

Learning About the American Revolution Through Literature

1763–1815



The Prologue

(What happened preceding an event)

While the English were establishing colonies in the New World, France was trying to establish its control as well. This competition culminated in the French and Indian Wars of 1754–1763. With the help of England, the colonists fought to defeat the French. The war was expensive and England, though now the most powerful country in the world, needed to find a way to replenish their losses. Even though people living in the colonies were English citizens, they were not allowed to choose people to represent them. Laws were passed that unfairly required them to pay taxes to support the government. In 1774, at the First Continental Congress, the colonists decided to stand up against this “taxation without representation.”

The Setting

(Information you need to know
in order to understand what comes next)

Read the following books or find other books in your local library for an overview of the Revolutionary War years.

If You Lived at the Time of the American Revolution, *Kay Moore*,
80 pages, Grades 2–5

The Revolutionary War Begins: Would You Join the Fight?, *Elaine Landau*,
48 pages, Grades 3–4

A More Perfect Union, The Story of our Constitution, *Betsy and Giulio
Maestro*, 48 pages, Grades 2–7

**American Revolution: A Nonfiction Companion to Revolutionary War on
Wednesday**, *Magic Tree House Research Guide Series*, 128 pages, Grades 2–5

The Language

(Vocabulary used in the story)

Choose one or two of the activities for learning vocabulary on page 129 of the Appendix.

Tyrant—a unjust or cruel ruler

Exploit—to selfishly take advantage of others

Independence—freedom

Proclamation—an official announcement

Patriot—colonist who supported independence from England

Loyalist—colonist who supported England

Militia—an army of ordinary citizens rather than professional soldiers

Minutemen—citizens who formed a militia that was ready to fight at “any minute”

Musket—a long-barreled gun that fired lead bullets

Hessian—German soldiers hired to fight for England

Boycott—an agreement where people refuse to support a business

Revolution—overthrow of a government

The Plot

(Actions and events that take place in a story.)

Depending on the amount of time you want to spend on this unit, choose from the following suggested books. You can also ask your librarian for suggestions. While older students may be assigned books to read on their own, it is recommended that you set aside some time each day to read aloud to your students. By following this practice, they can all participate in learning about the Revolutionary War period.

Before you read, scan through the list of activities in the **Reading Between the Lines** section. As you read, take time to enjoy the activities and look for other ways to expand your understanding of this time period. Be ready to stop

and pursue anything that your students are interested in. For example, when you read Jean Fritz' book *Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?*, you will notice Hancock's handwriting is more formal than how we write today. A fun activity would be to learn the art of calligraphy.

The books have been divided into short books (books that can be read in one or two sittings) and chapter books. Older children still enjoy shorter books, so it is suggested that you read these books aloud to all your students. Depending on how many weeks you want to spend on this unit, choose several of the chapter books that will hold the attention of your younger children and read them aloud to everyone. Select a few of the other books on the list and have your older children read them on their own and report back to the group what they have learned. You will find suggestions on how to do this on page 139 of the Appendix.

Help keep your little ones focused as you read aloud by providing activities such as period paper dolls, drawing paper, coloring books, LEGO bricks, or building blocks to keep their hands busy.

Story of the American Revolution Coloring Book,
Dover History Coloring Books

Heroes and Heroines of the American Revolution,
Dover History Coloring Books

Colonial and Early American Fashions,
Dover Paper Dolls

Busy Hands

Books

Short Books

They Called Her Molly Pitcher (2006), *Anne Rockwell, 40 pages, Grades K–2*

The true story of an American Revolutionary War heroine. Molly Hays went with her husband when he joined George Washington’s army. While taking water to the American soldiers at the Battle of Monmouth, she saw her husband fall. Satisfying herself that he was only wounded, she took over his job of firing the cannon.

Leave it to Abigail (2020), *Barb Rosenstock, 40 pages, Grades K–3*

The story of one of America’s founding mothers.

Paul Revere’s Ride (1996), *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, illustrated by Ted Rand, 40 pages, K–3*

In April of 1775, Paul Revere was asked to ride to Lexington, Massachusetts, with the news that British troops were coming to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Although not totally accurate, children have been enjoying and memorizing this poem for many years.

