Introduction:

In American History textbooks, the primary focus of instruction on the Revolutionary War uses the campaign in the north as a major source of study. Outside of the areas directly involved in the southern campaign of the conflict, the level of knowledge and interest in this pivotal part of the war is minimal among both adults and students. Yet, in participating in this workshop and in reading the primary source materials, one cannot escape concluding that the series of conflicts in the American South were pivotal in determining the ultimate American victory.

In a region thought to be dominated by loyalists that would provide easy cover for British troops, the opposite of rest and support took place for them. The British, through their military maneuvers and treatment of the backcountry people, walked into a bloodbath that would ruin any chance of lasting peace with their colonies.

In this lesson, I hope that students in the Midwest, where I teach, and elsewhere gain an insight into how individual war battles took place at Cowpens and King’s Mountain. I also hope they have a better idea of the geography of this region and the impact these battles had on the overall success of the Patriot (American) cause in the Revolutionary War.
Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, students will have done the following:

1) Had access to maps, modern and primary, that detailed the topography and battles that this area held in that time period.

2) Read primary and secondary source materials that detailed these two battles and aftermath.

3) Participated in their own cross-curricular activity with physical education class where battles are re-enacted through team activity.

4) Acquire additional factual knowledge and understanding of this important part of the Revolutionary War.

5) Examine a colonial painting from this era, describing both how this enhances and detracts from what actually took place on the battlefield.

Guiding Questions:

What are the benefits of using primary source materials such as maps and readings in studying history? What are some difficulties raised by using these materials for modern scholars?

How did the British and Loyalist/Tory soldiers underestimate the fighting force of the Colonials? Was a colonial victory inevitable or avoidable in the backcountry?

To what extent can we re-enact war and what limitations do re-enactment activities have from the actual event?

How did these two events change history? How would the war have been different with victories by British and Loyalist troops at Cowpens and Kings Mountain?

Preparing To Teach This Lesson
In preparation for this lesson, teachers should study the overall NEH website from Converse College on this topic for their own individual ideas. It has the title of, “The American Revolution in the Southern Backcountry.” In addition, the book by Lawrence Babits which participants in that conference read, “A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens,” is an outstanding summary of not only that individual battle but also of overall military strategy and culture for the two warring sides. Teachers should read this in book in full and then use isolated chapters with their students. Also, teachers with immediate geographic proximity to backcountry war sites should do so and those who do not should visit National Park Service websites from this area to acquire additional perspective on the topography of the land. Also, using first hand visits and/or websites will enhance the background knowledge of the instructor, who like many adults and students may lack basic knowledge from this area, if reliant on traditional instruction for their training and background.

Teachers may want to create a basic terms sheet for major participants, battle sites and general geographic knowledge for their students. Students will typically lack a background on this area of study as compared to study of Revolutionary War era sites such as Philadelphia or Boston, which tend to be the focus of contemporary textbooks. A timeline of major events in this area may also be created and have use to students who are studying this topic. Students can read a good secondary summary on this topic from a book called, “Hero of the American Revolution,” by David Brownell (all bibliography information will follow lesson).

Teachers will need to copy all source materials or have computer access to the websites where this material is stored on the individual websites. They may choose to project this source material to discuss with students and if so, should have preparations for that technology. More likely, this material would be printed in advance so that students can compare and contrast material more easily in small groups. In whichever manner the instructor chooses to distribute the material, this should be planned in advance of the lesson.

In preparing the physical activity portion of this lesson, the teacher should reserve space in their school gymnasium or secure an outdoor location that is at least the size of that area. They will need to gather the proper sports equipment (balls, nets, etc.) that will be described in the activities section of
this lesson plan. They need to determine the time period needed to begin, activate and finish this physical activity. The instructor may choose to do this in conjunction with the physical education teacher in a cross-curricular activity or may simply line up the equipment and space for this to be done independently with their own class. In either case, proper preparation by the instructor in lining up the proper space and equipment, along with student planning with the teacher on how the activity will be performed, will lead to a better final result. In other words, prepare the physical activity not unlike how a coach prepares a game plan for a contest or how the actual participants in the real historical event planned for war battles that will be re-enacted.

