

RaDon G. Andersen
Northridge High School
randersen@dmail.net, history0523@gmail.com

Fact or Fiction in the Revolutionary War

Grade Level: 11th, but can easily be adapted for 8th or 5th

Time Needed: About 90 minutes

Objective: Students will examine primary and secondary sources to explore the events that took place in the early years of the American Revolutionary War. Students will analyze the sources to determine what actually took place during each event.

Materials Needed: Copies of selected readings and chart for each student, computer lab time

Note: As we walked the Freedom Trail and visited Lexington and Concord, I kept singing the School House Rock song "The Shot Heard Round the World". I use this clip every year as an introduction to the Revolutionary War, but the song is full of incomplete stories. The song is the inspiration for this lesson!

Lesson Activities:

1. Show the clip "The Shot Heard Round the World", which can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZMmPWTwTHc>. The words are included in this lesson, so students can read along as they watch.
2. Give each student one area of focus (Paul Revere's ride, Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Valley Forge). Give students the corresponding reading for their area.
3. Give each student a copy of the chart (included in the lesson).
4. Have students read about their assigned area in their textbook, and fill in appropriate area on the chart.
5. Instruct students to read their selection, then complete the chart for their area.
6. Have students complete a short research project, where they find and read an additional account of their assigned area, and complete the chart.
7. Put students in to groups with one student from each area, and have them share their information.
8. Lead a discussion on the importance of consulting multiple sources and checking the reliability of sources. Emphasize that a good historian looks at many views of the same event to determine what is relevant.

Possible Lesson Alternates:

1. Read one or more of the selections as an entire class, and discuss the selection together.
2. Assign students to work with a partner.
3. Use Chapter 1 of *My Brother Sam Is Dead* to show how historical fiction uses real events to tell the story (in this section, Sam and his family discuss the "shot heard round the world")

Revolutionary War: Fact or Fiction?

Name _____

Period _____ Date _____

My Assigned Area: _____

What School House Rock says about this event:

What the reading says about this event:

What my research says about this event:

What I think happened:

My opinion on the reliability of the sources:

The Shot Heard Round the World (*School House Rock*)

"The British are coming! The British are coming!"

Now, the ride of Paul Revere
Set the nation on its ear
And the shot at Lexington heard 'round the world
When the British fired in the early dawn
The War of Independence had begun
The die was cast, the rebel flag unfurled
And on to Concord marched the foe
To seize the arsenal there you know
Waking folks searching all around
'Til our militia stopped them in their tracks
At the old North Bridge we turned them back
And chased those Redcoats back to Boston town

Chorus

Now, at famous Bunker Hill
Even though we lost, it was quite a thrill
The rebel Colonel Prescott proved he was wise
Outnumbered and low on ammunition
As the British stormed his position
He said, "Hold your fire until you see the whites
of their eyes!"
Though the next few years were rough
General Washington's men proved they were
tough

Those hungry, ragged boys would not be beat
One night they crossed the Delaware
Surprised the Hessians in their lair
And at Valley Forge they just bundled up their feet!

Chorus

Well, they showed such determination
That they won the admiration
Of countries across the sea like France and Spain
Who loaned the colonies ships and guns
And put the British on the run
And the Continental Army on its feet again
And though they lost some battles too
The Americans swore they'd see it through
Their raiding parties kept up, hit and run
At Yorktown the British could not retreat
Bottled up by Washington and the French Fleet
Cornwallis surrendered and finally we had won!

The winner!

Hurray!

From the shot heard 'round the world
To the end of the Revolution
The continental rabble took the day
And the father of our country
Beat the British there at Yorktown
And brought freedom to you and me and the
U.S.A.!
God bless America, let freedom ring!

The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere



Like any famous event, the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere has given birth to many legends and myths over the years. Revere's "publicity agent", Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, was a poet and not a historian, and therein lies much of the confusion... The best description of the "Eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five" comes from Revere's own words (the spelling and grammar are Revere's) ...