Will You Sign Here, John Hancock? (1997), *Jean Fritz, 48 pages, Grades 2–4*

Learn some little-known facts in this fun book about one of the first signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Revolutionary Friends: General George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette (2013), *Selene Castrovilla, 40 pages, Grades 2–4*

The Marquis de Lafayette, a French aristocrat, fought for America during the Revolutionary War. Learn of the bond he shared with General George Washington.

Ben’s Revolution: Benjamin Russell and the Battle of Bunker Hill (2017), *Nathaniel Philbrick, 64 pages, Grades 2–4*

In the late 1700’s, twelve-year-old Benjamin Russell is living a quiet life in Boston, Massachusetts. All of that changes when the Boston Tea Party leads to the closing of Boston Harbor. Tensions continue to mount until one day Ben’s teacher announces to his class, “The war has begun, and you may run!” Experience the war from the perspective of Ben and his friends.

Shh! We’re Writing the Constitution (1997), *Jean Fritz, 64 pages, Grades 2–5*

In the hot summer of 1787, fifty-five delegates gathered in Philadelphia to draw up the constitution of the United States. Newbery Honor author Jean Fritz captures the drama in this factual and humorous look behind the scenes.

Phoebe the Spy (1977), *Judith Griffin*, 48 pages, Grades 3–7

Young Phoebe Fraunces gets a job as George Washington’s housekeeper in order to spy on those around him. She reports all that she learns to her father. One day, Phoebe’s father tells her that someone is planning to kill Washington before he can leave town on a trip. Although Phoebe is frightened, she is determined to find out who is plotting against Washington and stop him.

Books Chapter Books

Skippack School (1939), *Marguerite De Angeli*, 88 pages, Grades K–3

When Eli’s German family comes to America and settles in Penn’s Woods, Eli finds he would rather spend his time roaming the woods, but his mother says he has to go to school. Will his new schoolmaster be kind or cruel?

Arrow Over the Door (1998), *Joseph Bruchac*, 112 pages, Grades 2–5

In the summer of 1777, a group of Abenaki Indians are scouting for King George when they come upon a Quaker Meetinghouse. Told from alternating viewpoints, the encounter between a young Quaker boy and a young Abenaki Indian illustrates what can happen when people learn to understand each other. Author Joseph Bruchac is an Abenaki Indian. *The Arrow over the Door* is based on a true story.

American Adventures: Thomas (1998), *Bonnie Pryor*, 188 pages, Grades 3–7

Based on true events, the Revolutionary War seems far away from Thomas Bowden and his family who are living in Pennsylvania. After Thomas’ father leaves to join George Washington’s army, Thomas and his mother and siblings must flee their home, and Thomas finds himself trying to avoid being captured.

Nathan Hale Hazardous Tales: One Dead Spy (2012), *Nathan Hale*, 128 pages, Grades 3–7

For fans of graphic novels, this is an introduction to the first American spy, Nathan Hale. Not for everyone, it is suggested that you review the book to make sure it is right for your students.

Tolliver’s Secret (1993), *Esther Wood Brady*, 176 pages, Grades 3–7

Ten-year old Ellen Tolliver’s grandfather is a patriot that passes information to General George Washington. When he is injured and cannot continue his mission, Ellen reluctantly agrees to take on the job. Disguised as a boy, she encounters many challenges. Facing these as well as her own doubts and fears, Ellen successfully accomplishes her mission.

Mr. Revere and I: Being an Account of Certain Episodes in the Career of Paul Revere, Esq. as Revealed by His Horse (1998), *Robert Lawson, 152 pages, Grades 3–7*

Humorous account of life during the pre-Revolutionary War days told from the perspective of Paul Revere's horse, Scheherazade, or Sherry for short. Sherry arrives in America as a conceited British loyalist but eventually becomes a true Patriot.

Ben and Me: An Astonishing Life of Benjamin Franklin by His Good Mouse Amos (1988), *Robert Lawson, 114 pages, Grades 3–7*

Another account of Benjamin Franklin's life. This time told from the viewpoint of a mouse.

Early Thunder (1967), *Jean Fritz, 256 pages, Grades 3–7*

Salem is a city that is divided between Whigs (Patriots) and Tories (Loyalists). Young Daniel and his father are strongly in the Tories' camp until the events of 1774 cause Daniel to rethink his loyalties.

Sophia's War (2012), *Avi, 336 pages, Grades 3–7*

In 1776, young Sophia Calderwood witnesses the execution of Nathan Hale in New York City, which has been newly occupied by the British army. Sophia is horrified by the event and resolves to do all she can to help the American cause. Sophia becomes a servant in the home of General Clinton, the commander of the British forces. When she uncovers a plot that will greatly harm the patriots' cause, no one believes her, so she decides it is up to her to stop it from happening.

