



## The American Revolution Institute Plan of Instruction on the American Revolution

In order to ensure proper understanding and appreciation of the American Revolution and its legacy, the American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati has developed this plan of instruction on the American Revolution for students in grades nine through twelve. The plan is designed to be followed during that part of a secondary school course on U.S. history that covers the period between 1754 and 1791, beginning with the French and Indian War and ending with the ratification of the U.S. Bill of Rights. The American Revolution Institute recommends that each state, or as local circumstances may dictate, each school district, adopt a version of this plan.

The plan is based on the interpretive framework developed by the American Revolution Institute to organize and synthesize the enduring achievements of the American Revolution and presents them in a way that makes sense of an extremely complex series of social, economic, political, intellectual, legal, and constitutional developments spanning nearly forty years. That interpretive framework rests on the best advanced scholarship on the Revolution published over the last seventy years, an extraordinary body of creative work that places the American Revolution at the center of American history.

### **Students taught according to this plan of instruction should learn that the American Revolution:**

- **secured the independence of the United States from British rule;**
- **established republics in each of the independent states as well as a federal government based on republican principles;**
- **created American national identity; and**
- **committed the new nation to ideals of liberty, equality, natural and civil rights, and responsible citizenship that have shaped American history for nearly 250 years.**

They should also learn that fulfilling and defending the ideals of the Revolution are the shared responsibility of all our citizens, and that in this way the American Revolution continues to define and shape our lives.

The plan begins with an overview of the European imperial system in the middle of the eighteenth century, but presupposes that the students have completed instruction on development of society in the British colonies of eastern North America, and that they are familiar with the hierarchical structure of that society, including slavery and indentured servitude, religious diversity in the colonies, the nature of conflict between colonists and American Indians, the nature and evolution of

colonial government, the nature of the late colonial economy, and the growth of the colonial population in the decades before the French and Indian War.

Understanding the topics outlined in this plan of instruction is fundamental to understanding the importance of the American Revolution, but the American Revolution Institute encourages states, school districts, schools, and teachers to integrate additional topics, particularly topics of local or regional importance. The American Revolution was not restricted to the eastern seaboard of North America. In what is now the United States, the Revolutionary War reached from Florida to Canada and west to the Mississippi River. It shaped the future of the Spanish empire in the Americas and ultimately touched the lives of people living in every part of North America. By challenging monarchy and colonial dependence and promoting ideals of equality and natural rights, the American Revolution ultimately became an event of global importance.

The American Revolution Institute welcomes the opportunity to work with school superintendents, school boards, state officials, and legislators to tailor this plan to local needs and circumstances. This version of the draft plan makes reference to people and events in the Revolutionary history of South Carolina of particular relevance in that state. The scope of the plan is national, leaving appropriate opportunities for the integration of themes, events, and people of regional, state, or local interest, which are often well suited to illustrate larger subjects in effective ways.

The American Revolution Institute has created materials to support the implementation of this plan, and further recommends materials developed by peer organizations, that are consistent with, and advance the aims of the plan.

## **A Plan for Instruction on the History and Legacy of the American Revolution for Use in Secondary Schools**

All students shall be instructed in the HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION according to the following plan during a course of instruction on U.S. history presented between grades nine and twelve, with a total classroom time of not less than forty hours to be devoted to this instruction.

Instruction on the HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION shall be divided into four sections, with not less than twelve hours of classroom instruction devoted to each of the first three sections, and not less than four hours of classroom instruction devoted to the fourth section.

### **The Shaping of the Revolution**

The first section is entitled THE SHAPING OF THE REVOLUTION. The aim of this section is to ensure that students understand why and how the people of the thirteen British colonies that became the United States resisted and ultimately rebelled against British rule and became the first colonial people to secure their independence from a European imperial power.

While students should understand the chronology and major events in the imperial controversy between the colonies and Britain, the larger purpose of this section is to ensure that students understand that the people of colonial British North America were not free, in the sense that we use

that term—that they may have enjoyed more personal independence and local autonomy than many people in the world, but they were ultimately subjects of a distant imperial monarchy and possessed few rights that the British government were bound to respect. The imposition of new imperial regulations and taxes during the 1760s made this clear, and led the colonists from resistance to rebellion in order to secure the rights to which they believe they were entitled.

