

Espionage and the American Revolution Lesson Plan

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Based on the National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Book
*George Washington: Spymaster of the American Revolution—
How the American Outspied the British and Won the Revolutionary War*

Abstract

In this lesson, students discover how the role of espionage was crucial in securing a victory against the British in the American Revolution. Based on the National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Book, George Washington, Spymaster—How the Americans Outspied the British and Won the Revolution by Thomas B. Allen, this lesson introduces students to various spy techniques and strategies used by the colonists under the leadership of General George Washington. Thomas B. Allen presents an intriguing and accurate account of double agents, covert operations, codes, and ciphers of the colonists' efforts to spy on the British army during the American Revolution War. Using the Internet as a resource, students conduct historical research through the critical examination of a variety of primary sources.

Introduction

Book Summary

“There is nothing more necessary than good intelligence to frustrate a designing enemy and nothing requires greater pains to obtain.” –George Washington

It is 1775, and General George Washington faces many difficulties. His ragtag army has few muskets and fewer cannons. They lack the necessary funds to fight the world's most powerful empire. His only hope of beating the British is to wage an invisible war—a war of espionage and deception. Thomas B. Allen presents an intriguing and accurate account of double agents, covert

operations, codes, and ciphers of the colonists’ efforts to spy on the British army during the American Revolution War.

NCSS Standards: Theme II. Time, Continuity, and Change

- c. compare and contrast different stories or accounts about past events, people, places, or situations, identifying how they contribute to our understanding of the past.
- d. identify and use various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, and others
- f. use knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with methods of historical inquiry, to inform decision-making about action-taking on public issues.

Exploratory Introduction

Materials:

- Copies for each student of *George Washington, Spymaster—How the Americans Outspied the British and Won the Revolutionary War* by Thomas B. Allen
- Pictures of spies from past and present
- Don Adams AKA “Maxwell” from at the link [Get Smart](#)
- [James Bond movie poster](#) link
- [Charlie’s Angels movie jacket](#) link
- [George Washington portrait](#) link
- [Benjamin Franklin portrait](#) link
- [Nathan Hale painting](#) link
- [Samuel Adams portrait](#) link
- Access to Internet for research purposes

Objectives

Procedures

Development

<p>Students will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. read the NCSS Notable Trade Book <i>George Washington, Spymaster— How the American Outspied the British and Won the Revolutionary War</i> by Thomas B. Allen. 2. research espionage techniques used during the American Revolution. 3. apply their research to 	<p>Exploration:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher will display pictures of the following: George Washington, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Nathan Hale, James Bond, Don Adams, and <i>Charlie’s Angels</i>. *Note: Pictures may be incorporated into a PowerPoint presentation, packets for groups of students to examine, or as transparencies to be 	<p>Synthesis:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For the next few days, the students will read <i>George Washington, Spymaster</i>. Throughout the daily chapter readings, the students should revisit the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Why did the American and British military leaders engage in clandestine activities? b) What sorts of information did spies provide to military leaders? c) What advantages did spying provide military leaders?
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<p>design and reenact colonial spy ring activities.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. gain skills in analyzing maps as historical evidence. 5. develop an understanding of the various spy methods used during the American Revolution. 6. analyze a hand-drawn spy map as an artifact, reading for information and inference. 7. analyze a handwritten letter as an artifact, reading for information and inference. 8. analyze an official Revolutionary War battle map, incorporating information gained from the spy map and letter. 9. write a newspaper report describing a specific spy activity the colonist participated in during the American Revolutionary War. 	<p>displayed on an overhead projector.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The teacher will probe the students to identify the individuals and to guess what these people had in common (they were spies). 3. The teacher will set the stage for the reading of <i>George Washington, Spymaster</i> by asking the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) What do you think of when you hear the word “spy”? b) When might a spy’s services be helpful to a government? c) Can you think of any examples? d) What sorts of information do you think a spy might provide to military leaders? e) Can you think of any advantages or disadvantages by relying on spies for important information? f) Do you think spying occurred during the American Revolution? g) If so, do you think their motivation to spy was honorable or dishonorable? h) The teacher will introduce the book <i>George Washington, Spymaster</i>, setting the stage for the reading of the chapter book 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> d) What might be some disadvantages to relying on spies for important information? e) Why did the British think it important to capture enemy correspondence? f) Did spying change the course of the Revolutionary War? How? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The students may keep a reading reflection log as they read each chapter responding to the above questions. <p>3. Closure: The students will read the following quote: “There is nothing more necessary than good intelligence to frustrate a designing enemy and nothing that requires greater pains to obtain” by George Washington. Students should react to the quote and the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) What do you think George Washington meant by “good intelligence”? b) To what enemy was he referring? c) How might “good intelligence” frustrate the enemy? Based on the reading of the book, what are some examples of “good intelligence” the colonists obtained? d) Why might George Washington refer to the collection of “good intelligence” as “greater pains to obtain”? Greater than what? Can you think of any examples when the colonists obtained information through painful methods?
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Expansion

