

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



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**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## The American Revolution

In a narrow sense, the American Revolution was a fight over a few new taxes and some other restrictions that England imposed on its North American colonies in the years just after the Seven Years War. In this sense, it was only a parochial battle between one European imperial power and some of its dependencies. It might be of interest to the nations involved. But otherwise, it would have had little significance.

In a broader sense, however, the American Revolution was a watershed event in world history. For in battling the British, the American colonies saw their fight as a defense of fundamental liberties. And they felt a need to defend their actions by setting down ideas and ideals that would help to reshape human history. The Revolution helped bring a new nation into existence. This by itself was to have world historical significance. But beyond that, the words of the rebels, especially the Declaration of Independence, held up a conception of individual rights and of the proper relation of citizen to state that has inspired people around the world down to the present day. The illustrations in this booklet help reveal the process by which a small group of colonists came to take this stand and change the world.

The twelve illustrations in the booklet focus on some of the central events and key trends of the American Revolution. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **England Versus the Colonies**

The illustrations in this lesson give a sense of how Americans reacted initially to efforts by England after 1763 to impose tighter restrictions over its North American colonies. Those reactions show that the colonists already felt themselves to be free English citizens, entitled to rights that British leaders themselves did not recognize.

### **From Protest to Revolt**

Colonial protest took many forms. And it became increasingly militant and even violent. The illustrations in this lesson ask students to consider the pros and cons of the various actions the colonists took in defending what they regarded as their historic rights and liberties.

### **A War for Independence**

The war did not go well at first for the colonial forces. But the suffering it brought, and the ideals for which it was fought, helped to forge a new nation out of thirteen separate colonies. The illustrations in this lesson touch on these themes.

### **Victory for the New Nation**

A key turning point in the war was the battle of Saratoga. From then on, the colonies slowly gained the upper hand. The defeat of the world's strongest imperial power launched a confident new nation and set the stage for the long, slow, but steady evolution of its democratic ideals.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

## *The American Revolution*

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### OBJECTIVE

1. Students will better understand how the colonists felt about British efforts to control the colonies more tightly in the 1760s and 1770s.
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# England Versus the Colonies

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Illustration 1

In 1763, at the end of its Seven Years War with France, England began to tighten its control over its huge North American empire. The British felt it was only fair for the colonists to pay more for the protection the empire gave them. But the American colonists did not share the British view of what was fair. Colonial outrage focused especially on the Stamp Act of 1765. This illustration shows the front page of a newspaper called *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*. The colonists said it was wrong for the British Parliament to tax them directly since they were not represented in it. The new taxes were mainly meant to raise revenue. But this newspaper heading seems to suggest that they were also aimed at a stricter kind of control—and the denial of colonial rights. By adding to the cost of newspapers, the Stamp Act seemed to threaten a key right, the right to freedom of speech and expression.

#### Illustration 2

This 1765 editorial cartoon by Benjamin Franklin takes the side of the colonies in opposing the new British taxes. But it also warns England's leaders that the taxes may hurt their own empire, too. That empire is shown as a dismembered figure who has fallen from her seat at the top of the globe. The figure's limbs stand for the various colonies she has lost. Ships stand idle in the background. The Latin words translate as "Give a dime to Belisarius." Belisarius was an ancient general who conquered Italy for Justinian. He was later dismissed and was said to have become a beggar. The classically educated public of Franklin's time would have understood this reference quickly as making a point about how easily the mighty can fall from power.

#### Illustration 3

The Boston Massacre is shown here in a famous drawing by Paul Revere. Revere needs to be identified because his drawing definitely takes the colonists' side in this fight. The British soldiers fired on the crowd, killing five, but only after they were badly taunted by it. Acting with courage, John Adams successfully defended the soldiers in court, even though he agreed with colonial protests against Great Britain. Nevertheless, the massacre's biggest effect was to add to the growing tensions between the colonists and the British government.



## Lesson 1—England Versus the Colonies

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustration

1. This illustration shows part of the front page of a newspaper called *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*. The newspaper's date is October 31, 1765. This front page is actually designed to be a strong criticism of the 1765 Stamp Act. What was the Stamp Act, who enacted it, and why?
2. A skull and cross bones are displayed at the top, in the center of this front page. Another skull and cross bones appear in a special space on the top right. Based on what you know about the Stamp Act, can you explain what this space at the top right was for? What point about the Stamp Act does the newspaper make by showing the skull and cross bones in this space?
3. The headline on the paper reads "Expiring: In Hopes of a Resurrection to Life again." Why would the Stamp Act lead the paper to claim it was "expiring"? What activities in the American colonies gave it "hope of resurrection to life again"?

