1776: “I Hope The Next Christmas Will Prove Happier”](#) (primary source)

Have students design and write a Christmas card to George Washington. Or for a more detailed creative writing project, students can write a story highlight past, present, future Christmases for Washington with the present being 1776 and preparing to cross the Delaware River.

### ***Option 2: Officers and Soldiers at Trenton***

Explore the lives and stories of some officers and soldiers at the Battle of Trenton.

- [George Washington](#)
- [John Glover](#)
- [Winsor Fry](#)
- [James Wilkinson](#)
- [John Cadwalader](#)
- [John Sullivan](#)
- [Johann Rall](#)

Have students note these soldiers’ regiments or commands – can they find them on the battle map? What did these soldiers specifically do during the Battle of Treton? What experiences were similar among these men? What was different? What did they do after Trenton?