

TEN Crucial Days

THE ROAD TO LIBERTY

Lesson Plans Developed by
American Institute for History Education

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To accompany NJN Public Television's Documentary
Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty



Public Television

Comparing General Washington and General Howe

Grade Level: 3–5 *United States History*

Time Needed: Three 40-minute periods

Objectives: Students will be able to:

1. compare and contrast the motivations and characteristics of General Washington and General Sir William Howe.
2. develop a historically accurate one-paragraph article written from a given perspective.

NJCCC Standards Grades 4-8:

6.1.A.11. Summarize information in written, graphic, and oral formats.

6.1.A.4. Analyze data in order to see persons and events in context.

6.4.E.2. Discuss the major events (e.g., Boston Tea Party, Battle of Trenton) and personalities (e.g., George Washington, John Adams, John Witherspoon, William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson) of the American Revolution.

6.4.E.3. Identify major British and American leaders and describe their roles in key events, such as the First and Second Continental Congresses, drafting and approving the Declaration of Independence (1776), the publication of Common Sense, and major battles of the Revolutionary War.

6.4.E.4. Explain New Jersey’s critical role in the American Revolution, including major battles, the involvement of women and African Americans, and the origins of the movement to abolish slavery.

Background:

During the first three years of the American War for Independence, the fortunes of the two sides were significantly affected by the skills and personalities of their respective commanding generals, George Washington and Sir William Howe. In many ways, the final outcome of the war was prefigured during those years. The two sides were personified by these two men, and the defining moment between the two may have been the events of the Ten Crucial Days, depicted in this video.

History has portrayed Washington as the determined, heroic “founding father,” and Howe as competent, but unimaginative and conventional, a British general who sometimes put creature comforts over military victories. In the course of this lesson, a more nuanced and less simplistic picture of these two leaders will emerge.

Both leaders had their baptism by fire as young men in the French and Indian War. Washington, at age 22, was directly involved in the first skirmishes of the war, with his Virginia militia fighting French troops over rival claims to the Ohio River Valley at Fort Necessity. He also served with General Braddock, when he suffered a disastrous defeat against French and Indian forces in 1755. While Washington fought with courage in battles that often ended in defeat, Howe’s equally valorous efforts contributed to important British victories. Howe arrived in North America when he was 32

and led the first British brigade attacking the French at Quebec in 1759. He was also cited for his contribution to the British victory at Louisburg in 1761.

Both leaders were representative of the upper classes of their respective home countries. Washington, of course, was a leader of the wealthy Virginia planter aristocracy. Howe was a member of the British nobility with blood ties to the royal family. (His mother was the illegitimate daughter of King George I and his mistress.) In both cases, their social rank played a major role in their rise to high military rank. Howe's family had bought his commission in the British army at age 17, a typical practice in those days, and Washington's first military action came as a 21-year-old major. In those days, officers were gentlemen and enlisted men were not.

Contrary to what most people would expect, both generals were sympathetic to the colonial Patriots' cause. Sir William Howe, who also held a seat in Parliament from 1758 to 1780—though he was often away serving in the military during that time—was a consistent and vocal critic of British policy toward the American colonies. This was also true of his brother, Admiral Richard Howe. They felt the British position toward the American colonists was too harsh, and Sir William Howe repeatedly stated that he would turn down any assignment fighting against the Americans. He was against the Stamp Act in 1765 and during his campaign for reelection in 1774, he spoke out against the Coercive Acts (known in England as the "Massachusetts Acts" and in the colonies as the "Intolerable Acts"). He voiced his doubts that the "whole British army could enforce" these policies. When he was ordered to take command of British forces in the 13 colonies in 1775, he accepted; even though he disagreed with British policies, he would obey the orders of the king. His brother, Richard, however, accepted appointment as British naval commander in America only on the condition that he and his brother would also serve as royal commissioners, authorized to negotiate a peace settlement with the colonists. They actually met with Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and other colonial leaders, but their talks were unsuccessful.

Also, both Washington and Howe exhibited extraordinary bravery on the battlefield. They were true leaders, in the sense that they would not send their men into dangerous situations while they sat in safety directing things from the rear. At the Battle of Princeton, Washington conspicuously rallied his troops to press an attack that was meeting heavy resistance. Mounted on a white horse, he was an obvious and a relatively easy target for British muskets as he led the attack, and many of his officers later said they were sure he would be killed.

At the Battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill, Howe personally led his men in a frontal assault on the rebel breastworks, in the face of intense musket and rifle fire, and rallied them for a second and third assault when the first two failed. In winning this battle, the British took over 1,000 casualties. This was a brutal lesson for Howe, who took pains to ensure that, in future battles, he never put his soldiers in such a position again.

Both generals were also popular among their troops and inspired the loyalty of their men, partly due to their leadership on the battlefield and partly because of the efforts they took to secure the welfare of the soldiers.

While the Howe brothers were fighting the colonists with an eye toward reconciliation, by 1776 Washington was totally committed to independence, and had no interest in any peace settlement that did not guarantee full independence.

Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton were the first triumphs for the Continental army since they had succeeded in forcing Howe—who had recently replaced General Thomas Gage as the British commander—to withdraw from Boston, the city where the hostilities had started, but a

city that was of relatively little strategic value to the British. The British occupation of New York City was strategically important, however, and Washington had been unable to keep the British from capturing the city and securing New York as a stronghold. The Battles of Trenton and Princeton had followed a string of near disasters for Washington's army, which was then on the brink of dissolution. Washington's boldness and determination at Trenton and Princeton would keep the Revolution alive, but Patriot forces might not have made it that far had Howe been more aggressive about following up his earlier routs of Washington's army in New York and New Jersey. For this, Howe has traditionally been criticized.