By 1775, Paul Revere was the patriots' most trusted messenger, having already carried their secrets for thousands of miles. That winter, he also became "one of upwards of thirty, chiefly mechanics, who formed ourselves in to a committee for the purpose of watching the Movements of the British Soldiers, and gaining every intelligence (sic) of the movements of the Tories."

... So on Sunday, April 16, two days before his more famous ride, Paul Revere made his first ride to Lexington to warn that something was afoot. On his way back home that Sunday, Revere "returned at Night thro Charlestown; there I agreed with a Col. Conant, & some other Gentlemen, that if the British went out by Water, we would Shew two Lanthorns in the North Church Steeple; & if by Land, one, as a Signal; for we were apprehensive it would be difficult to Cross the Charles River, or git over Boston neck." The lanterns were thus not signals to Revere "on the opposite shore"—as Longfellow put it—but signals *from* Revere, in case he was unable to escape safely with news from British-occupied Boston.

"On Tuesday evening, the 18th," Revere writes, "It was observed, that a number of soldiers were marching towards the bottom of the Common. About 10 o'Clock, Dr. Warren Sent in great haste for me, and begged that I would immediately set off for Lexington, where Messrs. Hancock & Adams were, & acquaint them of the movement, and that it was thought they were the objects."

... "When I got to Dr. Warren's house, I found he had sent an express by land to Lexington—a Mr. Wm. Daws." While Revere went one way, William Dawes was already enroute via a different road. This was merely insurance against one rider or the other being captured.

... Revere goes on: "I left Dr. Warren's, called upon a friend, and desired him to make the Signals. I then went Home, took my boots and Surtout (overcoat), & went to the North part of

the Town, where I had kept a Boat; two friends rowed me across Charles River...the moon was Rising.”

If it had been just fifteen minutes later, some historians suggest, the rising moon would have been so bright that Revere would surely have been caught.

...He started to take the most direct route, but it was blocked by “two officers on Horse-back, standing under the shade of a Tree.” One of the British soldiers chased Revere for “about 300 Yards” until the redcoat’s horse got mired in mud.

Revere then took a longer road through Medford, where “I awakened the Captain of the Minute men; & after that, I alarmed almost every House, till I got to Lexington.”

He arrived just after midnight. The parsonage where Hancock and Adams were staying was guarded by minute men, who would not let Revere in. The ladies and gentlemen were sleeping, the sergeant said, and had “requested that they might not be disturbed by any noise about the house.”

“Noise!” replied Revere, “You’ll have noise enough before long! The Regulars are coming out!”

Hancock, hearing the familiar voice, called, “Come in, Revere, we are not afraid of *you*.” William Dawes, who had left Boston an hour earlier but who followed a longer route, arrived half an hour after Revere.

Their official mission—to warn Hancock and Adams—was now completed; but after rest and refreshment the two couriers decided to set off for Concord. Along the way, they met Dr. Samuel Prescott, a “high Son of Liberty” who was returning home from courting his fiancée. Prescott joined the other two riders on their errand of alarm.

Halfway to Concord, however, the party was stopped by another British patrol. Prescott escaped and got the news through to Concord. Dawes, fled, too, by bluffing the redcoat soldiers, but he fell off his horse and never got to Concord. Paul Revere was arrested. One officer “Clap’d his pistol to my head, and said he was going to ask me some questions, if I did not tell the truth, he would blow my brains out... We rode till we got near Lexington meeting house, when the Militia fired a Voley of Guns, which appeared to alarm them very much. “

Surprised by the minute men’s practice volley, the British major released Revere.

Source: Bahne, Charles. *The Complete Guide to Boston’s Freedom Trail*. 2013.

Lexington and Concord



4:30 A.M. April 18, 1775

Thaddeus Bowman, the last of four scouts sent down the road from Lexington, to find out how near the British were, returned with the news they were less than half a mile away. The three other scouts had been taken by a small guard of British flankers sent out ahead of Pitcairn's companies of light infantry.