Anna Strong and the Revolutionary War Culper Spy Ring: A Spy on History Book (2019), *Enigma Alberti, 96 pages, Grades 3–9*

A true story of the Culper Spy Ring that helped the American colonies against the British. There are hidden messages throughout the book.

Rush Revere and the American Revolution (2014), *Rush Limbaugh, 256 pages, Grades 4–7*

Join Liberty, the talking horse, and Rush Revere as they time jump into the middle of Boston, Massachusetts at the brink of the American Revolution.

Johnny Tremain (1943), *Esther Hoskins Forbes, 320 pages, Grades 5–7*

Winner of the 1944 Newbery Medal and considered one of the finest historical novels ever written for children. Fourteen-year-old Johnny Tremain is an apprentice silversmith with a bright future ahead of him until he has a tragic accident that gravely injures his hand. He begins a new job delivering a patriotic newspaper. Soon Johnny is involved in many of the important events of the American Revolution.

Dialogue

(Talking about what you have learned)

1. What caused the American Revolution?

Many factors caused the American Revolution. One major factor was that the colonists felt they should have the same rights as other British citizens, but the British felt that the colonies were established to serve the needs of the crown and Parliament. Other factors were the necessary independent nature of people who would leave the safety of home for the uncertainties of a new world and the physical distance between the homeland and the new land. A series of actions by Parliament such as the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, and the Currency Act led to the colonists' feelings of being overtaxed and over-controlled.

2. What does “taxation without representation” mean?

The main conflict between the colonists and Great Britain was Parliament's insistence on regulating commerce in the colonies without giving the colonist a say in the decisions. Because the colonists were not allowed a representative in Parliament, the full phrase became “taxation without representation is tyranny.”

3. What was the “shot heard around the world,” and why is it called that?

This refers to the first shots fired by the militia at the battle of Lexington and Concord. It is considered to be the beginning of the Revolutionary War. The result of this war would greatly affect the future of the whole world.

4. Describe the three branches of the United States federal government?

Legislative Branch – Congress makes the laws. It consists of two parts – the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state has two Senators. There are four hundred and thirty-five members of the House. They are all elected by the people.

Executive Branch – After Congress passes a law it has to be approved by the President who is elected by the people. It is also his duty to execute the law. Next to the President is the Vice-President.

Judicial Branch – The Supreme Court decides if a law agrees with the Constitution. If it does not, then the law does not take affect. Supreme Court members are chosen by the President and approved by the Senate.

5. Read and discuss the importance of each of the amendments in the Bill of Rights.

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Amendment III

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Amendment VI

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

Amendment VII

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Amendment VIII

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

Amendment IX

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

Amendment X

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

6. Divide your students into Loyalist and Patriots. Have a debate.

Loyalists were those who supported the British monarchy and thought it was in the colonists' best interest to stay united with Great Britain.

Patriots were those who wanted to separate from Great Britain and form their own government.

Have your students research to prepare for this debate.

7. What is the difference between a Republic and a Democracy?

Both provide for representation by elective officials. In a democracy, the majority rules, leaving the minority unrepresented. In a republic, officials are subject to the constitution which protects the unalienable rights of the minority.

Reading Between the Lines

(Discovering hidden parts of the story)

Here are some ways to continue learning outside of the book:

Make Your Own Hornbook

Materials needed: **cardstock, scissors, glue stick, copy of book outline (page 149 of the Appendix), copy of front and back pages (pages 151 and 153 of the Appendix)**

1. Cut out the cardstock using the book outline.
2. Cut out the content sheets and glue them to each side of the hornbook.

Book of Flags from the Revolutionary War period

Materials needed: **Flag images from pages 155-167 of the Appendix, 5 pages of construction paper, stapler**

1. Stack the 5 pages of construction paper and fold them in half to make a 5 1/2" by 8 1/2" book. Staple down the middle.
2. Design the cover of the book however you would like.
3. Paste a State's flag at the top of the first page of the book. Color the flag and write when it joined the Union and any other information that you find about the state. Continue adding flags.

Map of the 13 Colonies

Materials needed: **Map from the Appendix on page 169**

1. Trace or print out the map of the thirteen colonies from the Appendix.
2. Label and color each state a different color.

