

Telling the Stories of African Americans Living During the American Revolution

Unit by an elementary teacher on the Motor City Educators Team, part of the 2021 cohort of *The 1619 Project* Education Network

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UNIT OVERVIEW

Unit Length	3 hours and 20 minutes or five 40-minute class periods
Grade Level(s)/ Subject(s)	5th grade
Unit Overview	<p><i>“Our Declaration of Independence, signed on July 4, 1776, proclaims that ‘all men are created equal’ and ‘endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.’ But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of Black people in their midst. ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ did not apply to fully one-fifth of the country. Yet despite being violently denied the freedom and justice promised to all, Black Americans believed fervently in the American creed.”</i></p> <p>- “The Idea of America” by Nikole Hannah-Jones</p> <p>One focus of the 5th grade curriculum is the Revolutionary period of American history. Students are introduced to the Declaration of Independence, the colonists’ reasons for issuing the declaration, and details of the war that led to independence from England. The heroic biographies of the founding fathers are often prominently featured. What is often left out of the textbooks are the stories of African Americans, both enslaved and free who lived during this period.</p> <p>This unit of study’s purpose is for students to research the lives and tell the stories of those for whom “ ‘Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness’ did not apply...Yet believed fervently in the American creed.” Students will research the lives of African Americans living in colonies during the American Revolutionary period.</p> <p>Students will demonstrate understanding of the contributions, motivations, and results of African Americans fighting on both sides of the American Revolution.</p>
Objectives & Outcomes	<p>Students will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research the lives of African Americans living in colonies during the American Revolutionary period• Examine, discuss, and analyze the contributions, motivations, and outcomes of African Americans fighting on both sides of the American Revolution• Memorialize underrepresented African American narratives during the American Revolutionary period

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Standards	<p>P1.1 Use close and critical reading strategies to read and analyze texts pertaining to social science; attend to nuance, make connections to prior knowledge, draw inferences, and determine main idea and supporting details.</p> <p>P1.2 Analyze point of view, context, and bias to interpret primary and secondary source documents.</p> <p>P1.3 Understand that diversity of interpretation arises from frame of reference.</p> <p>P1.4 Communicate clearly and coherently in writing, speaking, and visually expressing ideas pertaining to social science topics, acknowledging audience and purpose.</p> <p>P2.3 Know how to find and organize information from a variety of sources, analyze, interpret, support interpretations with evidence, critically evaluate, and present the information orally and in writing; report investigation results effectively.</p> <p>P2.4 Use multiple perspectives and resources to identify and analyze issues appropriate to the social studies discipline being studied.</p>
Unit Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 5, 1770 poem by Yusef Komunyakaa • Chapter 1 of Black Heroes of the American Revolution, (pgs 1 -2) • This Week in Black History, Crispus Attucks (1:34) • Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research [.pdf] • Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research [.docx] • America's First Black Regiment Gained Their Freedom by Fighting Against the British (Lexile level: 1020-1200) • American Revolution: African Americans (Lexile level: 810-1000) • How African Americans Were Involved in the American Revolution - a slideshow geared to upper elementary students, created by Black History Ed Zone through Teachers Pay Teachers (cost: \$2.50) • Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution by Gretchen Woelfle • Student worksheet - American Revolution: African Americans Reading • Blackpast.org - this site lists many individuals who fought in the American Revolution, but the teacher may have to do a search beforehand and list these individuals for students to locate on the site. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ African American History Timeline • Black Heroes of the American Revolution by Burke Davis • America's Black Founders: Revolutionary Heroes and Early Leaders by Nancy I. Sanders • Forge - an historical fiction, second in a series, that follows the story of Curzon, a runaway slave who enlists in the Patriot army and is present at Valley Forge. The book can be studied along with this social studies content as a literature cross-curricular unit or as a teacher read aloud. • The Declaration of Independence • A Spy Called James: The True Story of James Lafayette, Revolutionary War Double Agent by Anne Rockwell

