



Unit 6 Activities

The People and Perspectives in Between

This lesson will introduce students to the people that sought to remain neutral on the matter of independence, and those who saw benefits and challenges to supporting either side. Students will explore the variety of reasons why someone might choose neutrality or abandon it and consider the real consequences of making these choices without knowing the outcome of the conflict.

Aims /Objective

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

- Practice historical empathy as they contemplate the difficult choices made by everyday people of the Revolutionary Era
- Practice critical thinking by evaluating the risks and rewards that accompanied deciding with whom to side during the American Revolution
- Examine how different people could have different perspectives on the Revolution and how this impacted choices they made

Materials

Unit 6 Big Idea:
The People and Perspectives in Between

Other Resources:

- *Season of Independence* interactive
- Unit 6 Worksheet: Caught in the Middle (included)
- Timeline of Protest and Independence (included)
- Museum Virtual Tour

Procedures

Engagement 5 – 10 minutes

A THIRD OPTION

Take a moment to review the meaning of the terms “Revolutionary” and “Loyalist” with students. Ask students if they think it would have been easy or difficult to choose between one or the other and why. Next, ask if there were other options besides being a Revolutionary or Loyalist. What were these option(s) and why might someone choose them? What benefits or risks might come along with these choices?

Development 20 – 30 minutes

NEUTRALITY

Teacher Preparation: Familiarize yourself with Hannah Griffitts bio and quote in Season of Independence interactive. Read Unit 6 Big Idea Essay sections entitled

“Neutrality” and “Suffering the Consequences”. Prepare copies of Unit 6 Big Idea Essay for students

Begin by accessing and displaying the Season of Independence interactive and selecting Hannah Griffitts. Have students read her brief bio and quote about Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*. Emphasize that Hannah Griffitts had criticized British Policy but was still against war and independence. Ask students why she ultimately decided not to support either side, providing them time to share theories. Scaffold students to the understanding that Hannah Griffitts opposed war because of the destruction it would bring, opting not to side with the Revolutionaries despite her criticism of British policy.

Provide students with time to brainstorm other reasons that people may have chosen to remain neutral, maintaining a list that students can view and add to. Have students read the “Neutrality” and “Suffering the Consequences” sections from the Unit 6 Big Idea

Essay, offering them the opportunity to add to their brainstorming list with information they gained from reading. Afterward, ask students if it would have been difficult to remain neutral and why they believe it would or would not be. Discuss how peer pressure, threats, or outright violence from Revolutionaries, Loyalists, friends, and family members might have impacted their decision-making.

EXTEND: Introduce Hannah Griffiths's poems, "The Female Patriot" (<https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/female-patriots>) and "Upon Reading a Book Entitled Common Sense" (<https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/upon-reading-book-entitled-common-sense>). Ask students to compare and contrast both poems and discuss what they reveal about Hannah Griffiths's views on British policy and independence. How and why did her views change over time?

Development 30 – 40 minutes

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Teacher Preparation: Prepare copies of Unit 6 Big Idea Essay and Unit 6 Worksheet: Caught in the Middle for students. Read Unit 6 Big Idea Essay section entitled "Caught in the Middle".

Remind students that Revolutionary America was a diverse place with many different types of people. Ask students to open the Museum's Virtual Tour and explore galleries "The Road to Independence" and "The Declaration of Independence". Have students search for Joseph Brant and Elizabeth Freeman in these galleries. Students should read the displays and examine the objects for each individual before answering the three short response questions on the Caught in the Middle worksheet. Afterwards, they can read the Caught in the Middle section from the Unit 6 Big Idea Essay before completing the table on the worksheet.

Once students have completed all sections on the worksheet, designate or label three areas of the classroom to represent Revolutionaries, Loyalists, and remaining neutral. Inform students that they will be imagining what it was like to be several different groups of people living in the Revolutionary Era (Free People of African Descent, Enslaved People, Native Americans, Quakers, Colonists living on the frontier, Loyalists living in Revolutionary strongholds/Revolutionaries living in Loyalist strongholds)

who had to weigh the risks and rewards of taking sides in the Revolutionary War and that they should move to the area of the classroom that represents the side they think they would choose. Remind them that the people making these decisions did not know the outcome of the war when they made them. Let students know that they can move to a different location if they change their mind during the activity. Each time have students from each of the three locations take turns explaining their thinking. Ask students that change their minds to explain why they changed it. (Tip: This can be an excellent teachable moment to discuss how peer pressure and persuasive arguments could sway people to make particular decisions.) Once complete, discuss what (if anything) they found difficult about choosing and what complicated their decision-making.

