

Code-breaking activity on militia of the American Revolutionary War

Introduction:

In this activity, students will learn where Cornwallis surrendered to Washington, who rode with William Dawes, and how the Minutemen got their name.

Grade level:

Late elementary to middle school

Illinois Learning Standards Addressed:

16.A.3a Describe how historians use models for organizing historical interpretation (e.g., biographies, political events, issues and conflicts).

16.A.4a Analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

16.B.3b Explain how and why the colonies fought for their independence and how the colonists' ideas are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

Activity:

Read the following article. To break the code, you will need to take note of the words that are numbered. The first letter of the numbered word represents the letter in the code. After you have uncoded the questions, answer them.

For example: for ¹1=F example ²2=E

Colonists were divided over which side to support in the war; in some ¹⁶ areas, the struggle was a civil war. The Revolutionaries (also known as "Americans" or "Patriots") had the active support of about 40 to 45 percent of the colonial population. About 15 to 20 percent of the population ⁷ supported the British Crown during the war, and were known ² as Loyalists (or Tories). Loyalists fielded perhaps 50,000 men during the war years ^{10 25} in support of the British Empire. After ¹⁷ the war, some 70,000 Loyalists departed the United ¹⁴ States, most going to Canada, Great ²³ Britain, or to British colonies in the Caribbean.

When the war began, the Americans did not have a regular army (also known as a "standing army"). Each colony had traditionally provided for its own ⁶ defenses through the use of local militia. Militiamen served for only a few weeks or months at a time, were reluctant to go very ¹³ far from home ²⁴, and were thus generally unavailable for extended operations. Militia lacked the training and discipline of regular soldiers, but were occasionally effective ²¹ against regular troops. American militia were sometimes adept at partisan warfare, and were particularly effective at suppressing Loyalist ³ activity when British ¹⁸ regulars were not in the area.

Seeking to coordinate military efforts, the Continental Congress established (on paper) a regular army—the Continental Army—in June ¹ 1775, and appointed George Washington as commander-in-chief. The development ²⁰ of the Continental Army was always a work in progress, and Washington reluctantly augmented the regular troops with militia throughout the war. Although as many as 250,000 men may have served as regulars or as militiamen for the Revolutionary ⁸ cause in the eight years of the war, there were never more ⁴ than 90,000 total men under arms for the Americans in any given year. Armies in North America were small by European standards of the era; the greatest number of men that Washington personally commanded in the field at any one time was fewer than 17,000.

Early in 1775, the ¹⁵ British Army consisted of about 36,000 men worldwide, but wartime recruitment steadily increased this number. Additionally, over the course of the war ¹² the British hired about 30,000 German mercenaries, popularly known in the colonies as "Hessians" because many of them came from Hesse-Kassel. Germans would make up about one-third of the British troop strength in North America. By 1779, the number ⁵ of British and German troops stationed in North America was over 60,000, though these were spread from Canada ¹⁹ to Florida ²².

To help get you started, 11=X.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
																							11		

Question 1. 12-24-17-15 25-16 15-24-21 5-17-4-21 15-24-17-15 12-17-16

23-25-13-21-5 15-6 4-21-4-18-21-8-16 6-22 15-24-21 4-25-3-25-15-25-17 6-22

15-24-21 17-4-21-8-25-19-17-5 19-6-3-6-5-25-21-16 12-24-6 12-6-14-3-20 18-21

8-21-17-20-10 22-6-8 18-17-15-15-3-21 25-5 17 4-25-5-14-15-21'-16

5-6-15-25-19-21 ?

Question 2. 12-24-6 8-6-20-21 12-25-15-24 12-25-3-3-25-17-4 20-17-12-21-16 15-6

12-17-8-5 15-24-21 4-25-3-25-15-25-17-16 17-15 3-21-11-25-5-23-15-6-5 17-5-20

19-6-5-19-6-8-20 15-24-17-15 15-24-21 18-8-25-15-25-16-24 12-21-8-21

19-6-4-25-5-23 22-8-6-4 18-6-16-15-6-5 ?

Question 3. 12-24-21-8-21 17-5-20 12-24-21-5 25-5 13-25-8-23-25-5-25-17 20-25-20

19-6-8-5-12-17-3-3-25-16 16-14-8-8-21-5-20-21-8 15-6

12-17-16-24-25-5-23-15-6-5 ?

Answers

- A1. What is the name that was given to members of the militia of the American Colonies who would be ready for battle in a minute's notice? Minutemen
- A2. Who rode with William Dawes to warn the militias at Lexington and Concord that the British were coming from Boston? Paul Revere
- A3. Where and when in Virginia did Cornwallis surrender to Washington? Yorktown on October 19, 1781

Code Key:

17=A
18=B
19=C
20=D
21=E
22=F
23=G
24=H
25=I
1=J
2=K
3=L
4=M
5=N
6=O
7=P
26=Q
8=R
16=S
15=T
14=U
13=V
12=W
11=X
10=Y
9=Z

**Resources at the Pritzker Military Library:
(also available through interlibrary loan from your local library)**

- Bodle, Wayne K. *The Valley Forge winter: civilians and soldiers in war.* University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.
Call Number: E234 .B63 2002.
- Cunliffe, Marcus. *Soldiers & civilians; the martial spirit in America, 1775-1865.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1968. Call Number: E301.C86 1968.
- Galvin, John R., 1929-. *Minute men.* New York: Hawthorn, 1989.
Call Number: E255.G35 1989.
- Greene, F. V. *The revolutionary war and the military policy of the United States.* New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1911. Call Number: E230 .G79
- Lancaster, Bruce, 1896-1963. *From Lexington to liberty: the story of the American Revolution.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955.
Call Number: E208.L25 1955
- Leckie, Robert. *George Washington's war: the saga of the American Revolution.* New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Call Number: E208.L439 1992.
- McCullough, David G. *1776.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.
Call Number: E208 .M396 2005
- Morton, Joseph C. *The American Revolution.* Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003.
Call Number: E208.M9 2003.
- Reid, Stuart. *Soldiers of the Revolutionary War.* Oxford, England: Osprey, 2002.
Call Number: E208.R45 2002.
- Taaffe, Stephen R. *The Philadelphia campaign, 1777-1778.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003. Call Number: E233.T33 2003.