Sample from: 'How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?' | Product code: HS361

HISTORIAN'S APPRENTICE

How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?

Sourcing
Contextualizing
Finding Bias
Corroborating
Interpreting

Students learn the historian's craft by analyzing primary and secondary sources

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The HISTORIAN'S APPRENTICE

How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?

by Jonathan Burack

Each unit in *The Historian's Apprentice* series deals with an important historical topic. It introduces students to a five-step set of practices designed to simulate the experience of being a historian and make explicit all key phases of the historian's craft.

The Historian's Apprentice: A Five-Step Process

1. **Reflect on Your Prior Knowledge of the Topic**
   Students discuss what they already know and how their prior knowledge may shape or distort the way they view the topic.
2. **Apply Habits of Historical Thinking to the Topic**
   Students build background knowledge on the basis of five habits of thinking that historians use in constructing accounts of the past.
3. **Interpret the Relevant Primary Sources**
   Students apply a set of rules for interpreting sources and assessing their relevance and usefulness.
4. **Assess the Interpretations of Other Historians**
   Students learn to read secondary sources actively, with the goal of deciding among competing interpretations based on evidence in the sources.
5. **Interpret, Debate, and Write About the Topic Yourself**
   Students apply what they have learned by constructing evidence-based interpretations of their own in a variety of ways.

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Teacher Introduction

Teaching the Historian's Craft

The goal of *The Historian's Apprentice* units is to expose students in a manageable way to the complex processes by which historians practice their craft. By modeling what historians do, students will practice the full range of skills that make history the unique and uniquely valuable challenge that it is.

Modeling the historian's craft is not the same as being a historian—something few students will become. Therefore, a scaffolding is provided here to help students master historical content in a way that will be manageable and useful to them.

Historical thinking is not a simple matter of reciting one fact after another, or even of mastering a single, authoritative account. It is disciplined by evidence, and it is a quest for truth; yet, historians usually try to clarify complex realities and make tentative judgments, not to draw final conclusions. In doing so, they wrestle with imperfect sets of evidence (the primary sources), detect multiple meanings embedded in those sources, and take into account varying interpretations by other historians. They also recognize how wide a divide separates the present from earlier times. Hence, they work hard to avoid present-mindedness and to achieve empathy with people who were vastly different from us.

In their actual practice, historians are masters of the cautious, qualified conclusion. Yet they engage, use their imaginations, and debate with vigor. It is this spirit and these habits of craft that *The Historian's Apprentice* seeks to instill in students.

The Historian's Apprentice: Five Steps in Four Parts

The Historian's Apprentice is a five-step process. However, the materials presented here are organized into four parts. Part I deals with the first two of the five steps of the process. Each of the other three parts then deals with one step in the process. Here is a summary of the four parts into which the materials are organized:

Teacher Introduction. Includes suggested day-by-day sequences for using these materials, including options for using the PowerPoint presentations. One sequence is designed for younger students and supplies a page of vocabulary definitions.

Part 1. A student warm-up activity, an introductory essay, a handout detailing a set of habits of historical thinking, and two PowerPoint presentations (*Five Habits of Historical Thinking and How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?*). Part 1 (including the PowerPoints) deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Steps 1 and 2.

Part 2. A checklist for analyzing primary sources, several primary sources, and worksheets for analyzing them. Part 2 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 3.

Part 3. Two secondary source passages and two student activities analyzing those passages. Part 3 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 4.

Part 4. Two optional follow-up activities enabling students to write about and/or debate their own interpretations of the topic. Part 4 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 5.

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INTRODUCTION

Suggested Five-Day Sequence

Below is one possible way to use this *Historian's Apprentice* unit. Tasks are listed day by day in a sequence taking five class periods, with some homework and some optional follow-up activities.