Finally, the instructor must have an outline of the course of study and action that they intend to do in this set of activity. They should include a final evaluation of the series of activities, including written examination, report or combination of both.

Our goals in this lesson, if met by the instructor and their students, are to have better basic understanding of what took place in this region and to try to acquire a perspective that participants had in participating in these battles. Finally, our goal throughout instruction, is to produce learners who can make connections between these individual pieces of history and the larger role they played in the final resolution of the colonial conflict with their mother colony.

Activities

All activities are based on a 42 minute, daily class period for middle school students. It can be modified to fit into other class periods (block, longer, etc.) that fits the need of your particular school. The times are suggested in length and can be modified to the learning level of your students.

1) Students shall split into small groups and have 15-20 minutes to read and outline their prepared text from the American Revolution book referenced earlier. This secondary source gives a good, basic understanding of some major biographies of the era. The groups should be divided into groups that will read and summarize passages about the following: Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, Daniel Morgan, Francis Marion and William Washington. In
addition, the instructor may find alternative short, secondary source biographical sketches of British figures such as Tarleton, Ferguson and Cornwallis. The passages should be placed into a student reading packet. The student groups shall have four minutes each to summarize their historical figure to the class in an informal, group discussion. Students may be seated in a round seating arrangement for this or the instructor may seat students in another manner as the room allows. Instructors may assess the students on their group work leading into the presentation, their presentation to the group or a combination of both. Or, the instructor may choose not to assess a daily work grade to this process. The instructor may add any key points to the student summaries but the bulk of this instruction should be from the students, not the guiding instructor.

2) Homework for the first night should be to have a sampling of questions from each passage that the instructor believes guides students through the major instructional points of the passage. This should be collected at the start of the next classroom period.

3) The next class period should begin with a color copy or projected image of the painting *Battle of Cowpens* by William Ranney. Students shall be given five minutes to look at this source and to summarize what they see. They should also guess when it is painted, with a small reward to the closest attempt. The instructor should point out the date of the painting, 1845 and contrast it to the actual historical date of the battle, rewarding the best guess in the group. Then, the teacher shall ask for a sampling of 4-5 summaries of what the students see. After that, the instructor should share with the group what is accurate about the painting and what is believed to be inaccurate about the painting. The instructor shall lead a class discussion on depending on artwork as a source of historical information (both pluses and negatives). This should take 20-25 minutes.

4) The class should examine copies of the official National Park Service publications on Cowpens and Kings Mountain. Each student should have a copy of the material and the instructor should lecture with these as the guiding materials. The instructor may choose to utilize a computer lab and guide the students
through the same material on the websites of each. This should take the remainder of period 2 on the subject.

5) Students should read the primary source article *Journal of Alexander Chesney, A South Carolina Loyalist in the Revolution and After*. This was provided at the NEH Landmarks of American History workshop and provides a good insight in the losing side of the backcountry skirmishes. The teacher should highlight items of importance. This homework assignment for period two should be more insightful than the previous evening’s work, with a one page essay being assigned from the reading. The student should try to give a narrative summary of the work being examined and then try to share their thoughts on reading the words of someone we would consider an enemy today. Does it alter their perspective of the war and can they sympathize with the other side or not?

6) On day three of studying this topic, the instructor shall give a general summary of the background reasons for the war in the South and in particular, the backcountry of the Carolinas. Topics of examination should include, but not be limited to, divisions of culture and opinion from the backcountry to the Atlantic Coast region of South Carolina, specifically Charleston, loyalty oaths administrated by the British, the original success of British/loyalist forces in Charleston, the influence of religious leaders, and a general summary of the war leading up to the Southern campaign. The instructor should engage the students to recall their previous examinations of the biography of major figures from day one. (15 minutes).

