

THE SOCIETY *of the* CINCINNATI

Teaching the American Revolution

Cheney, Lynne. *When Washington Crossed the Delaware: A Wintertime Story for Young Patriots*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004. Published in paperback 2012.

Recommended for ages 6 and up

Lynne Cheney, former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, retells the story of the Continental Army's crossing of the ice-choked Delaware on Christmas in 1776 and the subsequent American victory at the Battle of Trenton in this book for young readers. This is a story of heroism, persistence, and patriotism overcoming enormous obstacles, well told and handsomely illustrated. This is an ideal book for reading aloud to first through third grade classes.

Hardcover:

ISBN-10: 0689870434

ISBN-13: 978-0689870439

Paperback:

ISBN-10: 1442444231

ISBN-13: 978-1442444232

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Recommended for ages 10 and up

Johnny Tremain should need no introduction. For nearly seventy years it has been the best work of historical fiction for young people on the American Revolution—and is properly regarded as a classic. It won the Newbery Award in 1944 and remains a great book to assign to students in the fifth or sixth grades.

Johnny Tremain tells the story of a young man caught up in the American Revolution. As it opens, Johnny is a gifted apprentice silversmith in pre-Revolutionary Boston. He injures his hand in an accident in the shop and the hand is crippled for life. No longer able to work as a silversmith, he finds work in a printer's shop, where he comes in contact with patriot leaders and is drawn into the Revolutionary movement.

Johnny Tremain was written in 1942 and 1943, during the most difficult period of another desperate war, and it was plainly intended to inspire patriotism in young people. But it is far from one-dimensional. Johnny is no saint, the patriot leaders are not flawless heroes, and the British are presented in a much more sympathetic and sophisticated way than you might expect. Johnny is a complicated character: vain and arrogant at first, he learns to be tolerant, patient, and ultimately to commit himself to a cause greater than himself. This is a remarkable book and every young American should read it.

For teachers, we also suggest *A Guide for Using Johnny Tremain in the Classroom* by Jean Haack (2004), a resource book with a variety of classroom activities to do before, during, and after reading the book. It includes sample lesson plans, vocabulary building ideas, cross-curriculum activities, and sectional activities, as well as quizzes and unit tests. (ISBN-10: 155734440X; ISBN-13: 978-1557344403)

ISBN-10: 0440442508

ISBN-13: 978-0440442509

Teaching the American Revolution

Fradin, Dennis Brindell. *Let It Begin Here!: Lexington and Concord; First Battles of the American Revolution*. New York: Walker, 2005. Published in paperback 2009.

Recommended for ages 7 and up

The story of Lexington and Concord is a remarkable drama. British soldiers marched out of Boston to seize the gunpowder and weapons stored in Concord. Colonial militia—warned overnight by Paul Revere and others that the British were coming—met them a few miles short of Concord, in Lexington, where the first shots of the war were fired. The British marched on to Concord. They found few weapons, but met more militiamen who made a brave stand near the Old North Bridge, exchanging fire with the British. As the proud British army retreated toward Boston, they faced repeated attacks from angry patriot militia all along the way. The British managed to get back to the city, but they had provoked a war with the colonists that would lead to the separation of the colonies from Britain.

In this short book Dennis Fradin recounts the story of that remarkable day. This is a book for young readers—typically in grades two through four. Teachers have had success reading it aloud to classes as a way to begin the story of the Revolutionary War. Because the number of people involved was small and because we know a fair amount about them as individuals, students can be led to identify with the participants. Simple maps, handsome two-page illustrations, and a precise chronological treatment make this a good introduction to historical narrative.

Hardcover:

ISBN-10: 0802789455

ISBN-13: 978-0802789457

Paperback:

ISBN-10: 0802797113

ISBN-13: 978-0802797117

Freedman, Russell. *Give Me Liberty!: The Story of the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Holiday House, 2000. Published in paperback 2001.

Recommended for ages 10 and up

This is the first of three books by Russell Freedman we recommend. The author is a Newbery Award winner (for *My Brother Sam*) and has written three Newbery Honor Books. The three books we recommend are suitable for the fifth through the ninth grade and can be read with pleasure by adults. *Give Me Liberty!* offers much more than the title suggests. This is really a summary of the American Revolution for middle school students. Some of the vocabulary may be beyond the level of the average elementary school student.

Hardcover:

ISBN-10: 0823414485

ISBN-13: 978-0823414482

Paperback:

ISBN-10: 0823417530

ISBN-13: 978-0823417537 ISBN-10: 0440442508

ISBN-13: 978-0440442509

Freedman, Russell. *Lafayette and the American Revolution*. New York: Holiday House, 2010.

Recommended for ages 10 and up

Lafayette was a hero to Americans of the Revolutionary generation and for generations after. Countless children, dozens of counties and towns, and hundreds of streets, parks, streams, lakes, and mountains were named for him in the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, few twenty-first century young people know who he was. That needs to change.