The drum was beat and the Minute Men reassembled on Lexington Green. Finally, 77 men of Capt. Parker's company were lined up in a double row on the triangle formed by the Green to await the arrival of the British. In the words of a later historian, deeply infused with a sense of the significance of this move, "They stood there, not merely as soldiers, but as citizens, nay, almost as statesmen, having the destiny of the country in their hands."

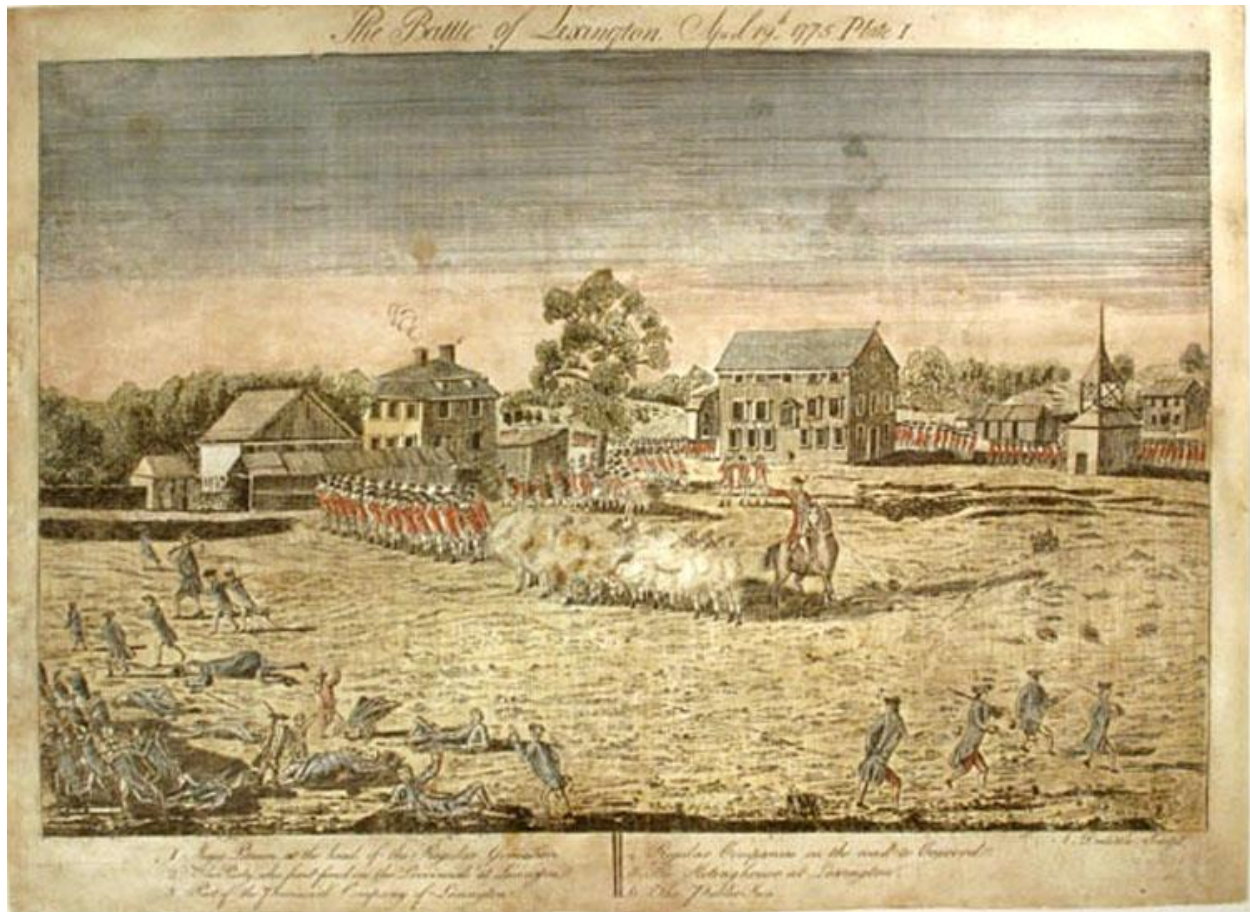
Paul Revere and a clerk went to the Buckman Tavern to remove a trunk of papers that belonged to John Hancock. Before they left, daylight was breaking and they were able to see the column of the British light infantry marching up the road to Lexington Green.