There are online copies (printed copies will work, too) of state Constitutions at the *Avalon Project at Yale Law School*. After the instructor has presented to the class, the remainder of the period should be in working together as a class in examining the Constitution of South Carolina adopted on March 26, 1776. A comparison to the Declaration should be made while students work with this primary source with the teacher. Can parallels be made with that document? What major points of contention are made in this document that could demonstrate grievances with the mother colony? Finally, how might a Charleston socialite view these issues differently than a backcountry Scotch-Irish farmer?
7) Homework for day three will be letters from the *George Washington Papers At The Library of Congress, 1741-1799*. This can be accessed at the Library of Congress website and distributed to students in printed form. Letters from February 14, 1781 and February 17, 1781 discuss Washington’s reaction to the victorious colonial efforts in the Carolinas. Students need to write an essay summarizing Washington’s views and contrasting them to the views expressed the previous evening by loyalist Alexander Chesney. Certainly students should be able to see how the same historical events can differ in their interpretation depending on who is sharing the history of that event.

At the start of day 4, the teacher shall give students copies of a map found in the *Papers of General Nathanael Greene* and copies of a modern road atlas of the same region. In small groups, they will map the major battle sites and routes of the Greene era with maps of the modern era. They will overlap and label the war routes and battle sites on the copy of the modern map. How are we the same and how do we differ in our eras in terms of major routes and where our towns are located? Then, in those same groups, students shall find a map using the electronic database from the *University of Georgia Libraries, Hargrett Rare Library Map Collection-Colonial America*. After finding the map of their choice that relates to this geographical region from that collection, they shall label major points from that map on their copy, as well. This will take the entire class period. Homework would come from students who could not complete this task in the class period and they would be expected to complete the work for the following class. Students will hand in their map with labels, as well as attaching the maps they used to get to those results in the process for assessment.

8) Day five will be a re-enactment day of the military battle at King’s Mountain. The class will be separated into groups of colonial and British/loyalist troops. If this is done outside, an elevated spot in the middle of the “battlefield” will be the site of the British troops. An open field with a rise to it in the center would be the ideal outdoor location. If in a gymnasium, they will be located in a round, taped off section in the middle of the gym. Each side will have a “commander” who is to give orders to their troops on how
to attack or defend against the opponent. All participants will be
given flags to wear (as in flag football). Those on the British side
will be given two flags and colonial soldiers will be given one flag.
If a soldier loses their flag or flag, they are a casualty and must lie
down and remain stationary in their spot. The British are given
two flags to demonstrate their superiority in hand-to-hand conflict.
The Americans will have two round zones around the British.
Each British soldier will have three tennis balls to use as
ammunition. Colonial soldiers will have three tennis balls to toss
from long distances and two larger round balls (nerf soccer balls)
to throw from shorter distances. In addition, extra ammunition
(balls) will be laying around the colonial zones for use
(reinforcements). The instructor will tape or mark the two zones,
to simulate the advancement zones of soldiers up King’s Mountain.
Cardboard boxes will be scattered to provide protection for
advancing American troops to use against British aim. If a soldier
is hit once in battle (by a ball), they are wounded and must remain
stationary until the next instructor whistle. Three team members
are nurses, if they can provide a cup of water to the “soldier”
before that soldier is hit again, the soldier regains full health. If
they are hit twice and are not helped by a team nurse, they must
remain stationary in this spot. The advantages in this game are
with the colonial side. Early in the game, the instructor might give
a few extra balls for the British to throw to help balance the odds.
Over time, however, the game will be tilted towards the colonials
and the desired result will be for the colonials to win. The game is
played until one side is finished (or raises a white flag given to
them to surrender. Again, individual rules and roles can be
tweaked to the location of this activity or size of the class. Help
from the physical education instructor could make this activity
easier to manage for the social studies teacher.

