

UNIT 6 ACTIVITIES

Don Troiani introduces his viewers to soldiers of African descent in several of his paintings of the Revolutionary War. The purpose of this unit is to help students learn more about these soldiers and their wartime experiences. Students will learn how the war created both challenges and opportunities for these individuals, learn several of their stories, and consider what the war meant to and for them and their communities. Using Don Troiani's paintings as a starting point, we can begin to envision what the war was like for these soldiers.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Explore the various roles that soldiers of African descent played in the armies that fought in the Revolutionary War.
- Practice historical empathy and critical thinking by evaluating the risks and rewards that accompanied deciding with whom to side during the Revolutionary War.
- Discover the story of James Forten and how the Revolutionary War presented him with opportunities to experience equality.
- Understand how the participation of soldiers of African descent in the Revolutionary War helped challenge some colonists' widely held prejudices towards them.
- Consider the impact of the Revolutionary War on the lives and opportunities of people of African descent, both in the Revolutionary generation and the generation that immediately followed it.

MATERIALS

[Big Idea 6: Soldiers of African Descent in the Revolutionary War](#)

Painting: *Battle of Bunker Hill* by Don Troiani, 2000 (Courtesy of Don Troiani)

Figure Study: *A Soldier of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment* by Don Troiani, 2000 (Courtesy of Don Troiani)

Figure Study: *Hesse-Hanau Artillery Drummer 1781, Parade Dress* by Don Troiani, 2018 (Courtesy of Don Troiani)

Painting: *Brave Men as Ever Fought* by Don Troiani, 2020 (Courtesy of Don Troiani)

[Worksheet: The Dreams of John Laurens](#)

[Handout: Patriotic Poems](#)

[Handout: Researching to Remember](#)

[Art Card: Cash Pallentine Discharge](#)



Courtesy of Don Troiani

PROCEDURES

Engagement, Option 1

10-15 minutes

SUPPORT SERVICES

Teacher preparation: Review Big Idea 6 - Soldiers of African Descent in the Revolutionary War. Display or project The Battle of Guilford Courthouse by Don Troiani and then Hesse-Hanau Artillery Drummer 1781, Parade Dress by Don Troiani.

Ask students to think about critical jobs in the army during the Revolutionary War. Other than fighting on the battlefield, what jobs and tasks would be important in maintaining the day to day operations of an army? Put the ideas that students come up with on the board or display them.

Explain to students that many soldiers of African descent during the Revolutionary War were infantry soldiers, but many others supported the armies by digging trenches, repairing bridges, playing martial music, and foraging for food. Engage students in conversation around the following questions:

- How important were these services to the armies that fought in the Revolutionary War?
- What would happen if the armies did not have these support systems in place?
- What do you think it was like to do these jobs?
- Why might these tasks have been often assigned to soldiers of African descent?
- Why do you think soldiers of African descent were willing to do these jobs?

Then, display or project *The Battle of Guilford Courthouse* by Don Troiani and point out the soldier of African descent who was a trumpeter in William Washington's regiment of light dragoons. Next, display or project *Hesse-Hanau Artillery Drummer 1781, Parade Dress* by Don Troiani.

- Ask students why they think musicians were important to the armies that fought in the Revolutionary War.

Note: Armies during the Revolutionary War used music in battle for various reasons. Sometimes music was used to encourage the army and other times to intimidate the enemy. Music was also used to assist soldiers in the timing and organization of maneuvers.

EXTEND: Print out the handout, the Dreams of John Laurens for each student or group. Allow time in class for students to complete or assign it for homework. After students complete the worksheet, ask them what arguments John Laurens made about soldiers of African descent joining the Continental Army to fight in battle.

Engagement, Option 2

20-25 minutes

WILLIAM LEE AND GEORGE WASHINGTON

Teacher preparation: Review the Virtual Tour of Washington's Field Headquarters and familiarize yourself with how to navigate to George Washington's sleeping tent, the inner tent, and the baggage chamber. Review the page on William Lee on the Mount Vernon website, linked below. Project the Virtual Tour or ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections

<https://tent.amrevmuseum.org/>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/william-billy-lee/>

Instruct students to go to the Museum of the American Revolution's Virtual Tour of Washington's Field Headquarters.

Have students explore the tent's interior, including the inner chamber where Washington slept, and then the baggage chamber where his enslaved manservant William Lee is likely to have slept. Explain to the students that William Lee travelled with and served Washington throughout the Revolutionary War.

After students have a basic sense of the tent's space and layout, engage them in a conversation around the following questions. When appropriate to the conversation, include details of what is known of William Lee's life and his relationship with George Washington.

- What do you think it was like to use this tent as an office and home throughout the war? How might this have differed for George Washington and for William Lee?
- How do you think George Washington felt about his relationship with William Lee?
- How do you think William Lee felt about his relationship with George Washington?
- Why do you think William Lee was the only enslaved person Washington immediately freed in his will?
- Do you think Washington's views on the institution of slavery changed as a result of his relationship with William Lee during the war?