PowerPoint Presentation: *Five Habits of Historical Thinking.* This presentation comes with each Historian's Apprentice unit. If you have used it before with other units, you need not do so again. If you decide to use it, incorporate it into the **Day 1** activities. In either case, give students the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout for future reference. Those "five habits" are as follows:

- History Is Not the Past Itself
- The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation
- Time, Change, and Continuity
- Cause and Effect
- As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Warm-Up Activity. **Homework assignment:** Students do the *Warm-Up Activity.* This activity explores students' memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the *Warm-Up Activity*, then either have students read or review the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout, or use the *Five Habits* PowerPoint presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the background essay "How 'Radical' Was the American Revolution?"

Day 2: Use the second PowerPoint presentation, *How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?*, to provide an overview of the topic for this lesson. The presentation applies the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to this topic. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources:

- Sourcing
- Contextualizing
- Interpreting meanings
- Point of view
- Corroborating sources

Day 3: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete "Source Analysis" worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. (Worksheet questions are all based on the concepts on the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.")

Day 4: In class, students complete the remaining "Source Analysis" worksheets and use their notes to discuss these sources. Take some time to briefly discuss the two secondary source passages students will analyze next.

Homework assignment: Student read these two secondary source passages.

Day 5: In class, students do the two "Secondary Sources" activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria:

- Clear focus on a problem or question
- Position or point of view
- Use of evidence or sources
- Awareness of alternative explanations

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher's discretion).
Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

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Suggested Three-Day Sequence

If you have less time to devote to this lesson, here is a suggested shorter sequence. The sequence does not include the PowerPoint presentation *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation is included with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have never used it with your class, you may want to do so before following this three-day sequence.

The three-day sequence leaves out a few activities from the five-day sequence. It also suggests that you use only six key primary sources. However, it still walks students through the steps of the *Historian's Apprentice* approach: clarifying background knowledge, analyzing primary sources, comparing secondary sources, and debating or writing about the topic.

Warm-Up Activity. **Homework assignment:** Ask students to read or review the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout and read the background essay "How 'Radical' Was the American Revolution?"

Day 1: Use the PowerPoint presentation How *"Radical" Was the American Revolution?* It provides an overview of the topic for this lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 2: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete "Source Analysis" worksheets on them. They then use their notes to discuss these sources. Documents 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, and 10 are suggested.

You may wish to make your own choices of primary sources. Use your judgment in deciding how many of them your students can effectively analyze in a single class period.

Homework assignment: Student read the two secondary source passages.

Day 3: In class, students do the two "Secondary Sources" activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher's discretion):
Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

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INTRODUCTION

Suggestions for Use with Younger Students

For younger students, parts of this lesson may prove challenging. If you feel your students need a somewhat more manageable path through the material, see the suggested sequence below.

If you want to use the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation, this sequence takes four class periods. If you do not use this PowerPoint, you can combine **Day 1** and **Day 2** and keep the sequence to just three days. We suggest using six primary sources only. The ones listed for **Day 3** are less demanding in terms of vocabulary and conceptual complexity. For **Day 4**, we provide some simpler DBQs for the follow-up activities.

Vocabulary: A list of vocabulary terms in the sources and the introductory essay is provided on page 7 of this booklet. You may wish to hand this sheet out as a reading reference, you could make flashcards out of some of the terms, or you might ask each of several small groups to use the vocabulary sheet to explain terms found in one source to the rest of the class.

SUGGESTED FOUR-DAY SEQUENCE

Warm-Up Activity. **Homework assignment:** Students do the Warm-Up Activity. This activity explores students' memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the Warm-Up Activity. Show the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation (unless you have used it before and/or you do not think it is needed now). If you do not use this PowerPoint presentation, give students the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout and discuss it with them.

Homework assignment: Ask students to read the background essay "How 'Radical' Was the American Revolution?"

Day 2: Use the PowerPoint presentation *How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?* This introduces the topic for the lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist offers a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 3: Discuss the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist" and talk through one primary source document in order to illustrate the meaning of the concepts on the checklist. Next, have students complete "Source Analysis" worksheets after studying primary source documents 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10.

Homework assignment: Students read the two secondary source passages.

Day 4: Students do *only* "Secondary Sources: Activity 2" and discuss it. This activity asks them to choose the two primary sources that best back up each secondary source passage.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher's discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Here are some alternative DBQs tailored to the six primary sources recommended here:

Describe the biggest changes you think the American Revolution brought for most ordinary people in America.

