

REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

1750 TO 1788

FRENCH-INDIAN WAR TO CONSTITUTIONAL CONGRESS

ERA SUMMARY – REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

Rebellion in the Colonies—The revolutionary period in American history began with the victory of England over France in the [French Indian Wars](#). As long as France controlled territories to the North and west of the English colonies and England's army was required to fend off the French and their Indian allies, there was no talk of rebellion. In 1759, [General Wolfe](#) conquered the French capital of Quebec for England, and soon after all of North America was in English hands. Once the French threat was relieved, the colonists no longer desired British troops in the colonies and resented being taxed to provide for services they no longer saw as necessary.



THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

In the years leading up to the war, a series of laws were passed by the British parliament that affected the colonies. The purpose of most of these laws was to raise revenue from the colonies, control colonial trade, and suppress rebellion. The **Stamp Act** was the most famous of these laws and it was so unpopular that it encouraged resistance and boycotts in the throughout the colonies. The **Boston Massacre**, a riot during with British soldiers fired on citizens, and the **Boston Tea Party**, during which patriots sabotaged a cargo of British Tea, were

two well-known incidents of patriot resistance, but even more hurtful to British interests were widespread boycotts and smuggling. All these measures made it difficult for Britain to raise revenues, and strengthened colonial resistance.

Instead of softening its stance towards the colonies, Britain passed more oppressive laws to retaliate against rebellion, and in 1774 the **First Continental Congress** was called to organize an economic boycott. Although there was considerable disagreement among the delegates, all agreed that a unified resistance to Britain was necessary. Only a year later the first battles of the war were fought at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill.

The Revolutionary War—In diplomatic terms, the [American Revolutionary War](#) began with the **Declaration of Independence** and ended with the **Treaty of Paris of 1783**. The first battles of

the war, however, preceded the Declaration by over a year, and active fighting came to an end with the surrender of [Lord Cornwallis](#) in 1781, two years before the treaty was signed.

The early fighting of the Revolutionary War involved the defense of the city of Boston, and the conquest of Fort Ticonderoga. These events were related because once [Benedict Arnold](#) and [Ethan Allen](#) took the northern fort, almost all its cannon and munitions were moved to Boston, and the British soldiers there were driven out. This successful campaign gave confidence to many wavering patriots and encouraged the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

The important campaigns of the following year, 1776-1777, saw the conquest of New York by British [General Howe](#), and patriot victories at Trenton and Princeton led by [George Washington](#). The most critical campaign of the war, however, was fought the following year in upstate New York. The Saratoga campaign began in Canada as [General Burgoyne](#)'s army recaptured Ticonderoga and headed south towards New York City. The Patriots won several important battles, culminating in the victory at Saratoga, where Burgoyne's army of over 6000 men were forced to surrender, thanks largely to the heroism of [Benedict Arnold](#).



THE SURRENDER OF CORNWALLIS.

The Patriot victory at Saratoga was a significant blow to Britain, and a critical factor in the decision of France to ally itself with the new nation and declare war on Britain. The war in the colonies was unpopular in Britain to begin with and the situation became dramatically worse when France entered the war in 1778. France's greatest contribution as an ally was not in helping the American patriots fend off Britain directly, but rather, they drew England into a worldwide naval war, forcing her to defend her far flung colonies. France's involvement made it impossible for Britain to bring the rebellion in America to a swift close, making victory almost certain for the patriots if they could hold out long enough.

Unfortunately, the Patriots were even more hard-pressed in terms of resources than the British. Washington suffered a series of defeats at Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth between 1777 and 1778. The losses, however, were not debilitating, and once it was heard that France had joined the war, morale greatly improved. Most of the major battles in the last few years of the war were in the south, most critically at Camden, Eutaw Springs, and Yorktown. By 1781 it was clear that Britain did not have either the will or the resources to defeat the patriots, but due to the complicated worldwide conflict with France, peace was not declared for two years.

Articles of Confederation and the Constitution— Soon after the Declaration of Independence was signed, the Continental Congress began drafting "The Articles of Confederation". Even



GEORGE WASHINGTON TAKES THE
OATH OF OFFICE.

before they were ratified by all thirteen states, these articles worked as an operating constitution for the newly formed government.

The problems with the Articles of Confederation were apparent very early. They gave great autonomy to each state, reserving only a few powers, such as conducting foreign policy, to the federal government. The weak central government, however, had no mechanism to enforce even the few powers that were reserved to it. Some problems that arose during the early years often involved money and revenues, while others were caused by the inability of the legislature to pass any laws without a majority of 9 of 13.

A number of the founding fathers were in favor of a stronger central government, and called a constitutional convention in 1787 to work out the details. As expected, there was disagreement among the states regarding how to organize the federal government, but eventually a compromise was reached. Important features of the new constitution involved a strong executive branch, a two-house legislature, and an independent judiciary. In order to encourage skeptics to accept the Constitution, [Alexander Hamilton](#), [James Madison](#), and John Jay published the **Federalist Papers**, defending the precepts of the American Constitution. It was ratified in 1788, and George Washington was elected the first president by a unanimous vote.