EXTEND: Read the following excerpt from Washington's will to students and ask them what Washington meant by "his attachment to me" and "faithful services during the Revolutionary War."

"And to my Mulatto man William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom...this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War." - George Washington's Will, 1799

EXTEND: Have students further research the life of William Lee, including his family and their experiences both before and after the Revolutionary War.

Development, Option 1

25-30 minutes

OBJECT OBSERVATION - CASH PALLENTINE DISCHARGE

Teacher Preparation: Display, project, or copy and distribute the Cash Pallentine Discharge art card.

Give students several moments to examine the discharge document, underlining, highlighting, or circling details they believe may be important, as well as ones they have questions about. Then engage students in a conversation around the following questions:

- What is this document?
- When is it dated? Who signed it?
- What words stand out?
- What do they see on the bottom?
- What did Pallentine do to earn the award mentioned on this document?
- Why did Pallentine keep this discharge paper?
- What might he have used the discharge paper for?

Then have students read the information about Cash Pallentine on the back of the card. Conclude by asking students to think about a question they would ask Cash Pallentine if he were alive today.

Note: Cash Pallentine (also spelled Palatine) was among hundreds of people of African descent who served in Connecticut regiments during the Revolutionary War. He enlisted in 1777, serving until the end of the war. In 1783, with peace on the horizon, General George Washington began issuing discharges. Pallentine's discharge states that he served continuously and faithfully for six years, which included the winter at Valley Forge, the Battle of Monmouth, and time in the Hudson Valley.

General George Washington personally signed Pallentine's discharge, as he did for all the soldiers in the Main Department of the Continental Army. As noted at the bottom of the discharge, Pallentine was awarded the "Badge of Merit," also known as the "Badge of Distinction." General Washington created this award on August 7, 1782, to honor soldiers and non-commissioned officers of the Continental Army who served for more than three years "with bravery, fidelity and good conduct..." In recognition of this award, Pallentine was entitled to wear a double chevron (representing his six years of service) on his left uniform sleeve.

Development, Option 2

30-40 minutes

BRAVE MEN AS EVER FOUGHT

Teacher preparation: Review Big Idea 6: Soldiers of African Descent in the Revolutionary War, specifically the section on the Rhode Island Regiment. Print out enough copies of the section on the Rhode Island Regiment for the students or make sure they will have internet access to read the section online.

Display or project *Brave Men as Ever Fought* by Don Troiani. Give students time to examine the painting. Lead them in a close-looking activity with the following questions:

- What is going on in the scene?
- What might the soldiers be feeling? What about the people in the street? What do you see in the painting that makes you say that? What other information is shaping your ideas?
- Describe the young boy of African descent holding his hat. Why do you think Don Troiani put him in the middle of the painting?

Then, have them read the Big Idea section on the Rhode Island Regiment. After they have finished reading, engage students in a conversation around the following questions:

- How close were their observations of the painting to the real story?
- What do you think James Forten was feeling when he witnessed this scene?
- What did Forten mean by "as brave Men as ever fought"?
- Why do you think Forten remembered this event 50 years later?
- Have you experienced anything in your life that you feel you might remember 50 years from now?

EXTEND: Have students research the battles in which the Rhode Island Regiment fought and then create a report in the style of their choosing — film, paper, song, etc. — on their contributions to the Continental Army.

Development, Option 3

35-40 minutes

RISKS AND REWARDS

Teacher Preparation: Review Big Idea 6: Soldiers of African Descent in the Revolutionary War and make enough copies for each student or have the link ready to share with them.

Ask students if they have ever had to make an important decision. Did they consider the risks before making the decision? The possible rewards? Have students read Big Idea 6: Soldiers of African Descent in the Revolutionary War. Divide students into three groups as follows:

- Remain in place and see what happens at the end of the war
- Fight for the Continental Army, hoping the new nation will include them in the idea that "all men are created equal"
- Fight for the British, hoping they will honor their promise of freedom

In their groups, ask students to make a list of the risks and rewards that might be involved in their option for an enslaved freedom-seeker during the Revolutionary War. Then have students present their list to the class. (Their lists might most easily take the form of "If..., then..." statements.)

After students have presented their risks and rewards, engage them in a conversation around the following questions:

- What were the similar risks between all three groups?
- What rewards other than freedom did you consider? Was freedom the only reward?

- How did the potential rewards affect the risks that people of African descent were willing to take?

EXTEND: Have students think about a risk they have taken and how the potential rewards affected their decision.

Culmination

RESEARCHING TO REMEMBER PROJECT

Teacher preparation: Print enough copies of the handout Researching to Remember and/or display images of the following ways soldiers of African descent have been remembered.

SALEM POOR Soldier who fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill.
Stamp: <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/the-black-experience-early-pioneers/salem-poor>

HAITIAN SOLDIERS Haitian soldiers who helped chase the British out of Savannah, Georgia.
Monument: <https://www.visitsavannah.com/savannahs-haitian-monument-franklin-square>

Display the images of the Salem Poor stamp and the monument to the Haitian soldiers in Savannah, Georgia. Discuss with students that these are ways soldiers of African descent who fought in the Revolutionary War have been remembered.