The topics covered shall include:

- an overview of the nature and extent of European empires ca. 1750 [including the Spanish, French, and British empires in America, their involvement with the native peoples of the Americas and Africa, the management of empires to benefit the imperial powers, and the competition between empires for trade and dominion; the people of British America—population, economy, slavery and servitude, geographical distribution, backcountry settlement, and conflicts with American Indians on the Appalachian frontier].
- the French and Indian War, 1754-1763 [including the British, French, and Indian competition for control of the trans-Appalachian West, the outbreak of war on the Ohio frontier, Braddock’s defeat, and the British conquest of Canada and victories in Europe and India, which left Britain with a much larger empire and a large war debt].
- American resistance to increased British regulation and taxation, 1764-1770 [including British decisions to regulate American affairs more closely, the Proclamation Line of 1763, colonial resistance to the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, and the Townshend Duties, debates between colonists and the British government about the authority of Parliament to make laws for and impose taxes on the colonists; backcountry and frontier discontents from Vermont to Georgia; the military occupation of Boston, and the Boston Massacre].
- the path from resistance to rebellion, 1771-1774 [including the Gaspee incident, the Boston Tea Party, the Intolerable Acts, the imposition of martial law in Boston; the colonists prepare for armed conflict, Patrick Henry’s “Liberty or Death” speech, the Continental Congress].

## The Revolutionary War

The second section is entitled THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR. The aim of this section is to ensure that students understand how the United States achieved its independence in an armed conflict lasting for eight years.

While students should understand the chronology and major events of the war, the larger purpose of this section is to ensure that they understand that the United States won its independence in a war against a great power because of the voluntary commitment of a wide range of Americans, from all regions, ethnic and religious groups, and occupations to a common cause; the skill, character, and commitment of American military leaders, including George Washington, Nathanael Greene, Lafayette, and others; challenges the British faced in conducting a war across the Atlantic; and the support of France, which supplied arms and supplies and sent part of its army and navy to assist the Revolutionaries. Students should understand that the intervention of France and the involvement of Spain turned the war into a global conflict in the system of European empires.

The topics covered shall include:

- the beginning of the war in 1775-76 [including the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Siege of Boston and the Battle of Bunker Hill, the creation of the Continental Army as the

common army of the colonies, the challenge of supplying the army, and the beginning of armed conflict in the South].

- successful American resistance to British efforts to crush the Revolution in 1776-78 [including the leadership of George Washington, loyalism, the defense of Fort Mifflin, the loss of New York City, the victories at Trenton and Princeton, the loss of Philadelphia, the victory at Saratoga, the training and reorganization of the army at Valley Forge, the French alliance, the Battle of Monmouth, and privateers and the war at sea].
- successful American resistance to British efforts to crush the Revolution in the South in 1779-1781 [including the sieges of Savannah and Charleston, Camden, King's Mountain, the partisan war in the Carolinas and Georgia, Nathanael Greene's campaign, French intervention at sea and on land, the role of Spain and the Spanish empire in the last stages of the war, the Yorktown campaign, and the Treaty of Peace].
- the role of the Revolutionary War in shaping American national identity [including the shared experience of a long war; common heroes, shared victories, defeats, and common challenges, and shared ideals about military service and the obligations of citizenship in a republic].

## The Revolutionary Republic

The third section is entitled THE REVOLUTIONARY REPUBLIC. The aim of this section is to ensure that students understand how the United States declared its independence from British rule and created republican governments in each of the thirteen newly independent states, how the Continental Congress and the states managed the Revolutionary War, and how the Revolutionaries created constitutions and laws based on ideals of liberty, equality, natural and civil rights, and responsible citizenship, culminating in the drafting and ratification of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

While students should understand the chronology and major events involved in the establishment of American republics, the larger purpose is to ensure that they understand that the thirteen colonies involved in the American Revolution were the first colonies of any European empire to secure their independence; that the American Revolution resulted in the establishment of republican governments dedicated to protecting and enhancing the rights and interests of ordinary people, in contrast to monarchical government, which is dedicated to advancing the interests of the monarch and the state; and that the Revolutionaries committed their new republican governments to ideals of liberty, equality, natural and civil rights, and responsible citizenship, which are reflected in the state constitutions and laws adopted between 1776 and 1787, and are reflected in the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. Bill of Rights.