CHARACTERS – REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

STATESMEN AND PATRIOTS

Benjamin Franklin	1706–1790	Statesman, publisher, inventor, and non-conformist. Founding father, and benefactor of Philadelphia.
Samuel Adams	1722–1803	Founding Father and Governor of Massachusetts. Colonial political philosopher who built support for the revolution.
George Washington	1732–1799	Leader of the Continental Army of the U.S. during the Revolutionary War, and first President.
Robert Morris	1734–1806	American Patriot who helped finance the Revolutionary war. Served as superintendent of finance and controller of the Navy.
Thomas Jefferson	1743–1826	Third President. Author of the Declaration of Independence. Founder of Democrat-Republican Party.
Paul Revere	1735–1818	Paul Revere is famous for his ride from through Lexington-Concord, warning of the British attack.
John Adams	1735–1826	Second President of the United States. Worked tirelessly to help establish the republic on steady footing.
Patrick Henry	1736–1799	American Patriot, active in inciting the rebellion against Britain. First Governor of Virginia.
James Madison	1751–1836	One of the chief authors of the Constitution and writer of the Federalist papers. Fourth President of the U.S.
Alexander Hamilton	1757–1804	Founding Father, principal author of <i>Federalist Papers</i> . Secretary of Treasury.
Nathan Hale	1755–1776	American patriot caught by the British and hung for treason.

WAR HEROES

Israel Putnam	1718–1790	Outspoken and adventure-loving soldier. Participated in both French-Indian and Revolutionary Wars.
Horatio Gates	1727–1806	Leading Patriot General during the Revolutionary war. Credited with winning the <i>Battle of Saratoga</i> .
Lydia Darrah	1728–1789	When her house was taken over by British officers, she overheard their plans and warned Washington.
John Stark	1728–1822	'Hero of Bennington' during the American Revolution. Fought with Rogers' Rangers during French Indian War.
Robert Rogers	1731–1795	Leader of a band of mountain men who did great service for Britain during the French and Indian War.
Francis Marion	1732–1795	Revolutionary War leader whose used guerilla tactics against the Tories in the Southeast marshes.
Philip Schuyler	1733–1804	Military leader during the American Revolutionary period. Later a statesman from New York.
Ethan Allen	1738–1789	Mountain man who became famous leader of Vermont's "Green Mountain Boys" during Revolution Era.
Benedict Arnold	1741–1801	Hero of the Revolutionary War, but tragically turned traitor. He escaped to the British before discovery.
Anthony Wayne	1745–1796	Bold and popular Revolutionary War Hero. Well known for victory at Stony Point.
John Paul Jones	1747–1792	American Revolution Naval Hero. Famous for the sea fight <i>Bon Homme Richard</i> vs. <i>Serapis</i> .
Molly Pitcher	1753–1832	When her husband was killed, she took over his position and helped man the cannon at the <i>Battle of Monmouth</i> .

Nancy Hart 1735–1830 Pioneer woman who captured a group of Tory soldiers in her home, and later hung them.

FRONTIERSMEN

Simon Girty 1741–1818 Controversial frontiersman who lived with both Indians and whites. Accused of torture of white captives while living with Indians.

Elizabeth Zane 1759–1823 As Fort Henry was besieged by Indians, Elizabeth risked her life to leave the barricade and carry back gunpowder from her father cabin.

Simon Kenton 1755–1836 Leading settler of the Ohio and Kentucky valleys. Fought on various Indian wars and the Revolutionary war.

George Rogers Clark 1752–1818 Revolutionary war hero who fought both British and Indians in the Ohio Valley.

Daniel Boone 1734–1820 Explored the Kentucky and Tennessee Valley. Opened a road for settlers through Cumberland Gap.

BRITISH

General Braddock 1695–1755 Led a disastrous campaign to Fort Duquesne (Ohio) during the French and Indian Wars.

General Howe 1729–1814 Commander-and-Chief of British forces during Revolutionary War. Took New York and Philadelphia.

General Burgoyne 1723–1792 British leader who surrendered with 6000 men to American forces at Saratoga.

Lord Cornwallis 1738–1805 British leader defeated at Yorktown in Revolutionary War. Later served as governor in India.

INDIANS

Pontiac 1720–1769 Leader of a Great Lakes tribe who planned a rebellion. His attempt to take fort Detroit was thwarted by an Indian who warned the garrison.

Chief Logan 1725–1780 Indian chief who was friendly to white settlers until his family was killed. He then warred against the U.S.

Cornstalk 1720–1777 Indian leader who tried to be neutral during the Revolutionary War, but was murdered.

ART AND LITERATURE

Benjamin West 1738–1820 Eminent American painter who specialized in historical paintings.

TIMELINE – REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS

- 1754-63** Britain drives the French out of North America during the [French Indian Wars](#).
- Jul 1755** [George Washington](#) accompanies [General Braddock](#) on ill-fated expedition to Fort Duquesne.
- Sep 1759** Quebec, the capital of New France, falls to Britain. Both generals, [Wolfe](#), and [Montcalm](#) are killed.
- 1763-66** [Pontiac](#), an Ottawa chieftain, leads a [Rebellion against Britain](#) following its conquest of Canada.
- May 1763** Fort Detroit is besieged after the British commander was warned of an ongoing attack.