### Follow-up Activity

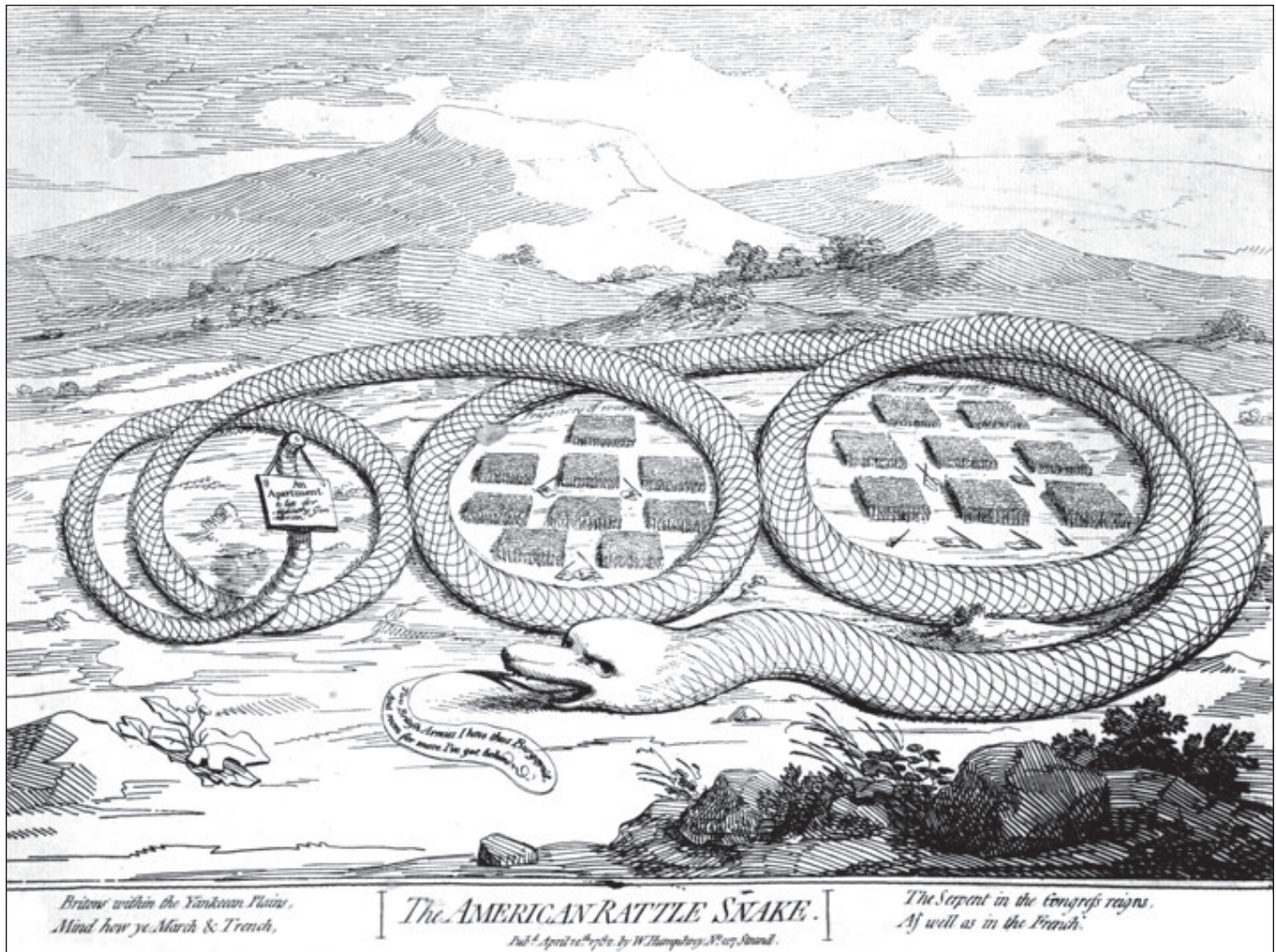
1. **Small-group activity:** The text beneath the headline on this front page was written by the newspaper's editor, William Bradford. In part, he writes that he hopes "methods can be found to elude the chains forged for us, and escape the insupportable slavery" caused by the Stamp Act. Your task as a group is to respond to this front page with your own letters to the editor. Each member of your group should write a letter to the editor commenting on the Stamp Act and its effects on this newspaper. However, in writing these letters, each of you should choose to act the part of one of the following types of people:

- A colonial farmer opposed to the Stamp Act
- A member of the British Parliament
- A colonial merchant
- A colonial paper manufacturer
- A British soldier stationed in the colonies

Post your letters, along with the headline, as part of a bulletin board display on the Stamp Act crisis.

## Victory for the New Nation

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress