



AMERICAN REVOLUTION 250TH ANNIVERSARY LESSON

Who is the Traitor? Patriot & Loyalist Perspectives
During the American Revolution



Who is the Traitor? Patriot & Loyalist Perspectives During the American Revolution

Task Overview: Using this series of activities, students will be able to critically evaluate primary sources and historical perspectives in order to construct an argument about which group was the real “traitor” during the American Revolution.

Essential Question:

Could both patriots and loyalists be considered traitors during the American Revolution?

Targeted Course(s): Virginia Studies (4th/5th grade) & United States History I

- Note: A preliminary understanding of the causes of the American Revolution is needed for this lesson

Materials:

- Graphic Organizers for Various Thinking Routines (included at end of lesson packet)
 - See, Think, Wonder; SOAPS; AEIOU
- Loyalist & Patriot Primary Sources (included at end of lesson packet)
- Posterboard or Large Sticky Notes & Markers

Part 1: Introduction

- Begin by discussing the outbreak of the American Revolution & define key terms “patriot,” “loyalist,” and “traitor.”
 - Traitor – A traitor is a person who betrays a friend, a country, or an idea.
 - Patriots – Patriots were colonists who believed that America should be independent from the British government so that the colonies could set up their own government. Patriots were often British citizens, which meant they were turning against their own government with their protests, boycotts, and violence. From a British point of view, Patriots were considered traitors because they were fighting against their own government! Even George Washington, who went on to lead the Continental Army in the American Revolution, started his career as a British soldier in the French and Indian War.
 - Loyalists – Loyalists, also called Tories, were people who wanted to maintain the relationship with Great Britain, and did not support a revolution. Patriots often considered loyalists to be traitors because they were not supporting the American cause, even though they lived in the

colonies. Many loyalists were not treated well during and after the war, and some even had to leave the country.

- *Note: This exercise is primarily focused on the motivations of white colonists who already experienced a measure of freedom. Enslaved, free Black, and indigenous motivations are less represented in this lesson due to a variety of other factors at play in their decision making.*
- Complete the “See, Think, Wonder” thinking routine with the print “Bostonian’s Paying the Excise-man” (linked below) in order to have students begin to discuss the idea of perspective. After completing the thinking routine, reveal the context behind the image. Ask students if this changes how they think about patriots?
 - [Bostonian’s Paying the Excise Man print and background information](#)
 - [See, Think, Wonder thinking routine information](#)

Part 2: Exploration of Primary Sources

Source Analysis Methods:

- Choose one the methods below, depending on what skills you are trying to develop with your students.
 - Gallery Walk: Display sources around the room. Students will walk around the room and analyze each source or artifact using a graphic organizer. The teacher will then work with students to decide whether each source represents a patriot or loyalist point of view.
 - Pair & Share: Divide students into groups of 4-6 and give each group two or three sources to evaluate using their graphic organizers. The groups will then share out to the class about their sources. Encourage them to focus on how they represent either the loyalist or patriot perspective.
- Note – sources are included at the end of the packet. You can choose to use some or all, depending on the amount of time you have in your classroom for this activity.

Analysis Routines (Graphic Organizers Included at end of Packet):

- SOAPS – Works best for written sources
 - Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Speaker
- AEIOU – Can be used for both visual and written sources.
 - Action, Emotion, Interest, Oh!, Um?

- For more strategies on interpretation, visit the [National Archives Primary Source Page](#)

Part 3: Conclusion

Have students discuss if this changed what they thought about Patriots and Loyalists? Can both groups be traitors? Can neither?

Extension Activity: Flash Debates

- Divide students into two groups. Group A will represent Patriots. Group B will represent Loyalists.
- Students will work in their groups to develop their argument about why the other group are traitors.
- Students will pair with an individual in the other group and explain their argument.
- Students will return to their original group and discuss the arguments of both sides.
- Each group will then nominate one student to answer the question “Who is the traitor?” using information from both groups and present to the class.