Assessment

Additional References

<p>1. Using the Internet websites, the students will read and analyze primary sources of spy letters and spy stories. Within groups, students will research the following topics related to spying during the American Revolution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Spy letters link b) Spy stories link c) Spy methods link d) Spy networks link e) Spy routes link <p>2. Students will present their researched topic to the rest of the class in the form of a teaching poster. They may choose to add an activity or example relating to their topic. For example, the “spy letter” group may want to role play the individual writing the letter and discuss its implications.</p>	<p>Students will act as reporters from the American Revolution and write an article describing an “alleged spy activity” the colonist used during the American Revolution. They may choose the specifics of the article based on their reading of the book and their research. Have students consider the following for the article:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What were the difficulties of fighting a war in America for the British? b) What difficulties did the Continental Army face? c) In what way did General Washington display effective leadership? d) What was General Washington’s role as “Spymaster”? e) Describe a specific example of when spy techniques were used by the colonists during the war. 	<p>Suggested Extension Activities:</p> <p>Numerous extension classroom activities that can be adapted to supplement the reading of the book may be found at the website <i>Spy Letters of the American Revolution</i> from the Collections of the Clements Library link</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing with invisible ink • Coding and decoding secret messages • Analyzing political cartoons <p>Websites:</p> <p>Spy Letters of the American Revolution—Teacher’s Lounge—</p> <p>This website offers a set of primary source letters written by spies on both sides of the American Revolution conflict as well as the stories surrounding them. Learn about the methods that secret agents used to encode and hide their information.</p> <p>Offers classroom activities and resources:</p> <p>George Washington, Master of Misinformation essay by Ruluff D. McIntyre, Governor, Ohio Society of The Order of the Founders and Patriots of America link</p> <p>CIA CSI The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence – short essays about some of the notable “spies” during the American Revolution link</p> <p>Teacher Background Resources: Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring by Alexander Rose</p>
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Internet Hyperlinks

Benjamin Franklin's portrait link. <http://www.jimpoz.com/quotes/images/speakers/franklin.jpg>

Charlie's Angels movie jacket link.

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/section/movies/amg/dvd/cov150/drt500/t582/t58267q85ua.jpg>

CIA CSI The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence – short essays about some of the notable “spies” during the American Revolution link. <https://www.cia.gov/csi/books/940299/art-1.html>

Collections of the Clements Library link <http://www.si.umich.edu/SPIES/index-lounge.html>

George Washington portrait link.

<http://richmondthenandnow.com/Images/Famous-Visitors/George-Washington-big.jpg>

George Washington, Master of Misinformation essay by Ruluff D. McIntyre, Governor, Ohio Society of The Order of the Founders and Patriots of America link.

http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2004_winter_spring/washington.htm

Get Smart Don Adams picture. http://store.gnprecendo.com/images/don_adams.jpg

James Bond poster.

<http://www.talkingpix.co.uk/James%20Bond%20Poster%20Book%20comp.jpg>

Nathan Hale portrait link. <http://www.americanrevolution.com/NathanHale.jpg>

Samuel Adams portrait link.

<http://gunshowonthenet.com/SecondAmend/RightsOftheColonists.html>

Spy Letters of the American Revolution. <http://www.si.umich.edu/SPIES/index-lounge.html>