Make Your Own Whirligig

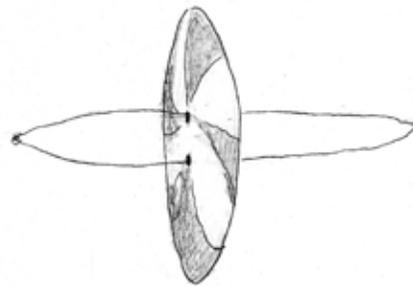
Materials needed: **cardboard, string or twine**

1. Using a small glass, trace a circle on the cardboard and cut it out.
2. Poke two holes, side-by-side in the center of the disc. This should look like a large button.
3. Cut the string or twine into a three-foot length. Thread this through one hole and back through the other. Tie the ends together.
4. You can paint or color your disc.



How to Play:

Using two hands, hold each of the string loops with the disc in the middle. Spin the disc around until the string is twisted. Gently pull and release the ends. The whirligig will wind and unwind as you move in and out. Because the weight of the disc and the string will vary, it may take some time to figure out the right way to keep the disc moving.



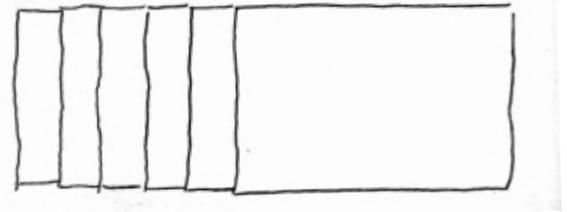
Lap Book of the Constitution

Materials needed: **Appendix pages 173-185 , manilla folder, 10 3x5 cards, 6 sheets of colored 8.5x11 paper, scissors, glue**

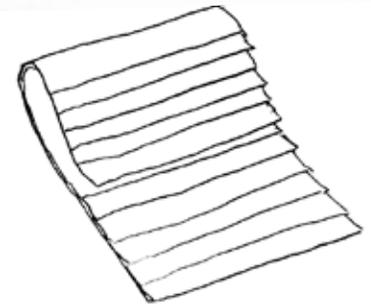
1. Open up the manilla folder. Fold each side in half to the middle as shown in the illustration on page 35.
2. Open the folder and glue the “How It Begins” tag to the top of the left-hand flap. Cut out the pocket labeled “The Preamble.” Fold back on the dashed lines. Put glue only on the folded back tabs and glue as a pocket on the left side of the folder under “How it Begins.” (see illustration on page 35)

Cut out the lines from the Preamble to the Constitution and glue each line on a separate 3x5 index card. These can be shuffled to test the students knowledge of the Preamble. They should be put in order and then stored in the pocket.

3. Make a layered book using 6 sheets of colored 8.5x11 inch paper. Stack each sheet off-set by about half an inch. See the illustration.



When each sheet is about a half of an inch apart, fold so that all of the layers are an equal distance apart and press the crease. Open the papers and glue them together along the fold.



Glue the “Bill of Rights” label on the top flap and then each of the “Amendment” labels in order as you go down.

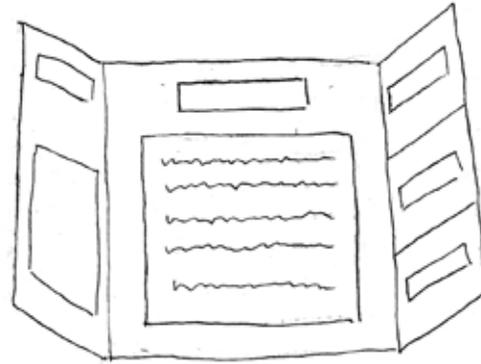
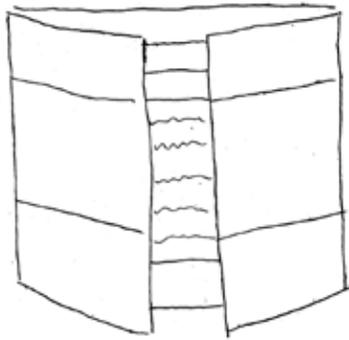
The text and/or pictures for each Amendment should be glued on its tab so that it cannot be seen when the layers are closed. The last tab should be the largest and will have Amendments 11–27 on it.