Pro-Patriot Sources & Objects

- Source A – Selected Quotes from Patriots
- Source B – Bloody Massacre on the Streets of Boston (VMHC 2000.110.35)
- Source C – Dunmore’s Proclamation (VMHC E203 A51 Ser4)
- Source D – George Washington to Bryan Fairfax, July 20 1774 (VMHC Mss2 W277 c 3)
- Source E – Culpeper Minute Men Flag Replica (VMHC 1948.3)

Pro-Loyalist Sources & Objects

- Source 1 – Selected Quotes from Loyalists
- Source 2 – Mercer’s Account of the Stamp Act (VMHC Mss2 M5345a 1)
- Source 3 – Martin Pickett Letter (VMHC Mss2 P5869 a2)
- Source 4 – Diaries of Nicholas Cresswell
- Source 5 – Anne Hulton Letter

Graphic Organizers

- See, Think, Wonder
- SOAPS
- AEIOU

Source A – Selected Quotes from Patriots

Benjamin Franklin

- “The mistaken policy of the Stamp Act first disturbed this happy situation, but the flame thereby raised was soon extinguished by its repeal, and the old harmony restored, with all its concomitant advantage to our commerce. The subsequent act of another administration, which, not content with an established exclusion of foreign manufactures, began to make our own merchandise dearer to the consumers there, by heavy duties, revived it again; and combinations were entered into throughout the continent to stop trading with Britain till those duties should be repealed. All were accordingly repealed but one, the duty on tea. This was reserved (professedly so) as a standing claim and exercise of the right assumed by Parliament of laying such duties.” – February 1773 ([Additional Information Here](#))
- Adapted Transcript - The Stamp Act made the relationship between the colonists and Parliament bad, but it was quickly repealed and things became better. However, more taxes came from Great Britain, which caused colonists to stop trading. Parliament also got rid of those taxes, but kept the Tea Tax, which they said they had the right to do.

Patrick Henry

- “A King, by disallowing Acts of this salutary nature, from being the father of his people, degenerated into a Tyrant and forfeits all rights to his subjects' obedience.” - March of 1775, the Second Virginia Convention, St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia
- Adapted Transcript – When a king turns into a tyrant, his subjects no longer have to listen to him.

Thomas Jefferson

- “Our properties within our own territories [should not] be taxed or regulated by any power on earth but our own”. - A Summary View of the Rights of British America, August, 1774
- More Information Here: <https://virginiahistory.org/learn/thomas-jeffersons-1774-summary-view-rights-british-america>

Thomas Paine

- “Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared, that she has a right (not only to TAX) but “to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER,” and if being bound in that manner is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.” – The American Crisis, December 1776 ([Full Text Here](#))
- Adapted Transcript – Great Britain has threatened military action in order to enforce its right to tax the colonists, as well as control them “in all cases whatsoever”. This is slavery, and God is the only person with unlimited power.

This is a detailed historical engraving depicting the Boston Massacre. The scene is set in a city street with multi-story buildings in the background. On the right side of the image, a line of British soldiers in red uniforms with white facings and bayoneted rifles stands in formation. They are firing towards a group of civilians on the left. Large, billowing clouds of white smoke fill the center of the street, partially obscuring the soldiers and the people. On the left, a group of men in 18th-century clothing are shown in various states of distress; some are falling, some are running, and others are being pushed back. A small dog is visible in the lower left corner. The buildings in the background have several windows, some with shutters. A sign on one of the buildings reads 'BUTCHER'S HALL'. In the upper right corner, there is a small circular emblem containing the number '2'. The entire scene is rendered in a classic engraving style with fine lines and cross-hatching for shading.

Contextual Information Can be Found Here: [Massachusetts Historical Society](#)

Source C – Dunmore's Proclamation

By his Excellency the Right Honourable JOHN Earl of DUNMORE, his Majesty's Lieutenant and Governor-General of the Colony and Dominion of Virginia, and Vice-Admiral of the same:

A P R O C L A M A T I O N.

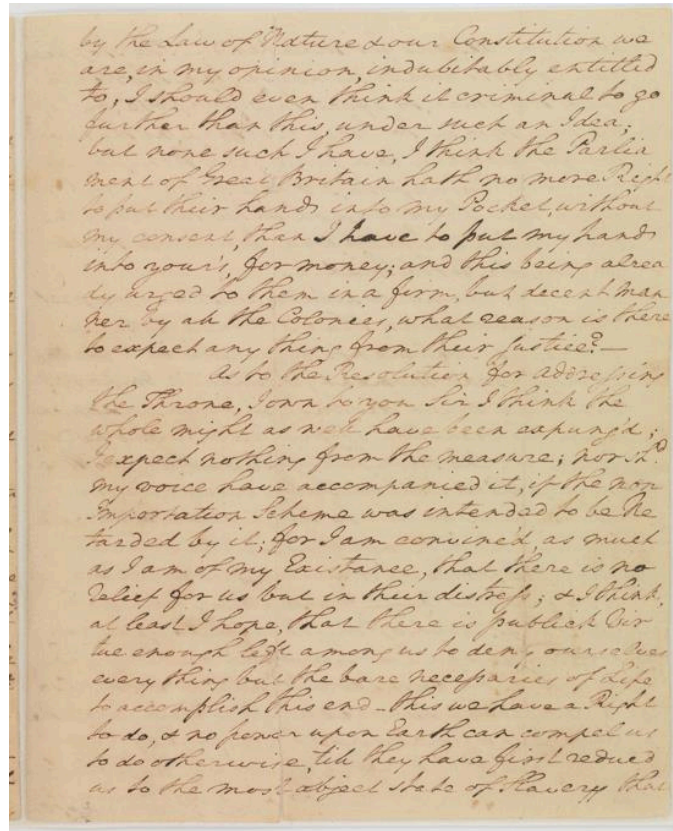
AS I have ever entertained Hopes that an Accommodation might have taken Place between *Great Britain* and this Colony, without being compelled, by my Duty, to this most disagreeable, but now absolutely necessary Step, rendered so by a Body of armed Men, unlawfully assembled, firing on his Majesty's Tenders, and the Formation of an Army, and that Army now on their March to attack his Majesty's Troops, and destroy the well-disposed Subjects of this Colony: To defeat such treasonable Purposes, and that all such Traitors, and their Abettors, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace and good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course of the civil Law is unable to effect, I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be obtained, I do, in Virtue of the Power and Authority to me given, by his Majesty, determine to execute martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony; and to the End that Peace and good Order may the sooner be restored, I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms to resort to his Majesty's S T A N D A R D, or be looked upon as Traitors to his Majesty's Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offences, such as Forfeiture of Life, Confiscation of Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby farther declare all indentured Servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining his Majesty's Troops, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to his Majesty's Crown and Dignity. I do farther order, and require, all his Majesty's liege Subjects to retain their Quitrents, or any other Taxes due, or that may become due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may be again restored to this at present most unhappy Country, or demanded of them for their former salutary Purposes, by Officers properly authorised to receive the same.

*GIVEN under my Hand, on Board the Ship William, off Norfolk,
the 7th Day of November, in the 16th Year of his Majesty's
Reign.*

D U N M O R E.

Contextual Information Can Be Found Here: [Lord Dunmore's Proclamation](#)

Source D – George Washington to Bryan Fairfax, July 20 1774



by the Law of Nature & our Constitution we are, in my opinion, indubitably, entitled to, I should ever think it criminal to go further than this, under such an Idea; but none such I have, I think the Parliamt of Great Britain hath no more Right to put their hands into my Pocket, without my consent, than I have to put my hands into yours, for money; and this being already urged to them in a firm, but decent manner by all the Colonies, what reason is there to expect any thing from their justice?—

As to the Resolution for adorning the Throne, I own I own Sir I think the whole might as well have been a puny; I expect nothing from the measure; nor will my voice have accompanied it, if the non-Importation Scheme was intended to be retarded by it; for I am convinced as much as I am of my Existence, that there is no relief for us but in their distress; & I think, at least I hope, that there is published but too enough light among us to deny ourselves every thing but the bare necessities of Life to accomplish this end—this we have a Right to do, & no power upon Earth can compel us to do otherwise, till they have first reduced us to the most abject state of Slavery that

Context:

- Following the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, the British Parliament passed a series of acts intended to punish Massachusetts for its rebellious actions. Known as the Intolerable Acts in North America, they sparked widespread outrage. Parliament's intention of subduing revolutionary sentiment served as a catalyst for unifying the colonies in opposition. It was within this context in the summer of 1774 that George Washington engaged in correspondence with his friend and neighbor Bryan Fairfax. In this letter, Washington writes to Fairfax after presiding over a committee of Fairfax County citizens that issued a series of resolves opposing British action and calling on a unified colonial response. Washington replies to a letter from Fairfax that called for a more moderate response to the controversy and explains his opposition to Parliament's policies.

Selected Quotes:

- "I think the Parliament of Great Britain hath no more right to put their hands into my Pocket, without my consent, than I have to put my hands into your's, for money...and this being already urged to them in a firm, but decent manner by all the Colonies, what reason is there to expect any thing from their justice?"
- For full transcription of letter, see here:
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-10-02-0081>

Source E – Culpeper Minute Men Flag Copy



This Culpeper Minute Men flag features a rattlesnake and a combination of “Liberty or Death” and “Don’t Tread On Me” – all symbols of American patriotism in the mid-1700s. They are well known for their fighting in the Dec 1775 Battle of Great Bridge, which ultimately drove out Royal Governor Dunmore.

Source 1 – Selected Quotes from Loyalists

Declaratory Act – March 18, 1766

- “That the said colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and of right ought to be. subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and parliament of Great Britain; and that the King's majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons of Great Britain, in parliament assembled, had, has, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America, subjects of the crown of Great Britain, in all cases whatsoever.” British Parliament, March 18 1766 ([Additional Information Here](#))
- Adapted Transcript – The American colonies are subordinate to the Parliament of Great Britain in all cases whatsoever.

Loyalist Petition From Princess Anne County, VA

- “We, the inhabitants of Princess Anne County, being fully sensible of the error and guilt into which this Colony hath been misled, under colour of seeking redress of grievances, by a set of factious men, styling themselves Committees and Congresses, who have violently, and under powers of Government, endeavoured to overturn our Constitution, have incurred the guilt of actual rebellion against our most gracious Sovereign.” - Unsigned Petition of the Loyalists of Princess Anne County: Printed in Peter Force, ed., American Archives Vol. III "A Documentary History", Washington, D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1840), 1671.
- Adapted Transcript – We, the people who live in Princess Anne County, are aware that there are men trying to rebel against the King and we think it is an error.

James Chalmers (Candidus) –

- “Innumerable are the advantages of our connection with Britain; and a just dependence on her, is a sure way to avoid the horrors and calamities of war. Our author surely forgets, that when independent, we cannot trade with Europe, without political connections, and that all treaties made by England or other commercial states are, or ought to be, ultimately subservient to their commerce.” - Plain Truth, March 1776 ([Additional Information Here](#))
- Adapted Transcript – The advantages of being a British colony are huge, and we must maintain dependence on her to stay profitable and avoid war.

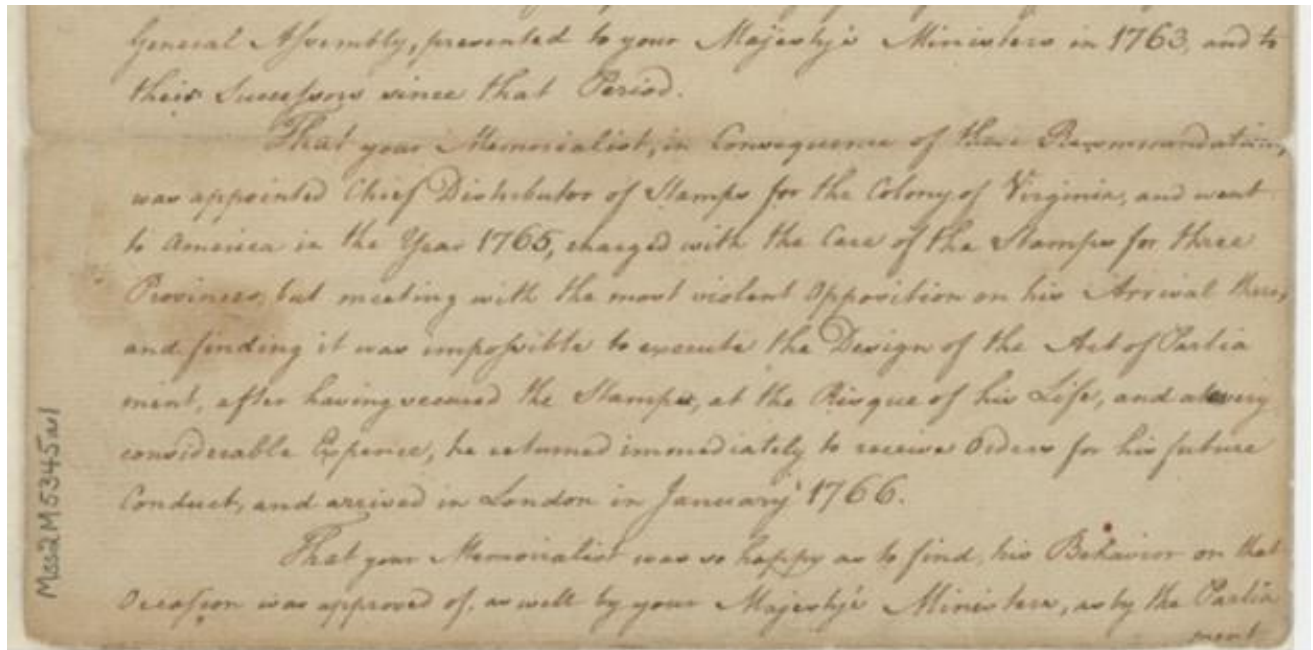
Lieutenant James Moody

- “Rebellion is the foulest of all crimes; and what was to begin in wickedness must end in ruin.”

Response to the Declaration of Independence

- “They now pretend to discover plots and plans of slavery, in statutes by which they and their fathers have lived and even in their very charters on which they were first settled...they now kick charters, compacts, statutes, and precedents all out of doors” – Kentish Gazette, 1776
- Additional Context Here: [British Newspaper Archive](#)

Source 2 – Mercer's Account of the Stamp Act



General Assembly, presented to your Majesty's Ministers in 1763, and to their Successors since that Period.

That your Memorialist, in Consequence of these Recommendations, was appointed Chief Distributor of Stamps for the Colony of Virginia, and went to America in the Year 1765, charged with the Care of the Stamps for three Provinces; but meeting with the most violent Opposition on his Arrival there, and finding it was impossible to execute the Design of the Act of Parliament, after having secured the Stamps, at the Risque of his Life, and at every considerable Expence, he returned immediately to receive Orders for his future Conduct, and arrived in London in January 1766.

That your Memorialist was so happy as to find, his Behavior on that Occasion was approved of, as well by your Majesty's Ministers, as by the Parliament.