Some historians look at this history in a different way. They argue that Howe's goal was to defeat Washington's army and force Washington to negotiate a peace, not simply annihilate his opponents forces. Howe, they claim, also had his limitations. While American history stresses the difficulties faced by the Continental army, Howe also faced significant resource problems. His manpower pool was 3,000 miles away and took months to replenish. He had learned a hard lesson leading his troops in a frontal attack at the Battle of Breed's Hill, where the British won, but suffered more than 1,000 casualties, including 225 killed. He knew that if he lost that many men in every battle, it would be hard to replace them. When in the field, the British sometimes found it difficult to live off the land, as the Americans could, and they had to bring extensive baggage trains of supplies with them, which slowed their movement. Communication between cities and ships at sea was slow, and the political landscape in England was complicated by rifts among the Parliamentary factions and royal officials.

Through the use of segments of the video *Ten Crucial Days*, and readings from the websites provided in this lesson, students will be able to piece together a more nuanced and more interesting understanding of the chemistry between these two outstanding leaders.

Procedures:

Day 1

- I. Anticipatory Set: Based on what they've already learned, have the students answer the following question in sentence form.
 - i. Who won the Revolutionary War in the Boston area—the Continental army or the British royal army? Anticipated answer: The rebels won, forcing the British to evacuate Boston.
- II. Review the students' answers
- III. Explain that, in this lesson, we will look at what happens in "round 2" of the Revolutionary War.
- IV. Students will watch the video *Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty* (25 minutes)
- V. Initiate a class discussion based on the following questions:
 - i. What did Washington do to rally his troops and ensure a victory at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton?
 - ii. What do you think would have happened if Washington had not attacked Trenton and Princeton, and had just waited out the winter in Pennsylvania?
 - iii. Why was Washington's action such a surprise to the British and to the people in the

colonies and in England?

- VI. For homework, the students should develop a headline and a picture for a newspaper article that will highlight Washington's surprise attack on the Hessians at Trenton.
 - i. Divide students into two groups. Half the class should develop their headline and picture from the perspective of a colonial newspaper. The other half should develop theirs from a British newspaper's point of view.
 - ii. You may want to share examples of newspaper headlines and pictures from local newspapers.
 - iii. Explain that the headlines and pictures should be eye-catching to the public to entice them to read the article.
 - iv. If this battle were to occur today, how do you think people would access the news? Besides newspapers, how can people today be informed about what is happening at home and around the world?

Day 2

- I. Anticipatory Set: As a class, develop a list of Washington's characteristics, motivations, and war tactics.
 - i. Have students briefly describe why they offered the answers they did.
- II. Have some students present their headline and the picture they drew for homework.
- III. Explain to the students that the video told the story of Trenton and Princeton, focusing on General Washington. In this class, we will focus on his opponent, General Sir William Howe.
- IV. Explain to the students that just before the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, the British succeeded in driving the American troops out of New York City. As a result, the American troops had retreated to Pennsylvania.
- V. Ask the class to respond to the following questions:
 - i. How do you think British General Howe responded to the news of Washington's surprise attack?
 - ii. What would your response have been as a British officer?
- VI. Students will work in groups of three (selected by the teacher), and research the following websites. Each group will view the websites and discuss them. The group should develop a list of characteristics and motivations for William Howe and list any war tactics he used. The websites include:
 - i. <http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/www/us/williamhowedef.htm>
 - ii. <http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/revolutionarywar2.htm>
 - iii. <http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312848/ghowe.htm>
 - iv. http://www.answers.com/topic/william_howe_5th_viscount-howe

- VII. Groups will report back to the whole class regarding what they learned by researching the websites. The teacher will help clarify conflicting viewpoints between the groups.
- VIII. For homework the students should complete a Venn diagram, comparing of the qualities, tactics, and motivations of General George Washington and General Sir William Howe during the period from 1775 to 1778.
 - i. The students should be able to apply the information learned from the day's lesson to complete the Venn diagrams easily.

Day 3

- I. Briefly review the information the students placed in their Venn diagram. These should also be collected by the teacher for further evaluation.
- II. Students should write a one-paragraph newspaper article to go along with the headline and picture they previously developed.
- III. When completed, these newspaper articles would make for a good bulletin board display. One side should display the articles "written in colonial newspapers" and the other should display articles "written in British newspapers."
- IV. Students can access the web and print out biographical information of the key figures who fought in the war from British, German and USA sites.

Assessment:

1. Evaluate the students' Venn diagrams for thoroughness.
2. Evaluate the students' newspaper article and picture for historical accuracy, creative writing, and effort. A rubric may be used for grading purposes.

Extension:

Students will write a brief paragraph applying the following statement to the Revolutionary War service of Generals Washington and Howe:

"The winners write history, the losers are history."

Links:

Hessian Barracks:

<http://www.barracks.org/>

Battle of Trenton:

http://www.theamericanrevolution.org/battles/bat_tren.asp

<http://www.patriotresource.com/battles/trenton.html>

<http://www.myrevolutionarywar.com/battles/761226.htm>

http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle_trenton1776.html

Battle of Princeton:

<http://www.patriotresource.com/battles/princeton.html>

<http://www.myrevolutionarywar.com/battles/770103.htm>

<http://virtualology.com/revolutionarywarhall/BATTLEOFPRINCETON.COM/>

Revolutionary War in New Jersey

<http://www.doublegv.com/ggv/NJrev.html>

http://mapmaker.rutgers.edu/HISTORICALMAPS/REVOLUTIONARYWAR/Revolutionary_War.html

<http://www.njskylands.com/hsAmRev225.htm>