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dear Benjamin Banneker by Andrea Davis Pinkney ● Mumbet's Declaration of Independence by Gretchen Woelfle ● The 1619 Project Broadsheet ● Student worksheet - Chart for Study of James Armistead Lafayette, Benjamin Banneker, and Mum Bett [.pdf] ● Student worksheet - Chart for Study of James Armistead Lafayette, Benjamin Banneker, and Mum Bett [.docx] ● Phillis Wheatley: The First Published African-American Poet Black Patriots History (5:10) ● Late 1773: poem by Eve L. Ewing ● Color, Symbol, Image: A routine for distilling the essence of ideas non-verbally ● National Liberty Memorial – Honoring African American soldiers and patriots of the Revolutionary War - website ● History.com - the following links are to resources on the site regarding African Americans during the American Revolutionary period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 Black Heroes of the American Revolution ○ How Enslaved Men Who Fought for the British Were Promised Freedom ○ Slavery in America ○ 8 Things We Know About Crispus Attucks ○ America's First Black Regiment Gained Their Freedom by Fighting Against the British ● 12 x 18 white construction paper to make Color, Symbol, Image posters ● Art supplies like markers, colored pencils, crayons
<p>Performance Task(s)</p>	<p>Inspired by the National Liberty Memorial in construction in Washington, D.C. to honor the thousands of enslaved and free Black people who fought in the Revolutionary War, students will craft a class memorial honoring the selection of Black historical figures examined in this unit.</p> <p>Throughout the unit, students will practice researching the individual stories of African Americans whose stories are underrepresented in historical accounts of the American revolution. By using the Color, Symbol, Image routine, which assists students in distilling the essence of ideas from a range of sources using colors, symbols, or images to represent ideas, students will contribute a poster about one African American they researched to contribute to the class memorial.</p> <p>As a culminating, extension activity, students can write short biographical paragraphs about the person they researched using the graphic organizer. These can then be read in a reader's theater format Readers theater - Wikipedia with the Color, Symbol, Image posters as a backdrop.</p>

DAILY LESSONS AND RESOURCES

Telling the Stories of African Americans Living During the American Revolution

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Lesson 1

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Reflect and discuss what they know about the historical figures of the American Revolution
- Evaluate why the stories of Black people who lived and fought during the American Revolution are not told
- Analyze poetry about Black historical figure, Crispus Attucks

Essential Questions

- Whose stories are told in history resources examining the American Revolution?
- Whose stories have not been told or are not widely known and should be told from the Revolutionary period?

Lesson Materials & Resources

- [March 5, 1770 poem by Yusef Komunyakaa](#)
- Chapter 1 of [Black Heroes of the American Revolution](#), (pgs 1 -2)
- [This Week in Black History, Crispus Attucks](#) (1:34)
- [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research](#)

Lesson Activities

What do we know about the heroes of the American Revolution?

1. Project a list of names of people from the Revolutionary period on the board.
2. Ask students:
 - a. Which names are familiar?
 - b. What do you know about the people whose names are familiar?
 - c. What about the names that are not familiar?
 - d. Why do you think these names are on the list?

Educator note: possible names on the list: George Washington, Crispus Attucks, Thomas Jefferson, John Addams, Phillis Wheatley, Elizabeth Freeman, Samuel Addams, Benjamin Banneker, Martha Washington, James Armistead Lafayette

Where are the stories of Black heroes?

1. Read aloud the first section of chapter 1, “The Histories were White” in [Black Heroes of the American](#)

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[Revolution.](#)

2. Consider the following question in small group or whole group conversation: Why do we *not* know the stories of many of the Black people who fought in the American Revolution?

Crispus Attucks

Crispus Attucks is one of the best known African Americans of the Revolutionary period and is often briefly mentioned in textbooks.

1. Screen [This Week in Black History, Crispus Attucks](#)
2. Share [March 5, 1770 poem by Yusef Komunyakaa](#). Ask questions like the following to probe student understanding and interpretations of the poem:
 - a. How does the poem make you feel?
 - b. What does the poet say to make you feel that way?
 - c. What do you learn about Crispus Attucks from the poem?

Introducing the unit: researching Black stories of the American Revolution

Tell students that their charge will be to tell some of the untold/little told stories of other African Americans who lived at the time of the American Revolution.

1. Introduce the [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research](#). Students can use this tool to search websites, books, and other resources to find names and stories of African Americans living during the American Revolution.