REBELLION IN THE COLONIES

- 1765** Britain passes the Stamp Act, a tax on all printed material, to raise money from the colonies.
- 1770** Boston Massacre—Five citizens killed by British soldiers when a mob protests British policies.
- 1773** Boston Tea Party—Colonists destroy a shipload of tea rather than pay taxes on it.
- 1774** [Lord Dunmore's War](#), first conflict with Indians in the Ohio Valley.
- 1774** "Intolerable Acts" are passed by the British Parliament to punish Boston for Tea Party.
- 1774** First Continental Congress called to address colonial resistance to *Intolerable Acts*.
- 1775-83** [American Revolutionary War](#).
- Apr 1775** [Paul Revere's](#) Ride, battles of Lexington and Concord.
- May 1775** Second Continental Congress called to manage colonial war effort after battles of Lexington.
- Jun 1775** Battle of Bunker Hill.
- Jul 1776** Continental Congress signs the *Declaration of Independence*.
- Dec 1776** Washington leads men across the Delaware to surprise the British at the Battle of Trenton.
- Aug 1777** [John Stark](#) leads colonists to victory of British at the Battle of Bennington/Oriskany.
- Sep 1777** Battle of Brandywine.
- Oct 1777** British [General Burgoyne](#) surrenders after the Battle of Saratoga.
- Dec 1777** [George Washington](#) and his men spend the winter at Valley Forge.
- Feb 1778** France recognizes the Independence of the United States and joins the war effort against Britain.
- Jun 1778** Battle of Monmouth.
- Sep 1779** [John Paul Jones](#), sailing the *Bonhomme Richard* defeats the H.M.S Serapis at Flamborough Head.
- Aug 1780** General [Horatio Gates](#) disgraces himself at the disastrous Battle of Camden, in South Carolina.
- Sep 1780** [Benedict Arnold's](#) plot to surrender West Point discovered when Major Andre, a Tory spy is captured.
- Oct 1781** [Lord Cornwallis](#) surrenders after being trapped in Battle of Yorktown.

FORMATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

- 1781** All 13 Colonies adopt the *Articles of Confederation*.
- 1783** Britain recognizes the Independence of the United States, signs the Treaty of Paris.
- 1781-89** The *Continental Congress* becomes the governing body of the United States.
- 1786** A Constitutional Convention meets in Philadelphia to revise the *Articles of Confederation*.
- 1787** *Northwest Ordinance* plan for governing "Northwest Territory" surrounding Great Lakes is adopted.
- 1788** The American Constitution is in force when New Hampshire became the 9th state to ratify.
- 1787-88** The *Federalist Papers* are published by [Alexander Hamilton](#), [James Madison](#), and John Jay.
- 1789** George Washington is elected first President of the United States.
- 1789** The *Bill of Rights* is ratified by the First United States Congress.

RECOMMENDED READING – REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS *

Guerber - <u>Story of the Thirteen Colonies</u>	<u>Washington's Boyhood</u> to <u>Washington's Farewell</u> (34)
Guerber - <u>Story of the Great Republic</u>	<u>The Beginning of the U.S</u> to <u>The Constitution</u> (4)
Marshall - <u>This Country of Ours</u>	<u>A Terrible Disaster</u> to <u>A Turning Point</u> (16)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Evans - <u>America First</u>	<u>Israel Putnam</u> to <u>Benjamin Franklin</u> (32)
Pratt - <u>American History Stories - II</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Baldwin - <u>Four Great Americans</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Otis Kaler – <u>Stephen of Philadelphia</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Burton - <u>Four American Patriots</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Barnes - <u>The Hero of Stony Point</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Russell - <u>George Washington</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Tappan - <u>Story of Our Constitution</u>	<i>entire book</i>
McSpadden - <u>Thomas Jefferson</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Morris - <u>Historical Tales - American I</u>	<u>Franklin in Philadelphia</u> to <u>Marion, the Swamp Fox</u> (12)
Morris - <u>Historical Tales - American II</u>	<u>Boy's Holiday in the Wildwood</u> to <u>General Greene's Retreat</u> (8)
Drake - <u>Indian History for Young Folks</u>	<u>The "Old French War"</u> to <u>The Indians Join Britain against the Colonies</u> (5)

SPECIAL INTEREST – MILITARY

Sabin - <u>Book of Frontier Fighters</u>	<u>Attack on Logan's Station</u> to <u>Betty Zane's Powder Exploit</u> (9)
Sabin - <u>Book of Border Battles</u>	<u>Washington Stands Fast</u> to <u>Braddock's Bloody Field</u> (2)
Sabin - <u>Book of Indian Warriors</u>	<u>The Ghost Dancers</u> to <u>Cornstalk Leads the Warriors</u> (4)
Fraser - <u>Boys' Book of Battles</u>	<u>Bunker Hill</u> to <u>Yorktown</u> (3)
Fraser - <u>Boys' Book of Sea Fights</u>	<u>Commodore John Paul Jones</u> (1)

* Level I and II Study Questions are based on **Core Reading Assignments**.