5:00 AM

Maj. Pitcairn saw the Minute Men drawn up to oppose him and formed his men into line of battle.

Capt. Parker then gave his famous order to his company: "Stand your ground! Don't fire unless fired upon! But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here!"

Realizing at last how badly he was outnumbered and how futile his situation was, Parker ordered his men to file away, but not before a single shot rang out and a volley from a British platoon. Another volley followed and, with bayonets leveled, the Redcoats charged. Eight men were killed and 10 more, wounded, were able to get away with their fleeing comrades. *The first American blood had been fatally shed!*



Jonathan Harrington, Jr., mortally wounded, was able to drag himself to the door of his house, opposite the northwest corner of the Green, where he died at his wife's feet.

Even more heroic in death was the brave Jonas Parker, cousin of the captain, who had fired once and yet stood his ground through wounded by a bullet and sinking to his knees. He was trying to reload, with bullets, wadding and flints in his hat tossed at his feet, when finally cut down by a bayonet thrust.

The main body of the British soon came upon the Green. A cheer rose in token of the victory and the "musick struck up" as the troops started down the road for Concord. Any illusion as to the secrecy of their mission was now completely gone.

Sources:

The Lexington—Concord Battle Road: Hour-by-hour account of events preceding and on the History-making day, April 19, 1775. Concord Chamber of Commerce.

Amos Doolittle Engraving: *The Battle of Lexington* found at <http://connecticuthistory.org>

Bunker Hill



Since the action at Lexington and Concord in April, the country had been preparing for war. Recruits for the new “New-England Army” poured in to Cambridge, while British reinforcements arrived in Boston. Yet except for one skirmish and some peacock-like parading, nothing happened for almost two months.

Not that things were stable. British held Boston was surrounded on all sides by “rebel” ground. High hills overlooked the city from both north and south; whoever controlled these hills would command the harbor. Did either side dare to mount an offensive? “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne, the most eloquent and outspoken of Gage’s generals, was eager to move. “What!” he exclaimed. “Ten thousand peasants keep 5,000 of the King’s troops shut up! Well, let’s go in and we’ll soon find some elbow room!”

Gage’s council of war drafted the first plans. Their army would land on Dorchester Neck, south of Boston, and sweep around the capital in a broad arc. “The operations will be very easy”—or so they thought. Just as at Lexington and Concord, American intelligence learned of Gage’s plans in time to thwart them. This time, the patriot commanders decided on preemptive action—to “erect some Fortifications upon said hill & defeat this design of our enemies.”

So, on the night of June 16th, 1775, “about a thousand” New England soldiers marched to Charlestown. “By the dawn of day, they had thrown up a small redoubt (a fortification of earth and timber), about 8 rods (132 feet) square” atop Breed’s Hill—not Bunker Hill. A last-minute change in plans causes confusion to this day about the battle’s name.

The British waited until afternoon to attack. Morning was spent baking bread and cooking meat for a three-day expedition. It was a mistake. As General Burgoyne noted later, “every hour gave them (the rebels) fresh strength.” By 2:00 pm, when the British rowed across the harbor, the Americans had thoroughly entrenched themselves atop the hill.

“And now,” wrote Burgoyne, “ensued one of the greatest scenes of war that can be conceived.” British troops made three assaults on the Americans that day...Inside their woolen coats, His Majesty’s men sweated under the sun of an 80F day.

To conserve precious gun powder, the Americans had orders (from Col. Prescott) not to fire “‘til you see the whites of their eyes”—orders which proved to be a stroke of genius. The British regulars advanced further and further up the hill, meeting no response. Were the rebels cowards? Were they even there? Why did they not fire? The Americans waited still. Then, suddenly, “Fire!” Row after row of redcoats fell, mowed down by the patriots’ guns. Some units lost 3 quarters, even 90 percent of their men. Casualties were greatest among the officers, who were singled out as targets.