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Lesson 2

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Describe the contributions, motivations, and outcomes of African Americans fighting on both sides of the American Revolution
- Research various African Americans living during the American Revolution independently and in small groups

Lesson Materials & Resources

- [America's First Black Regiment Gained Their Freedom by Fighting Against the British](#) (Lexile level: 1020-1200)
- [American Revolution: African Americans](#) (Lexile level: 810-1000)
- [How African Americans Were Involved in the American Revolution](#) - a slideshow geared to upper elementary students, created by [Black History Ed Zone](#) through [Teachers Pay Teachers](#) (cost: \$2.50)
- [Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution](#) by Gretchen Woelfle
- [Student worksheet - American Revolution: African Americans Reading](#)
- [Blackpast.org](#) - this site lists many individuals who fought in the American Revolution, but the teacher may have to do a search beforehand and list these individuals for students to locate on the site.
- [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research \[.docx\]](#)
- [Black Heroes of the American Revolution](#) by Burke Davis
- [America's Black Founders: Revolutionary Heroes and Early Leaders](#) by Nancy I. Sanders
- [Forge](#) - an historical fiction, second in a series, that follows the story of Curzon, a runaway slave who enlists in the Patriot army and is present at Valley Forge. The book can be studied along with this social studies content as a literature cross-curricular unit or as a teacher read aloud.

Lesson Activities

Exploring the contributions of African Americans in small groups

Choose from the following resources for students to read and gather information pertinent to the lesson's focus:

- [America's First Black Regiment Gained Their Freedom by Fighting Against the British](#) (Lexile level: 1020-1200)
- [American Revolution: African Americans](#) (Lexile level: 810-1000)
- [How African Americans Were Involved in the American Revolution](#)
- The introduction to [Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the](#)

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[American Revolution](#)

1. In partners or small groups, students read the selected text and complete the [Student worksheet - American Revolution: African Americans](#)
2. After completing the worksheet, students share their findings with the whole class
3. While listening to others, students should add additional information to their charts

Independent Research Time

Using the [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research](#), students can continue researching Black heroes from the American Revolution. Students can refer to any of the materials explored in the last two lessons or these additional resources which include stories of several individuals:

- [Black Heroes of the American Revolution](#) by Burke Davis
- [Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution](#) by Gretchen Woelfle
- [America's Black Founders: Revolutionary Heroes and Early Leaders](#) by Nancy I. Sanders
- [Forge](#) by Laurie Halse Anderson

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Lesson 3

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Describe obstacles to freedom that enslaved people experienced during the American Revolution
- Evaluate how the lives of a Black historical figures were impacted before, during and after the American Revolution
- Analyze the relationship between the ideals about liberty described in the Declaration of Independence and the lived experiences of African Americans during the Revolution.

Essential Questions

- What do you think/know that enslaved people did to gain their freedom?
- What are obstacles to freedom for enslaved people you can add to the others we discussed that are apparent in this caption?
- How did African Americans fight to make the words of the Declaration of Independence apply to themselves and the “hundreds of thousands black people” denied “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Lesson Materials & Resources

- The Declaration of Independence
- [A Spy Called James: The True Story of James Lafayette, Revolutionary War Double Agent](#) by Anne Rockwell
- [Dear Benjamin Banneker](#) by Andrea Davis Pinkney
- [Mumbet’s Declaration of Independence](#) by Gretchen Woelfle
- [The 1619 Project Broadsheet](#) (pgs 10 and 11)
- [Student worksheet - Chart for Study of James Armistead Lafayette, Benjamin Banneker, and Mum Bett \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Student worksheet - Chart for Study of James Armistead Lafayette, Benjamin Banneker, and Mum Bett \[.docx\]](#)
- [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research \[.pdf\]](#)
- [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research \[.docx\]](#)

Lesson Activities

Introducing Mum Bett

1. Project the image and quote from Mum Bett on page 10 of [The 1619 Project Broadsheet](#)
2. Have students discuss what the quote means to them. Ask the following questions to advance the discussion:

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- a. Why do you think Mum Bett would make that kind of trade?
- b. What does that tell you about Mum Betts' life as an enslaved person?
- c. What do you think/know that enslaved people did to gain their freedom?
- d. What obstacles do you think they faced?

