

The American Revolution in the Southern Backcountry

Exploring American Revolution Primary Sources

by Howard Blount, Tomlin Middle School

Florida Sunshine State Standard

SS.5.A.1.1 Use primary and secondary sources to understand history.

Definitions

primary sources – original information from a historical period; photos, testimonies, artifacts, memoirs, newspapers, documents, film footage, audio recordings, public records, historical sites

secondary sources – a discussion or original information from a historical period; analyses, opinions, textbooks, scholars, internet sites, works of fiction, word of mouth

Materials:

pencil & paper

Lesson Introduction

This is a simple, yet powerful activity that requires students to practice critical visual observational skills, draw conclusions based on those observations, apply the conclusions to their own lives, and finally question and/or evaluate a primary source. Although the Florida Standard is elementary, this activity works well with all grade and ability levels.

Select in advance a visual primary source from the American Revolution era to use with this activity, such as a drawing, painting, engraving, lithograph, editorial cartoon, advertisement, announcement, or sculpture. Display the primary source in a large format such as a poster or enlarged and projected on a screen.

Introduce the definitions and examples for the terms listed above. Ask students why primary sources are important for the study of history and why they may be more valuable than secondary sources. Explain how sometimes history has been intentionally rewritten and often mis-communicated by a lack of understanding or adequate research. Tell them that today they are going to learn history by creating a foldable to study a primary source.

Instructions for a Visual Primary Source Foldable

Direct students to:

- 1) fold a sheet of ditto paper in four sections – portrait or landscape

- 2) label the four boxes: I see . . . , I think . . . , I feel . . . , I wonder . . .
- 3) view the displayed primary source for five minutes and respond in writing to the “I see . . .” prompt. Instruct students to critically examine the image for minor, yet significant details.

Conduct a classroom discussion, allowing students to share their findings.

Follow the same procedure for the remaining three prompts on the foldable.

Finally, ask students to share what they have learned about history from this experience studying primary sources.

Suggested Visuals from the National Archives

- George Washington receiving French generals at Mount Vernon. Illustration. 19-N-1587. ([revolutionary_war_050.jpg](#))
- Attack on Savannah, Oct. 8, 1779. Illustration by A.I. Keller. 148-GW-1120. ([revolutionary_war_051.jpg](#))
- Battle of Camden; Death of DeKalb. Engraving from painting by Alonzo Chappel. 148-GW-164. ([revolutionary_war_052.jpg](#))
- Col. William Augustine Washington at the Battle of Cowpens. Drawn and engraved for Graham's Magazine by S.H. Gimber. 148-GW-390. ([revolutionary_war_053.jpg](#))
- Siege of Yorktown. Engraving by O.M. Fontaine from painting by Conder. 148-GW-516. ([revolutionary_war_054.jpg](#))
- Capture of Yorktown. Lithograph by Turgis. 148-GW-565. ([revolutionary_war_055.jpg](#))
- Surrender of Cornwallis. Painting by John Trumbull. 16-AD-60. ([revolutionary_war_056.jpg](#))

Extensions

- Visit a historical site on a field trip and respond to the experience with an adapted foldable.

- Read and respond to a written historical document, news article, memoir, or public record.
- Adapt the Photo Analysis Worksheet from the National Archives and Records Administration to fit this activity.
- Study examples of misunderstanding historical events such as the widely-held belief that the American Revolution occurred primarily in northern states and the lack of knowledge that there were more revolutionary battles in South Carolina than in most of the other colonies combined.

Selected Resources

<http://www.archives.gov/research/american-revolution/pictures/#south>

Giansanti, Mark. *The American Revolution: Primary Source Activity Pack for Social Studies Classrooms* (Spiral-bound). Prestwick House, 2005.

Exploring Primary Sources: The American Revolution and its Aftermath (EP3051), EduPress.

Complete Resource Package: The Revolutionary Age (TM726), The Exploration Company.