A second assault, half an hour later, had much the same result. It was the third attack, an hour after the first, which was the decisive effort. Artillery fire and fresh reinforcements joined the British fight...But the pivotal fact was that the Americans ran out of gun powder. Lacking both powder and bayonets, the patriots’ cause was lost. The provincials valiantly held the royal troops off with hurled stones and “the butt –ends of their Musquets (sic). The New Englander’s retreat was orderly, but their casualties mounted because they could no longer fight back.

Bunker Hill was technically a British victory, for Howe’s men held the bloody summit when it was over. But the pride of the empire lay exhausted, wounded, dead, and dying. Their planned foray around the bay was forgotten, not just for one day, but forever. Publicly, General Gage called it “a complete victory”; privately, he admitted that “The loss we have sustained is greater than we can bear.” His tally showed 1,054 of his men killed or wounded, nearly half of those who fought. On the other side, the American casualties were only 441 men from a much larger force. Patriot General Nathanael Greene summed it up well: “I wish I could sell them another hill at the same price.”

Source: Bahne, Charles. *The Complete Guide to Boston’s Freedom Trail*. 2013.

Valley Forge



The army was now not only starved but naked; the greatest part were not only shirtless and barefoot, but destitute of all other clothing, especially blankets. I procured a small piece of raw cowhide and made myself a pair of moccasins, which kept my feet (while they lasted) from the frozen ground, although, as I well remember, the hard edges so galled my ankles, while on a march, that was with much difficulty and pain that I could wear them afterwards; but the only alternative I had, was to endure the inconvenience or to go barefoot, as hundreds of my companions had to, till they might be tracked by their blood upon the rough frozen ground. But hunger, nakedness and sore shins were not the only difficulties we had at that time to encounter;--we had hard duty to perform and little or no strength to perform it with.

The army continued at and near the Gulf for some days, after which we marched for the Valley Forge in order to take up our winter quarters. We were now in a truly forlorn condition,--no clothing, no provisions and as disheartened as need be. We arrived, however, at our destination a few days before Christmas. Our prospect was indeed dreary. In our miserable condition, to go into the wild woods and build us habitations to *stay* (not to *live*) in, in such a weak, starved and naked condition, was appalling in the highest degree, especially to New-Englanders, unaccustomed to such kind of hardships at home. However, there was no remedy,--no alternative but this or dispersion;--but dispersion, I believe, was not thought of,--at least, I did not think of it,--we had engaged in the defense of our injured country and were willing, nay, we were determined to preserve as long as such hardships were not altogether intolerable. I had experienced what I thought sufficient of the hardships of a military life the year before... But we were now absolutely in danger of perishing, and that, too, in the midst of a plentiful country. We then had but little, and often nothing to eat for days together; but now we had nothing and saw no likelihood of any betterment of our condition. Had there fallen deep snows (and it was the time of year to expect them) or even heavy and long rain storms, the whole army must inevitably have perished. Or had the enemy, strong and well provided as he then was, thought fit to pursue us, our poor emaciated carcasses must have "Strewed the plain." But a kind and holy

Providence took more notice and better care of us than did the country in whose service we were wearing away our lives by piecemeal.

We arrived at the Valley Forge in the evening; it was dark; there was no water to be found, and I was perishing with thirst. I searched for water till I was weary, and came to my tent without finding any;--fatigue and thirst, joined with hunger, almost made me desperate. I felt at that instant as if I would have taken victuals or drink from the best friend I had on earth by force. I am not writing fiction, all are sober realities...

I lay here two nights and one day, and had not a morsel of anything to eat all the time, save half of a small pumpkin, which I cooked by placing it upon a rock, the skin side uppermost, and making a fire upon it; by the time it was heat through I devoured it with as keen an appetite as I should a pie made of it at some other time.

Source: Martin, Joseph Plumb. *Memoir of a Revolutionary Soldier*. New York: Dover Publications. 2014.