"The American Revolution ended British control of the colonies. However, it changed very little else for most Americans." Explain why you do or do not agree with this statement.

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Vocabulary: The Introductory Essay

- **disinterested**: In this case, not seeking selfish gain or pursuing other personal "interests"
- **dissenter**: Someone who speaks out publicly against authority or governmental policy
- **elite**: The group with greatest wealth, power, or social prestige or status
- **Enlightenment**: In this case, the 18th-century celebration of reason and tolerance in social life
- **hierarchy**: A system in which individuals or groups are ranked one above the other
- **indentured servant**: A person who is bound to work for another for a period of time
- **Minutemen**: A name for the colonial militia of citizen soldiers ready to fight in a "minute"
- **Patriot**: In this case, a term used for American colonists who supported the Revolution
- **radical**: In this case, extreme or someone seeking extreme changes in social conditions
- **republicanism**: A belief in government by the citizens rather than by a hereditary elite
- **status**: In this case, a person or group's standing in relation to others
- **transformation**: A complete change in something

Vocabulary: The Primary Sources

- **apprehend**: To understand something, to grasp its meaning
- **censure**: To blame, criticize, or condemn
- **commencement**: The start of something
- **constancy**: Remaining steadfast, or sticking to principles
- **eminence**: High reputation, status, or rank
- **estate**: All of one's property and possessions
- **freehold**: An estate owned, held, or inherited for life
- **Freemasons**: A secret order for mutual support to which many leaders of colonial society belonged
- **indigent**: Poor
- **manifested**: Demonstrated or displayed
- **mercantile**: Having to do with merchants and commercial activity

Vocabulary: The Secondary Sources

- **aristocracy**: A group considered superior, or an elite that inherits its rank and power
- **conservatism**: A political tendency seeking to preserve or restore what is traditional
- **consolidate**: Bring together and organize into a unified whole
- **despotic**: Ruthless, as a tyrant or dictator
- **egalitarian**: Believing strongly in equality
- **feudal tenure**: Lands held by one person in a dependent personal relationship to another
- **hereditary**: Something held or passed on within a family; a right held by birth
- **iconography**: Forms of visual representation or the study of the meaning of those forms
- **menial**: Describes work seen as of lesser value, lowly, even demeaning
- **monarchical**: Having to do with the rule by hereditary kings or queens
- **paradox**: A statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd, but is true
- **stratification**: In this case, dividing society in a hierarchy by rank, class, or caste
- **susceptible**: Able to be influenced or moved in a certain way
- **unprecedented**: Never seen or known before

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Warm-Up Activity

What Do You Know About the American Revolution?

This lesson deals with the American Revolution. Whenever you start to learn something about a time in history, it helps to think first of what you already know about it—or think you know. You probably have impressions, or you may have read or heard things about it already. Some of what you know may be accurate. You need to be ready to alter your fixed ideas about this time as you learn more about it. This is what any historian would do. To do this, study this painting and take a few notes in response to the questions below it.

The painting from 1853 is of George Washington on his estate in Virginia. What do you know about Washington and his role in the American Revolution? How does this painting fit or not fit with what you have learned about him?

What does the word "radical" mean to you? In particular, what do you think people mean when they say a society has changed in a "radical" way?

Do you think the American Revolution was a radical revolution? Why or why not?

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How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?

The first real armed clash of the American Revolution was the battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. That day, the Minutemen—ordinary farmers and artisans who serevd as militiamen—"fired the shot heard round the world," as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it. Later, at the end of the Revolution, some accounts say the British at Yorktown played the tune "The World Turned Upside Down" as they marched out to surrender.

Americans have long viewed the Revolution as this sort of world-changing event. In many ways, it was. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed the principles of liberty and equality, inspiring people everywhere: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." For two centuries, these words have been on the lips of many revolutionaries seeking to turn their societies "upside down." They indeed hoped to bring about thoroughgoing social and economic transformation, and not merely a change of political rulers.