Ms. 2. M. 53.45. v. 1

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Additional Context: <https://virginiahistory.org/learn/george-mercers-account-stamp-act-virginia>

Source 3 – Martin Pickett Letter

Dear Sir

Williamsburg 8th Oct^r 1778

At this place we have but little news but what comes from the North
wards which you generally get before us. It seems to be pretty clear that
the Enemy intend amovement from New York the Congress say they
certainly intend to make a descent upon Charles Town in South Carolina
but it is my Opinion they intend to leave the continent if they find
they cannot divide up by their Manifesto or Proclamation lately
published & sent to the Assembly by a flag which is now published
in a hand Bill which I suppose you will see before this reaches you
The Assembly refused to see it, but it is a generally dropt - This was
intended to deceive & divide. But should our country men be too
much to be thus tempt & deceived. I fear nothing from that Insulting
& base artifice which appears to be their last dying efforts
The business of the Assembly goes on slowly as yet the aged deal of business
lay before the house. The Imprehension Law will be revised nearly upon
the old plan with some necessary amendments the militia Law will
be amended by raising the fines. The Exp. bill is to be amended first cannot
till how the Generally agreed will be higher or I think our money will
be good for nothing which is all we have to dread - There is one very Salu-
tary Bill before the house concerning those men amongst us called
the Enemies to America; principally aimed at the Monjurons & those
who hitherto have shewn an ennimical conduct The Proposition is
to call all such persons before the court of their County & if it shall
appear to the court that such persons have conducted themselves traitorly
& friendly towards America they are admitted to take the oath of Allegiance
as before administered to others & become subjects to the Commonwealth
if they refuse - Then they are to be denizens of America & their Estates
Confiscated - This Bill ought to be well considered. That a proportion
may be drawn between the Innocent Ignorant, & the designing &
Betrayor of his country - how it will turn out I cannot foretell

Ms. A. 9.2.4. 2

Selected Transcript:

There is one very interesting Bill before the house concerning those men amongst us called the enemies to America...To all such persons before the court of this county and shall appear to the court that such persons have conducted themselves quietly and friendly towards America they are advised to take the oath of fidelity as before administered to others and become subjects to the commonwealth. If they may refuse - then they are to be enemies of America and their estates confiscated.

Source 4 – Diaries of Nicholas Cresswell

A collection of diary entries from Cresswell that describes his travels in the colonies from 1774-1777. He highlights how patriots thought of loyalists, and some Virginia specific observations.

<https://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/rebellion/text3/vacresswell.pdf>

Source 5 – Anne Hulton Letter

Letter from Anne Hulton, who was the sister of the Commissioner of Customs in Boston and a confirmed Loyalist. This letter details an account of the Battles of Lexington and Concord and offers a rare female perspective.

<https://wams.nyhistory.org/settler-colonialism-and-revolution/the-american-revolution/lexington-and-concord/>

See Think Wonder



SEE

What do you see?



THINK

What do you think is going on?



WONDER

What does it make you wonder?

SOAPS Document Guideline Sheet

Purpose: The SOAPS method will help you analyze when and where the author of a document, text, political cartoon, or picture is coming from and what his or her biases may be.

Who is the Speaker? _____

Who is the person who produced this piece (the voice that tells the story)? What is their background and why are they making the points they are making? Is there a bias in what was written or shown? If so, why? If not, why not?

What is the Occasion? _____

What is the time and place of the piece—the current situation? It is particularly important that you understand the context that encouraged the writing or creation to happen.

What is the Audience? _____

To what group of readers or viewers is this piece is directed? The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group; it may be a certain person or certain people.

What is the Purpose? _____

What was the reason behind this text or picture? Examine the logic and any arguments being made. How does it connect to what we are doing today?

What is the Subject? _____

State the general topic, content, and main idea contained in the text or picture. Students should be able to state the subject in a few words or a short phrase.

A – Action What are people doing in this source?	E – Emotion Do the people in this source express emotion?	I – Interesting What do you find interesting in this source?	O – Oh! What is surprising about this? What connections can you make?	U – Um? What questions do you have?

CREDITS

Virginia Museum of History & Culture

Project Directors

Margaret Creech

Lead Lesson Designer

Allison O'Connor

Design, Production, & Marketing

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Virginia Museum of History and Culture Marketing Department, Maggie Creech

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