

TEN Crucial Days

THE ROAD TO LIBERTY

Lesson Plans Developed by
American Institute for History Education

Robert Longo
Director of Educational Programs

and Laureen Hungo
Instructional Design and Curriculum Editor

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



Public Television

How to Win a War You Should Lose

Grade Level: 3–5 *United States History*

Time Needed: Three 40-minute periods

Objectives: Students will be able to:

1. identify and sequence the events of December 1776–January 1777 involving the victories of Washington at Trenton and Princeton.
2. identify the factors affecting Washington’s situation in December 1776.
3. analyze the factors and choose a course of action.

NJCCC Standards Grades 4–8:

6.1.A.8. Compare and contrast competing interpretations of current and historical events.

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.

Key Terms:

- Hessians n. German soldiers, from Hesse-Cassel, Hesse-Hanau, Brunswick, and several other small German states, who were hired by the British government or sent to fight with the British army to repay a debt to the British king.
- Musket n. A standard firearm issued to both British and American soldiers in the Revolutionary War. Muskets were single-shot, smooth-bore weapons with an accurate range of under 75 yards.
- Bayonet n. A three-sided blade with a sharp point that could be attached to the end of a musket, allowing the musket to be used as a pike or a spear, as well as a firearm.

Background:

By the end of the year in which the American colonies declared their independence from Britain, it looked as if the Declaration of Independence would soon be just another piece of wasted paper. The heady successes of the early stages of the Revolutionary War—when the Americans had driven the British out of the Massachusetts countryside, bottled them up in Boston, punished them when they tried to force the Americans off Breed’s Hill, and then bombarded them from Dorchester Heights until they packed up and sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia—seemed like distant memories by December. The British had regrouped, received reinforcements, and marched south from Canada to occupy a more strategic location at New York City. From there they could control access to the Hudson Valley and be within easy sailing distance of New England or the South.

George Washington had brought his new army south to New York to try to prevent a British occupation of this strategic city, but the Continental army was clearly overmatched by the expanded forces of the British. In one battle after another, Washington was forced to withdraw, often in a hurry, before the lockstep British battle machine. It reached the point where a key facet of Washington's battle plan was to guarantee a safe escape route. By the fall, Generals Sir William Howe and Charles Cornwallis had chased Washington from Brooklyn to Harlem to White Plains and then across the Hudson and across New Jersey. When New Jersey, too, proved unsafe, Washington retreated across the Delaware into the relative safety of Pennsylvania. His 35,000-man army from the summer had shrunk to around 3,000. The British appeared so confident of their military prowess in relation to the Patriots that they withdrew the bulk of their troops back to the comforts of New York City for the winter, leaving a force of only 1,500 Hessian soldiers in Trenton to keep an eye on the rebels.

By mid-December, things had gotten even worse for the rebels. Food and supplies were scarce in Washington's winter camp. Many soldiers had gone home in fear of defeat and many others were planning to leave once their enlistments expired on January 1. Washington became convinced that the army could only last another ten days, and that when it dissolved, so would the Americans' bid for independence. Yet, as underdogs had sometimes done in the past and would do again, Washington came up with a plan to wrest victory from the jaws of defeat. By deploying his small forces in the most effective way and using shrewd psychology, careful planning, reliable intelligence, courage, and determination, he could outweigh his adversary's advantage in numbers.

How he managed to do this is one of the great stories of the Revolution, made even greater by the fact that it is not a legend or an exaggeration. It's just what he did.

Procedures:

Day 1

I. Anticipatory Set

- A. Have students respond in brief sentences to the following question: Who won the Revolutionary War—the Americans or the British? How were they able to do this?
- B. Show the first few minutes of the video *Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty*, up to the point where Washington is quoted as saying that the army can't hold out more than about ten more days.
 1. Review with students and discuss why Washington believed the army would collapse in ten days.
 2. At this time, Washington was not only faced with a recent defeat in New York City, but many of his soldiers' enlistments were due to expire at the beginning of the year. Other soldiers saw no way for the Continental army to win, and considered leaving the army. Washington needed a new strategy to turn the war to his advantage.
- C. Provide each student with a map of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Have a copy of the same map enlarged or displayed on an overhead projector.

- D. As a class, the students should mark the locations where Washington's troops tried to stop the British from occupying New York and the route of Washington's retreat through New York, New Jersey, and into Pennsylvania in the second half of 1776. Students should add arrows, showing the direction of both armies' movements during the actions described above.
- E. Divide students into groups of three or four and have them try to plan a strategy for Washington. The new strategy should accomplish the following goals:
 - 1. Revive the soldiers' belief in the cause of the Revolutionary War.
 - 2. Rally the Continental army to believe that they can win.
 - 3. Keep Washington's army from getting destroyed.
 - 4. Score a significant victory against British troops.
 - 5. Make the British believe that it would be difficult for them to win the war.
- F. The students may want to refer to the maps they just created to plan any maneuvers, as well as "Washington's Intelligence Sheet," distributed earlier. Once the students in each group have agreed on a strategy, they should prepare a brief role-play.
 - 1. One student, posing as Washington, should deliver a rousing rally speech to the troops, demonstrating the next move for the Continental army.
 - 2. The other students may want to pose as soldiers and/or aides to Washington.

Day 2

II. Procedures

- A. The groups should resume working on their war strategy.
- B. The students should perform their role-play for the class.

Day 3

III. Procedures

- A. The class should view the remainder of the Ten Crucial Days video.
- B. The class should then discuss which group's strategy, if any, came closest to what Washington actually did.
- C. Engage the class in the following discussion questions:
 - 1. How did Washington's plan keep his army from being destroyed?
 - 2. How did Washington set up his army so that they had a chance to defeat the British?
 - 3. Which side seemed to show the greatest motivation?
 - 4. How did Washington's army's change as a result of these two victories?

Assessment:

Evaluate each group's strategy, based on how well their strategy would succeed in accomplishing the following goals:

1. Revive the soldiers' belief in the cause of the Revolutionary War.
2. Rally the Continental troops to believe that they can win.
3. Keep Washington's army from getting destroyed.
4. Score a significant victory against British troops.
5. Make the British believe that it would be difficult for them to win the war.

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>

-