EXTEND: Remind students of (or introduce them to) the concept of cultural memory, where groups of people pass down memories of historical events from one generation to the next and it colors their perception of the present. Ask students to explain how the experiences of Native Peoples during the French and Indian War and colonial era would impact their decision-making toward American Independence. As a class, make a list of events that might impact the thinking of Native Peoples on independence. Afterward, ask individual students or small groups to sort these events by whether they would be more likely to cause Native peoples to support independence, oppose independence, or remain neutral on independence. Compare and contrast how students sorted the events and ask them to explain their reasoning.

Culmination 20 – 35 minutes

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Teacher Preparation: Prepare copies of the Timeline of Protest and Independence for students.

Ask each student to imagine the perspective of either a member of the Shawnee people in western Virginia, an enslaved person in Alexandria, Virginia, a free person of African descent in Philadelphia, or poor, landless colonist in Boston during January of 1776.. Instruct them to write a persuasive statement as though they were speaking to a friend or family member from the perspective of their assigned role. Within their statement they should describe some of the events leading up to

independence, make an argument for why the person they are persuading should choose to side with Revolutionaries or Loyalists or remain neutral, and explain what is most important to them/what they personally hope to gain by making the choice they advocate for.

Allow students to refer to the Timeline of Protest and Independence. Allow students to share their statements out loud or record them and leave them out on desktops and permit students to move around the room to read other letters, later sharing which ones they found to be the most persuasive.

Extensions and Adaptations

POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS

Introduce Students to Phillis Wheatley by sharing the portrait of her in her book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/collection/phillis-wheatleys-poetry>). Explain how Phillis was kidnapped from Africa and brought to British North America where she was enslaved but received an education and became a writer who advocated for independence. Have students read a poem that she wrote regarding tyranny and slavery in the colonies, entitled *To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth*. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47706/to-the-right-honorable-william-earl-of-dartmouth>) Afterward discuss how they think her experiences may have led her to become a Revolutionary. Ask them if they think her perspective on independence was typical for enslaved people and to explain why they do or don't believe it was.

DUELING OPINIONS

Instruct students to access the Season of Independence Interactive and read the entries for Lemuel Haynes and Mary Perth. Note that while they are both people of African descent, Lemuel was free and became a Revolutionary to fight for freedom while Mary was enslaved and became a Loyalist to seek her own personal freedom. Ask students:

- What do their different decisions tell us about what it means to pursue liberty and freedom during the American Revolution?
- How might their individual situations have impacted their decision-making?

For additional background on the decision-making of enslaved people in Virginia (like Mary Perth) who sought freedom, allow students to explore the Museum's Finding Freedom digital interactive (<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/interactives/finding-freedom>).

DEBATING INDEPENDENCE

Form students into different delegations representing two groups of people that they learned about in the Unit 6 Big Idea essay. Have them work within their groups to prepare arguments for whom to side with that they can present in a formal debate. Offer students the opportunity to present rebuttals once opening arguments have taken place. Revisit learning from prior units by holding several debates between different groups of people that students learned about in other units.

THEN AND NOW

Though Native American is a common term, it's often used as a catch-all for the many different Native Peoples that lived (and continue to live) in North America. Ask students to research some of the different Native American groups that deliberated over whether to support American independence. Introduce the following Native American nations to students: Shawnee, Lenape, Wyandot, Cherokee, and the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy (Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Seneca, Tuscarora, Oneida). Split students into small groups and assign them one of the Native American nations listed above to research. Have students research their assigned nation's role in the American Revolution and then construct a "Then and Now" profile that illustrates their role in the American Revolution and the state of their assigned Native American nation now. Students can share this information with a PowerPoint presentation or by creating a timeline showing key events in the history of their group.

NEUTRAL NUANCE

The idea of neutrality can be deceptively complex. Ask students, as individuals or small groups, to define what it means to be neutral. Prompt students to share their definitions, then explore the topic further by discussing with students:

- Is neutrality the absence of opinion, a desire to stay out of conflict with others, a dislike of all sides in a conflict, or all of these at once?
- Is neutrality more about beliefs or behavior? When might it be just one? When might it be both?
- What are some examples from their own lives where students have attempted to remain neutral? What motivated their decision? Did anything make it difficult to maintain their neutral stance?

A SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Quakers are a denomination of Christianity with strong beliefs in pacifism, or non-violence. They often refused to support either Revolutionaries or Loyalists as a result of their beliefs, which commonly led to suspicion from both sides. Allow students to use the Museum's Virtual Tour to view the display about Quakers and confiscated property in the "Property and War" gallery. Afterward, ask students how non-Quakers may have interpreted their neutral stance. How was the way colonists viewed Quakers similar to or different from how they viewed Native Peoples? Were Quakers considered more or less trustworthy? Why or why not? What are some consequences that some Quakers endured for their decisions to stay neutral?