Did the American Revolution itself really do that? That is, did it turn upside down the basic social system already existing in the colonies? Did it give ordinary people vast new rights and freedoms? Did it revolutionize relationships between rich and poor, men and women, blacks and whites, and bring about a more equal social order, or did it merely remove British control so that colonial society could go on as it had before—except now as 13 independent states, not 13 British colonies? How "radical" was the American Revolution?

There really is no easy answer to this question. For one thing, it depends on what kinds of changes actually make up a truly "radical" social upheaval. Does "radical" mean completely equal status between wealthy merchants and planters, on the one hand, and ordinary farmers, shopkeepers, and artisans ("mechanics," as they were called) on the other? If so, then not that much changed, or at least not right away. After all, the Revolution was mainly led by members of the social elite of the various colonies. True, some patriots, like Benjamin Franklin, rose from humble beginnings to positions of leadership and respect. However, most were well-to-do merchants like John Hancock, wealthy financiers like Robert Morris, or owners of vast plantations like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, and many others.

These men did advocate "republican" ideas that many saw as radical. They admired writers of the European Enlightenment, such as John Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and others. Such "enlightened" thinkers attacked the traditional social order ruled by kings, by those born to aristocratic status, or by an established church hierarchy. The leaders of the American Revolution admired other writers, like Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, who were seen as dangerous, radical dissenters in Great Britain itself.

For these leaders of the Revolution, "republicanism" meant having no king or hereditary aristocracy. It meant some role for ordinary citizens. It demanded firm protections for individual rights and property. In its time, this could seem like radical change. However, it did not mean "democracy" in the sense of direct rule by the citizens or by representatives chosen by the citizens—or even chosen by all adult white males. Republicanism for the colonial merchant and planter elites did not mean rule by the lower social orders.

That was not because these leaders thought the poor had no rights or dignity. It was just that they believed only independently wealthy gentlemen could ignore those personal "interests" that could corrupt them as public servants. Having "interests" meant having selfish motives for seeking a public role—such as to get a well-paying office or to enact laws that would be helpful personally. Republican virtue meant being "disinterested," not seeking to further one's own selfish interests. Only well-off and truly independent men could achieve this disinterested state of mind. In addition, only well-off men could read widely and gain the broader point of view that a liberal education could provide.

Apart from such "enlightened" leaders, nearly everyone else in colonial society was seen as dependent—and "interested." That is, they were not as able to exercise independent judgment and act in a disinterested way in society. Small farmers and artisans depended on wealthy men who often acted as patrons and sources of credit. Children and women were dependent on the male heads of households. Apprentices and indentured servants

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Part 2: Analyzing the Primary Sources

Note to the teacher: The next pages provide the primary sources for this lesson. It is suggested that you give these to students after they read the background essay, review the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout, and watch and discuss the PowerPoint presentation for the lesson.

This section includes the following:

- **Handout: "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist"**

  Give copies of this handout to students and ask them to refer to it when analyzing any primary source.

- **Ten Primary Source Documents**

  The Documents are as follows:

  Document 1. Wealthy planter William Drayton's complaint
  Document 2. Some mechanics reply to Drayton
  Document 3. A painting of Washington on his estate
  Document 4. An illustration of a colonial town meeting
  Document 5. A passage from "The Farmer Refuted," by Alexander Hamilton
  Document 6. Esther Reed calls on women to aid the Revolution
  Document 7. A news illustration of four coffins of Boston Massacre victims
  Document 8. Prince Hall's petition on behalf of the slaves
  Document 9. Benjamin Latrobe's 1806 letter describing democracy
  Document 10. An interview with an old Revolutionary War vet

- **Ten "Source Analysis" Worksheets for Analyzing the Primary Sources**

  Each worksheet asks students to take notes on one source. The prompts along the side match the five categories in the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." Not every category is used in each worksheet, only those that seem most relevant to a full analysis of that source.

  You may want students to analyze all of the sources. However, if time does not allow this, use those that seem most useful for your own instructional purposes.

  Students can use the notes on the "Source Analysis" worksheets in discussions, as help in analyzing the two secondary sources in the next part of this lesson, and in follow-up debates, DBQs, and other activities.