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In this fine book—ideal for the fifth through the ninth grade—Russell Freedman re-introduces Lafayette, capturing his idealism, courage, and determination. A wealthy aristocrat orphaned as a child, Lafayette came to America at nineteen to volunteer his service. Appointed a major general, he quickly distinguished himself as one of the most daring and capable leaders of the Continental Army. He was like a son to George Washington and served as an important intermediary between Washington and the French court of Louis XVI. Lafayette played a major role in persuading the French king to send an army to America to support Washington, and then played a key role in defeating Cornwallis in Virginia and bringing the Revolutionary War to a successful close. Modern young people should be taught to admire Lafayette—the youngest major general in our history and an idealist who devoted himself without reservation to a cause greater than himself.

ISBN-10: 0823421821

ISBN-13: 978-0823421824

Freedman, Russell. *Washington at Valley Forge*. New York: Holiday House, 2008.

Recommended for ages 10 and up

In this book, Russell Freedman offers a powerful account of the endurance of the Continental Army during a critical period of the Revolutionary War. Camped at Valley Forge, about twenty miles from Philadelphia, through the winter of 1777-1778, Washington's army endured severe hardships, but emerged the next spring a more effective fighting force capable of meeting and defeating the British army.

ISBN-10: 0823420698

ISBN-13: 978-0823420698

Martin, Joseph Plumb. *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier: Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of Joseph Plumb Martin*. Reprint ed. New York: Signet Classics, 2010. First published 2001.

Recommended for ages 14 and up

Joseph Plumb Martin (1760-1850) was an ordinary soldier of the Revolutionary War who left behind an extraordinary account of his service. Martin enlisted as a private in June 1776 at age fifteen and served with the Continental Army in the defense of New York and fought in several later engagements, including the Battle of Monmouth Court House and the Siege of Yorktown. Along the way, he was promoted to corporal and later to sergeant.

In 1830, Martin's account of his wartime service was published anonymously by his hometown printer as a book entitled *A narrative of some of the adventures, dangers, and sufferings of a Revolutionary soldier, interspersed with anecdotes of incidents that occurred within his own observation* (Hallowell, [Me.]: Printed by Glazier, Masters & Co., 1830). Original copies of the book are exceedingly rare, but it has been reprinted under various titles in recent years. The best scholarly edition is the one edited by James Kirby Martin, published under the title *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin* (3rd ed., Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008). The recommended Signet edition is very good and widely available as an inexpensive paperback.

Martin's narrative is one of the only published first-person accounts of the Revolutionary War by an enlisted man. He writes clearly and well, and is easily understood by a high school student or an advanced student of middle school age. High school age students relate to the account of events that occurred when Martin was their own age. Martin makes two important points—that the army suffered unnecessarily because the government was unable to provide the food, clothing, and supplies it needed, and that the regular soldiers in the Continental Army were far more important to victory than the militia. More Americans served in the militia than in the Continental Army, and by the time Martin wrote his narrative many Americans had come to credit the militia with winning the Revolutionary War. A perceptive high school student will grasp these points.

Martin does not comment extensively on events he did not witness, which gives his work great value for understanding the perspective of individual actors in history, which are generally limited. Because of this, Martin's narrative does not substitute for a good general history of the Revolution, but it makes a magnificent supplement and is an ideal way to teach high

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school students about primary sources.

ISBN-10: 0451531582

ISBN-13: 978-0451531582

Murphy, Jim. *The Crossing: How George Washington Saved the American Revolution*. New York: Scholastic, 2010.

Recommended for ages 8 and up

The story of Washington's dramatic crossing of the Delaware River on Christmas night, 1776, and the ensuing Battle of Trenton is well told in this book by two-time Newberry Honor Book author Jim Murphy. This is one of the Revolution's great heroic moments, and a good place to get young readers interested in the Revolution and in history in general.

ISBN-10: 0439691869

ISBN-13: 978-0439691864

Murphy, Jim. *A Young Patriot: The American Revolution as Experienced by One Boy*. New York: Clarion, 1996. Published in paperback 1998 by Sandpiper.

Recommended for ages 8 and up

In *C[on]q[ue]ri[ng] the Revolution*, Jim Murphy, a veteran writer of children's non-fiction, distills the Revolutionary War memoirs of Joseph Plumb Martin into a book that can be readily understood and enjoyed by young readers. Murphy lets Martin speak for himself throughout the text, weaving in historical background details where necessary. This is an ideal book on the Revolutionary War for elementary school students.

Hardcover:

ISBN-10: 0395605237

Paperback:

ISBN-10: 0395900190

ISBN-13: 978-0395900192

Schanzer, Rosalyn. *George vs. George: The American Revolution as Seen from Both Sides*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2004. Published in paperback 2007.

Recommended for ages 9 and up

This is an excellent book through which to introduce young readers to the idea of looking at historical events from different perspectives. Rosalyn Schanzer introduces George Washington and George III—leaders with more in common than we sometimes acknowledge—and presents sides of the arguments that divided the colonies from the British kingdom. Was King George a “Royal Brute” as American patriots claimed? Or was he, as others believed, “the father of the people?” Was George Washington a scurrilous traitor, as the king's supporters claimed? Or should we remember and celebrate him as “the father of his country?”

Hardcover:

ISBN-10: 0792273494

ISBN-13: 978-0792273493

Paperback:

ISBN-10: 1426300425

ISBN-13: 978-1426300424