After the conflict (or multiple conflicts are over), copies of maps of
King’s Mountain can be given to students. Comparisons to the
game they played and the actual advancements to the surrounded
British troops will be made. In the discussion, students should be
questioned about the wisdom of British troop location at this scene
and how accurately can we recreate war (what was realistic about
this simulation and what was not)? In other words, we want the
students to compare and contrast their activity to the actual battle
at this site. The game may be replayed with any suggested rules that students have to add realistic elements to the “battle” that they are doing. Obviously, real re-enactors can simulate battles in a more realistic way, but that is not an option with the weaponry used for middle school students. However, if a local war re-enactor is available, this could be a good additional resource to use before or after this activity.

The bottom line in this activity is for students not just to think about war, but also to try to gain some insight into what these soldiers faced at the site. An insight can be gained into the chaos and split second decisions that Revolutionary War soldiers faced at this site. Also, some level of accuracy can be given through the “ammunition” and topography given to students in this re-enactment. This should take one class period. Students may be instructed in a homework assignment to reflect on the events and may be guided with some of the suggested questions given for the class discussion at the discretion of the instructor.

A similar re-enactment can be given to individual pieces of the war battle at Cowpens on day 6. For example, one group of students could be told to march in slow retreat as the colonials did, only to turn around at a given whistle to fire on their opponents who are running at them with superior “firepower” (physical education balls). This would simulate the colonial maneuver that helped to determine their victory at that battle. In addition, flanking activities could be done with groups of students to demonstrate individual movements done by colonial and British troops there. If local topography allows, there could use of ground to re-enact an area where students who toss balls from a lower spot on the colonial side hit their target while advancing high ground British troops “fire” over their opponents. This would simulate another colonial advantage at the spot. The larger the space of ground or gymnasium, the more accurately the re-enactment could take place.

After doing the King’s Mountain re-enactment that is teacher led, it would be great to have a planning day for a Cowpens re-enactment where rules and layout of the game are mainly student driven, based on research of primary source map work and journals found on the computer. The teacher may make that, with a written report detailing their research findings and how their
designed re-enactment worked, part of a major assessment of this unit. Or, they may write about it as an essay on the end of a teacher written test of major historical facts known about this time period. In any manner, if student involvement is maximized in planning and researching this step, applying what is known from the King’s Mountain activity, then an additional research day (or days) will need to be added between the King’s Mountain teacher led physical educational activity and the simulation of Cowpens.

10) The final assessment of this unit is up to the teacher. In addition, secondary source readings or reviews (or lecture from the instructor) that detail the history between these two Colonial victories and the final defeat of the British at Yorktown to follow should be used to summarize the importance of these battles. A final review with the students of the material covered throughout this unit, along with any review games that the teacher may use with their students in preparing for testing, should be done to review core concepts. Testing those concepts should be done on the day following this review. In addition, applying analysis to these basic thoughts, through essay or project, should be done.

Through the combination of activity, primary source and secondary source materials, I hope that all students would have a much stronger grasp of this important part of American History. I submit this lesson plan as a collection of ideas that an instructor can use to help their students to do just that. If an instructor can use all or some of these materials to enhance the education of their students, I would be pleased that this project met its goals. I feel that I am a better American History instructor in studying these two battles and this area of history in a direct manner. I hope that those in the immediate area can visit these backcountry areas, perhaps taking their students there on a field trip to enhance these suggested activities. I hope that all teachers and students include this part of study as equal to that of colonial New England activities in studying the Revolutionary War. I plan to use these activities with my students and hope that they can provide interesting, educational experiences that will help them in their broader knowledge of the southern campaign of the Revolutionary War.

The materials cited will be scanned and shared as attachments to this project. Additional primary and secondary source materials may be inserted at any unit step at the determination of the instructor for their specific class needs.