Educator note: Mum Bett has been spelled in a number of ways across different publications and resources: Mum Bett, Mumbet, and Mumbett. The spelling used in this unit reflects the spelling utilized in The 1619 Project,

Examining African American Stories During the Revolution

1. Read aloud the following trade books:
 - a. [A Spy Called James](#)
 - b. [Dear Benjamin Banneker](#)
 - c. [Mumbet's Declaration of Independence](#)

Educator note: You can also group students and have each group read one of the books and then share a summary with the class.

2. After students read [Dear Benjamin Banneker](#), share the image and text on page 11 of [The 1619 Project Broadsheet](#) titled "A Powerful Letter."
 - a. Read aloud the caption
 - b. Ask students: What are obstacles to freedom for enslaved people you can add to the others we discussed that are apparent in this caption?
3. As a class, discuss and chart the ways in which each individual fought to make the words of the Declaration of Independence apply to themselves and the "hundreds of thousands Black people" denied "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Students should write their responses in the [Chart for Study of James Armistead Lafayette, Benjamin Banneker and Mum Bett](#)

Independent Research Time

Using the [Graphic Organizer for Biographical Research](#), students should continue researching Black heroes from the American Revolution.

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Day 4

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Examine and compare different texts that capture the life of Phillis Wheatley
- Identify colors, symbols, and images inspired by accounts of Phillis Wheatley's life

Essential Questions

How can we tell the stories of African Americans who lived during the American Revolution?

Lesson Materials & Resources

- [Phillis Wheatley: The First Published African-American Poet | Black Patriots | History](#) (5:10)
- [Late 1773: poem by Eve L. Ewing*](#)
- [Color, Symbol, Image: A routine for distilling the essence of ideas non-verbally](#)

Lesson Activities

Introducing Phillis Wheatley

1. Screen [Phillis Wheatley: The First Published African-American Poet | Black Patriots | History Channel](#)
2. Share [Late 1773: poem by Eve L. Ewing](#) with students
3. Ask students to reflect on the poem using the following questions:
 - a. How does this poem make you feel? Why do you feel that way?
 - b. What things does the poem say about Phillis Wheatley that is different from the video?
 - c. How do you think the author feels about Phillis Wheatley?
 - d. Why do you think the author feels that way?

Fostering Non-Verbal Connections to Phillis Wheatley's Story

Model how to complete a [Color, Symbol, Image Visible Thinking Routine](#) for Phillis Wheatley.

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Day 5

Lesson Objective
Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the mission of the National Liberty Memorial• Create a poster that use colors, symbols, and images to honor the contributions of underrepresented Black historical figures
Essential Questions
How can we tell the stories of African Americans who lived during the American Revolution?
Lesson Materials & Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Liberty Memorial – Honoring African American soldiers and patriots of the Revolutionary War - website• 12 x 18 white construction paper to make Color, Symbol, Image posters• Art supplies like markers, colored pencils, crayons
Lesson Activities
<p><u>National Liberty Memorial</u> Share the National Liberty Memorial – Honoring African American soldiers and patriots of the Revolutionary War website with students. This is a memorial that is yet to be built.</p> <p><i>Educator’s note: project and review the website. Spend some time on the mission and purpose page and the history page.</i></p> <p><u>Creating Our Own School Memorials</u> Students will be making their own school memorial to the people they have researched by completing Color, Symbol, Image posters to be displayed.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review the Phillis Wheatley poster made yesterday.2. To get students to reflect on the people whose stories they researched, ask students to think about these ideas:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. How does this person’s story make you feel? Why do you feel that way?b. What did this person do that others should know and remember?c. What other facts about this person’s life should others know and remember?3. Hold independent time for students to construct their posters. <p><i>Educator’s note: Creating school memorials may take an additional class period.</i></p>

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Reader's Theater Extension Activity

As a culminating, extension activity, students can write short biographical paragraphs about the person they researched using the graphic organizer. These can then be read in a reader's theater format [Readers theater - Wikipedia](#) with the Color, Symbol, Image posters as a backdrop.