

Who Was the Greatest American Revolutionary?

CONTENT FOCUS: The focus of this unit is primarily United States History, with aspects of reading and writing included.

GRADE LEVEL: Although this panel discussion was designed for an 8th grade United States History class, it could be adapted to any level class which deals the American Revolutionary period.

PURPOSE:

In this activity, students will role play American Revolutionaries. Students will be asked several questions by a moderator and will try to persuade the audience that they should be considered the greatest American Revolutionary. They have a difficult task because there are several well-known and important revolutionaries on the panel.

This activity could take place near the end of a unit on the American Revolution. This will give students some background information on the American Revolution and a better understanding of the importance of the American Revolution. The goal is for students to read about an American Revolutionary, listen to many American Revolutionaries who have a claim to being the greatest American Revolutionary, and to decide who should get credit for being the greatest American Revolutionary.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will read about an American Revolutionary and answer questions about that American Revolutionary.
2. Students will come up with a list of characteristics and attributes which makes someone great and use that list to evaluate the candidates for Greatest American Revolutionary.
3. Students will appreciate the complex nature of human behavior when deciding who should be the greatest American Revolutionary.
4. Students will take notes during the question and answer session.
5. Students will engage in a culminating activity which will explain who they think should be the greatest American Revolutionary, providing at least two reasons given in the reading or discussion to support their choice.
6. Students will answer and discuss questions at the end of the debate.

TIMELINE:

Assumes 45 minute classes.

Before Day 1: Teacher reads the entire packet.

Day 1: Introduce panel debate, overview of candidates and choose students for each candidate. Students begin reading handouts and answering questions.

Day 2: Students read and answer questions about their American Revolutionary. Prepare for panel debate.

Day 3 -4 : Optional: Additional research on their American Revolutionary.

Day 5: Panel Discussion and answer debriefing questions.

Day 6: Finish answering debriefing questions and work on culminating activity.

Day 7: Finish culminating activity.

PROCEDURE:

1. Teacher: Read over entire packet a week or so before the panel discussion.
2. Explain to students the panel discussion and tell them who the candidates are for the Greatest American Revolutionary with a brief explanation of each candidate.

Option: This is a short list of possibilities. Include more people or take people out as necessary.

3. Choose candidates and a moderator. You may want to select students yourself or come up with another method to choose parts.

Option: Have three or four different panel discussions so each person has the chance to role play one of the Revolutionaries.

4. Students who don't have parts in the panel discussion should be given one of the candidates or they could choose a candidate. I like to have 3-4 students for each candidate. That way there is a backup if a student is absent the day of the panel discussion and every student has something to read and answer.
5. You may want to have a discussion on what makes a person great. You could have students come up with characteristics and write them down for later reference.
6. Have students read over their part and answer the questions.

Option: Have students work in groups to read and answer the questions.

Option: Have students research additional information on their American Revolutionary and take notes during their research.

Extension possibility: Have students research someone not on the list and come up with their own questions and answer them. Include this person in the discussion.

Option: Have students dress up for their part and make a name card for their American Revolutionary.

7. Have the panel discussion. This should take about one class period. You may want to allow time for the audience to ask questions of each candidate. Or require each student to come up with at least one question for each candidate.

Extension Possibility: Have one or more students be artists for the debate and draw the panelists in action.

8. Students should take notes for each candidate, concentrating on events and personal characteristics which will help answer the question; Who is the Greatest American Revolutionary?
9. Lead a discussion on who should be The Greatest American Revolutionary and why? Take a vote before and/or after the discussion.
10. You may want to use the questions at the end as a starting point for additional discussion.
11. Students should write a paragraph explaining their choice for Greatest American Revolutionary and give at least two reasons for their choice or choose another culminating activity.

Option: Have this be a longer writing assignment by making it a 5 paragraph essay.

Option: Have students draw a picture with a caption of their Greatest American Revolutionary.

Option: Write poem about their American Revolutionary.

Extension possibility: Compare an American Revolutionary to a 20th Century Revolutionary

Option or extension possibility: Write an original song about why your revolutionary is the Greatest American Revolutionary or take a song from a favorite musician and change the lyrics.

Educational Standards:

United States History Standards and Benchmarks (3rd Ed.)