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Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist

Primary sources are the evidence historians use to reach conclusions and write their accounts of the past. Sources rarely have one obvious, easily grasped meaning. To interpret them fully, historians use several strategies. This checklist describes some of the most important of those strategies. Read the checklist through and use it to guide you whenever you need to analyze and interpret a primary source.

Sourcing

Think about a primary source's author or creator, how and why the primary source document was created, and where it appeared. Also, think about the audience it was intended for and what its purpose was. You may not always find much information about these things, but whatever you can learn will help you better understand the source. In particular, it may suggest the source's point of view or bias, since the author's background and intended audience often shape his or her ideas and way of expressing them.

Contextualizing

"Context" refers to the time and place of which the primary source is a part. In history, facts do not exist separately from one another. They get their meaning from the way they fit into a broader pattern. The more you know about that broader pattern, or context, the more you will be able to understand about the source and its significance.

Interpreting Meanings

It is rare for a source's full meaning to be completely obvious. You must read a written source closely, paying attention to its language and tone as well as to what it implies or merely hints at. With a visual source, all kinds of meaning may be suggested by the way it is designed, and by such things as shading, camera angle, use of emotional symbols or scenes, etc. The more you pay attention to all the details, the more you can learn from a source.

Point of View

Every source is written or created by someone with a purpose, an intended audience, and a point of view or bias. Even a dry table of numbers was created for some reason, to stress some things and not others, to make a point of some sort. At times, you can tell a point of view simply by sourcing the document. Knowing an author was a Democrat or a Republican, for example, will alert you to a likely point of view. In the end, however, only a close reading of the text will make you aware of point of view. Keep in mind that even a heavily biased source can still give you useful evidence of what some people in a past time thought. However, you need to take the bias into account in judging how reliable the source's own claims really are.

Corroborating Sources

No one source tells the whole story. Moreover, no one source is completely reliable. To make reasonable judgments about an event in the past, you must compare sources to find points of agreement and disagreement. Even when there are big differences, both sources may be useful. However, the differences will also tell you something, and they may be important in helping you understand each source.

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Document 3

Information on the source: This 1853 painting shows George Washington standing among field workers harvesting grain. Washington's Mount Vernon mansion is in background. Like a number of leaders of the American Revolution, Washington was a wealthy slave-owning planter who regarded Mount Vernon as the home he hoped to return to after the Revolution was over.

Document 4

Information on the source: This 1795 illustration shows an angry confrontation taking place during a colonial-era town meeting in a church.

Document 5

Information on the source: This is part of Alexander Hamilton's tract "The Farmer Refuted" (February 23, 1775), a response to an earlier Loyalist attack on his views. In this passage, Hamilton approvingly quotes Sir William Blackstone's influential *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Hamilton uses Blackstone to explain why the vote should be limited to those with at least some minimum amount of property.

It is . . . undeniably certain, that no Englishman, who can be deemed a free agent in a political view, can be bound by laws, to which he has not consented, either in person, or by his representative. Or, in other words, every Englishman exclusive of the mercantile and trading part of the nation who possesses a freehold to the value of forty shillings per annum, has a right to share in the legislature which he exercises by giving his vote in the election of some person he approves of as his representative

"The true reason," says Blackstone, "of requiring any qualification, with regard to property in voters, is to exclude such persons as are in so mean a situation, that they are esteemed to have no will of their own. If these persons had votes, they would be tempted to dispose of them, under some undue influence or other. This would give a great, an artful, or a wealthy man, a larger share in elections than is consistent with general liberty. If it were probable that every man would give his vote freely, and without influence of any kind; then, upon the true theory and genuine principles of liberty, every member of the community, however poor, should have a vote in electing those delegates, to whose charge is committed the disposal of his property, his liberty, and life. But since that can hardly be expected, in persons of indigent fortunes, or such as are under the immediate dominion of others; all popular States have been obliged to establish certain qualifications, whereby some, who are suspected to have no will of their own, are excluded from voting; in order to set other individuals, whose wills may be supposed independent, more thoroughly upon a level with each other."