Glue this layered book in the center of the folder under “What it Says.” (see illustration on page 35)

4. Fold another sheet of 8.5x11 inch paper in half longwise. Then fold it in thirds. Open it and cut the two fold lines from the left side to the center fold, creating a 3-tabbed book. With the fold on the left, glue this book to the inside, right hand flap of the lap book. Glue the “How it Works/

Separation of Powers” label at the top of the top tab. Glue “Article 1.” in the middle of the top tab. Glue “Article 2” on the middle tab, and “Article 3” on the third tab. (see illustration below)

Glue the text explaining the three branches of government inside the corresponding flap.



5. Color the cover image. Close the two sides and glue the two halves of the cover image on the front.

Revolutionary War movies

Movies are a powerful medium for experiencing the times. Here are suggestions for family friendly movies in this time period. You can search for more on the internet. Parents should always preview a movie to make sure it follows your family’s standards.

Liberty’s Kids, 2002 (G)

40-episode animated series of the American Revolution as told through the eyes of teenage reporters for Benjamin Franklin’s newspaper

Ben and Me, 1953 (G)

Adapted from the book by Robert Lawson

Felicity, An American Girl Adventure, 2005 (G)

Set in 1775 Williamsburg, explores the tension between the British Loyalist and the American Patriots

Johnny Tremain, 1957 (PG)

Depicts Paul Revere’s Ride, the Boston Tea Party, and the early battles of the Revolutionary War

April Morning, 1988 (PG)

Dramatization of the Lexington-Concord battle.

Cornbread

Corn was an important part of the colonists' diet.

Ingredients:

1 cup yellow corn meal	2/3 cup milk
1/3 cup flour	1 egg, beaten
2 teaspoons baking powder	3 tbsp. vegetable oil or shortening
1/2 teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon sugar (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease an 8-inch round cake pan.
2. Combine cornmeal and dry ingredients in a bowl.
3. Stir in milk, egg, and oil. Mix thoroughly.
4. Pour into prepared pan and bake 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Jefferson Meringues

A tasty recipe that Thomas Jefferson brought back from Paris.

Ingredients:

6 egg whites	6 tablespoons sugar
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Directions:

1. Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form. Gradually beat in sugar.
2. Place rounded tablespoonsful on parchment paper and bake in a 250-degree oven for 45 minutes or until nicely brown.

Fun Food Facts



While Thomas Jefferson was an ambassador to France, he enjoyed eating French Fries so much, he brought the idea home and frequently served them to friends



The first written recipe for American ice cream was penned by Thomas Jefferson and can be found in the Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress.



During harvesting time, workers were served switchel. Also known as Haymaker's Punch, this drink was made up of molasses, vinegar, and water. It was thought to be a cooling, invigorating drink.

The Epilogue

(Wrapping up the story)

1. Reading biographies is a wonderful way to learn about history. Assign each student one of the following people to read about and research. Set aside a special time for each student to present what they learn. See page 139 in the Appendix for ideas on how to present.

Betsy Ross

Molly Pitcher

Paul Revere

Alexander Hamilton

George Washington

James Madison

Phyllis Wheatley

Thomas Jefferson

King George III

Benedict Arnold

Benjamin Franklin

Patrick Henry

2. Older students can research and make a presentation of major events, people, and places, or you might like to do the research and present it to your children. Suggestions: Stamp Act, Boston Massacre, Boston Tea Party, Intolerable Acts, Declaration of Independence, Valley Forge, Treaty of Paris. See page 140 of the Appendix for ideas on how to make a presentation.
3. The internet is another rich source of information. Search YouTube.com for videos about the Revolutionary period. Use them wisely as visual learning aids.
4. Make a Timeline using the dates on the following page. See page 141 of the Appendix for ideas on how to make a timeline. Add any people or events you researched.

Timeline

- 1754–1763 French and Indian War
- 1765 The Stamp Act
- 1770 Boston Massacre
- 1773 The Boston Tea Party
- 1774 First Continental Congress Meets
- 1775 The Ride of Paul Revere
- The Second Continental Congress Meets
- Battle of Bunker Hill
- 1776 The Declaration of Independence signed
- 1777 Washington at Valley Forge
- 1781 Articles of Confederation adopted
- 1783 Treaty of Paris ending the war
- 1787 U.S. Constitution signed
- 1788 U.S. Constitution ratified
- 1789 George Washington inaugurated as 1st US president
- 1791 Bill of Rights added to Constitution
- 1812 Capitol burned during War of 1812