Distribute the handout and assign the students one of the individuals listed or allow them to choose. Have students research the following:

- How did their person participate in the Revolutionary War?
- What contributions did they make?
- What happened to them after the war?

With their research, have students create a memorial for their individual. Forms might include a monument, stamp, painting, sculpture, or other creative idea.

WRITING AND/OR DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Based on the experiences of Black soldiers, to what extent did the Revolutionary War advance the cause of freedom for people of African descent?

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Share the following story with the students.

An enslaved man named James served as a double agent for the Revolutionaries, pretending to serve as a British spy, but in reality delivering information to the Marquis de Lafayette, a French general in the Continental Army. The information James gathered was critical in defeating the British in 1781 at the Siege of Yorktown. After the war, when James applied for a pension but was initially denied, Lafayette helped him by writing a letter to Congress on his behalf. After James was granted his freedom in 1787, he adopted Lafayette as his last name.

Ask students why they believe James changed his name. Why might names have been very important to enslaved people?

EXTEND: Research other people of African descent who changed their names during the Revolutionary War and the years after.

Note: Many enslaved people were forced to answer to new names after they were sold into slavery, or were given names by their owners rather than their parents if born into slavery. A name, like today, was a source of identity for people during the 18th century.

MONUMENT TO HAITIAN SOLDIERS

Teacher preparation: Familiarize yourself with the following monument in Savannah, Georgia. <https://www.visitsavannah.com/savannahs-haitian-monument-franklin-square>

Explain to students that soldiers of African descent also served

in the French Army and supported the Revolutionary cause. Have students research the monument and create a newspaper article or presentation about the monument and the soldiers it honors.

PROCLAMATION PROMISES

Teacher preparation: Review the section in Big Idea 6, called Sometimes Freedom Wore a Red Coat. Review the note on the Emancipation Proclamation below. Print out copies of Lord Dunmore's Proclamation and the Emancipation Proclamation or ensure student access to the internet to allow them to read both documents.

Lord Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775
<https://moar-media-production.s3.amazonaws.com/gd1b5bd1-egc6-4e5f-a313-544445375d44/Eve-LordDunmoresProclamation.pdf>

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863
<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>

Note: On January 1, 1863 President Lincoln presented the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation declared, "all persons held as slaves within any States, or designated part of the State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." The Emancipation Proclamation did not free all enslaved people in the United States. The proclamation declared free only those enslaved people in states not under Union control (the Confederate states). The proclamation encouraged soldiers of African descent to fight for the Union, allowing the army to recruit more soldiers.

Once students have finished reading the documents, engage students in a discussion around the following questions:

- How are the two documents similar and different?
- What was the aim of both documents? Were they issued for any of the same reasons?
- How might enslaved people of African descent have felt hearing about these proclamations?
- What do you think they needed to consider when determining whether or not to take up the proclamations' promises?

FINDING FREEDOM -

SOLDIERING ON DIFFERENT SIDES 30 minutes

Teacher preparation: Review the stories of London and Andrew in the Finding Freedom interactive, as well as the accompanying Google Map. Ensure students have access to the internet.

Have students explore both the stories of London and Andrew in the Finding Freedom interactive, as well as their location points on the Finding Freedom Google Map. As they do, ask students to complete the chart on the "A Soldier's Life" handout. Once they have finished, or a sufficient amount of time has passed, debrief with students, exploring the similarities and differences between the lives of Andrew and London. Discuss: what do their stories tell us about being a soldier during the Revolutionary War?

Finding Freedom Interactive:

www.amrevmuseum.org/findingfreedom

"A Soldiers Life" Handout

https://moar-media-production.s3.amazonaws.com/12fe8c07-3d94-48ca-8850-954740160312/Documents_101520_Finding-Freedom_FFTG_Worksheets-Unit7a.pdf

BLACK SOLDIERS, PAST AND PRESENT

Though the Rhode Island Regiment had segregated companies, most soldiers of African descent in the Continental Army served in integrated units, soldiering alongside men of different backgrounds. But afterward and until the end of World War II, soldiers of African descent in the United States Army served in segregated units led by white officers. Individually or in groups, ask students to choose a Black unit from the 1800s or 1900s — the Triple Nickels, Buffalo Soldiers, Tuskegee Airmen, or United States Colored Troops, for example — and research their history and experiences in their conflict. How did their activities contribute to the war effort?

PATRIOTIC POEMS

Teacher preparation: Print out enough copies of the Patriotic Poems handout to distribute to all students, or prepare to read it out loud.

Inform students that Lemuel Haynes was a free soldier of African descent who fought at the Battle of Lexington. After the battle, Hayes wrote a poem about it.

Have students read his poem and then summarize it in their own words. Engage students in a conversation around the following questions:

- How was the word "liberty" used in the poem? What did Haynes mean by it?
- How is it similar to or different from "freedom?"
- How might others have used the word "liberty" in a different context during the American Revolution?

Next, have students read "Liberty Song" by John Dickinson. Discuss with students how this poem is similar to and different from Haynes' and compare how the word "liberty" is used by each author.