The topics covered shall include:

- the Declaration of Independence [including the Olive Branch Petition and other failed efforts at negotiated settlement of the imperial controversy, the American Prohibitory Act, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, the arguments for and against independence in Congress, the Lee Resolution, the vote on independence, Thomas Jefferson and the drafting of the Declaration, the purpose of the Declaration, and the principles defined by the Declaration, including the "self-evident" truths that "all men are created equal" and the "inalienable rights" of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and the implications of a government

based on natural rights for the future of slavery and the empowerment of women, free people of color, religious minorities, and others marginalized in colonial society].

- the creation of American republics, 1776-1780 [including the nature of republics, the distinction between the aims of monarchical government and republican government, the idea of sovereignty and the sovereignty of the people, the first state constitutions, culminating in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, and the Articles of Confederation as a cooperative compact between independent republics; the challenges of conducting the Revolutionary War without an effective shared or national government].
- the implementation of republican ideals in law, 1776-1787 [including the protection of natural and civil rights, exemplified by the Virginia Bill of Rights; the emergence of antislavery sentiment, exemplified by the Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery; the spread of religious liberty, exemplified by the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom; expanded opportunities for personal independence through land ownership, exemplified by the Northwest Ordinance].
- the framing and implementation of the U.S. Constitution, 1786-1791 [including the economic downturn of the 1780s, Shays' Rebellion, the problem of the public debt, the Federal Convention, the ratification of the U.S., including the debates between the Federalists and the Antifederalists, the launching of the federal government, and the chief accomplishments of the new federal government, including the adoption of the Bill of Rights].

## The Legacy of the American Revolution

The fourth section is entitled THE LEGACY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. The aim of this section is to ensure that students understand how the ideals of the American Revolution have shaped American culture, society, economy, and government since the beginning of the Revolution, and do so today. This section is not a substitute for instruction on American national history, but provides a framework for understanding the enduring and pervasive influence of the Revolution.

The topics covered shall include:

- the Revolution and American national identity [including the fragmented, local identity of the American colonies before the Revolution, the role of the common cause in creating colonial unity; the Revolution as the source shared national history and common heroes, including George Washington, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, Lafayette, and others who became national icons, the Revolution as the source of shared symbols, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Bill of Rights, the U.S. flag, the eagle, and other enduring symbols].
- the Revolution and the growth of equality [including the expansion of voting rights in the decades after the Revolution as property and other qualifications for voting were abandoned, the expansion of political participation including the election of ordinary people to public office; the value the post-Revolutionary generation placed on expanding opportunities for land ownership, and the end of indentured servitude].
- the Revolution and the abolition of slavery [including the end of slavery in the northern states, the abolition of the slave trade, the unexpected rise of cotton and increased southern economic dependence on enslavement, the ideal of equality and the rise of opposition to slavery, black and white abolitionists' appeal to the principles of the Revolution, including

- Frederick Douglass and others, and Lincoln's view that the Civil War was a fulfillment of the American Revolution, in which the North sought to vindicate the ideal of universal equality].
- the Revolution and women's rights [including early arguments for women's role from Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and others, the Seneca Fall Convention and the Declaration of Sentiments; the leaders of the women's suffrage movement, including Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and their appeal to the ideals of the Revolution].

This section is to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, and could be extended to include, among other topics, the consequences of the American Revolution for the role of the United States in the world as a model for free governments and for colonial resistance to imperial rule; the relation of Revolutionary ideals for the growth of the labor movement and demands for the rights of workers; the relationship of Revolutionary idealism for the modern movement for civil rights for African Americans as well as for the rights of women and minority groups; and for the role of the United States as a champion of natural rights around the world.

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