Era 3 - Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

Standard 6: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory

Level II: (Grades 5-6)

Understands the major developments and chronology of the Revolutionary War and the roles of its political, military, and diplomatic leaders (e.g., George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Richard Henry Lee)

Level III (Grade 7-8)

Understands the creation of the Declaration of Independence (e.g., historical antecedents that contributed to the document, individuals who struggled for independence)

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

Understands the arguments of advocates and opponents of slavery from different regions of the country during the revolutionary period (e.g., how pro-slavery Americans justified their defense of slavery with their espousal of inalienable rights to freedom, how enslaved African Americans employed revolutionary ideals to obtain their freedom)

Understands how the principles of the Declaration of Independence justified American independence

NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

Standard 3: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features.

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, and vocabulary) to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 5: Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 11: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Washington States Reading Essential Academic Learning Requirements:

1: The student understands and uses different skills and strategies to read.

1.3 Build vocabulary through wide reading.

2: The student understands the meaning of what is read.

2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.

3: The student reads different materials for a variety of purposes.

3.1 Read to learn new information.

3.2 Read to perform a task.

Washington States Reading Essential Academic Learning Requirements:

1: The student writes clearly and effectively.

To meet this standard, the student will:

1.1 develop concept and design
develop a topic or theme; organize written thoughts with a clear beginning, middle, and end; use transitional sentences and phrases to connect related ideas; write coherently and effectively

1.2 use style appropriate to the audience and purpose
use voice, word choice, and sentence fluency for intended style and audience

1.3 apply writing conventions
know and apply correct spelling, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and capitalization

Motivation — Students get to role play a American Revolutionary and use their skills of persuasion to convince the audience that they are the greatest revolutionary. They are participating in history which can be a motivating factor for students. They can also dress up for their part to get into their part. Who is the Greatest American Revolutionary? helps students to analyze information and use higher order thinking skills rather than memorizing facts. History comes alive for students and audience as participants are actively role playing people from the American Revolution.

Student Roles —Students role play famous and maybe not so famous revolutionaries. They keep the same parts throughout the panel discussion. By becoming their character, they may better

understand the contributions of people in the American Revolution and some of the issues surrounding the American Revolution. By writing and discussing the debriefing questions, students will make connections between The American Revolution, the world of today, and their own personal life.

Student Grouping — Depending on teacher preferences, students can work independently or cooperatively on all aspects of the unit, including reading, answering questions on American Revolutionaries, and debriefing questions. They will play their role independently, although this responsibility could also be shared.

Meaningful Culmination - There are many options for students to show what they have learned in this unit. Some of these are:

- ❖ Answering the debriefing questions
- ❖ Discussion
- ❖ Voting
- ❖ Writing a paragraph or essay
- ❖ Drawing of a Revolutionary
- ❖ Writing a poem or song about their Revolutionary

Differentiation Opportunities - Who is the Greatest American Revolutionary? is a unit which involves most of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. The following are some examples of how this debate makes use of the different intelligences students bring to class.

- ❖ **Linguistic intelligence** – Writing a paragraph, paper, or poem about their American Revolutionary
- ❖ **Logical-mathematical intelligence** – Students use information to come up with a hypothesis about who is the Greatest American Revolutionary. They use logical reasoning to write a persuasive essay to answer this question.
- ❖ **Musical intelligence** – Students have the option to write a song about their choice for Greatest American Revolutionary
- ❖ **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** - Some or all students will role play an American Revolutionary.
- ❖ **Interpersonal intelligence** - Students will analyze the motivations of some American Revolutionaries.
- ❖ **Intrapersonal intelligence** - Students will analyze their own motivations and intentions and think about how they can make positive contributions to their society.

THE CANDIDATES:

George Washington: Leader of the Continental Army during the Revolution.

John Adams: One of the leaders during the discussions about declaring independence.

Thomas Jefferson: Main author of the Declaration of Independence.

Ben Franklin: One of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and supporter of the Patriot cause.

Benedict Arnold: Hero of the Battle of Saratoga, which many consider a turning point in the American Revolution. Eventually, became a traitor and joined the British.

Abigail Adams: Wife of John Adams. Wrote many letters to John discussing equality for women and telling him to remember the ladies.

Patrick Henry: This firebrand from Virginia provided many reasons why the colonies should separate from England.

Thomas Paine: This British author wrote the famous pamphlet called Common Sense.

James Armistead (Lafayette): Slave who helped during the Revolution as a spy, especially during the Battle of Yorktown.