

Lesson Title: Hamilton's War

Grade Levels: 9-12

Time Allotment: Three 45-minute class periods

Overview:

This high school lesson plan uses video clips from REDISCOVERING ALEXANDER HAMILTON and a website featuring interactive animations of Revolutionary War battles to explore Alexander Hamilton's military career in three different engagements: The Battle for New York The Battle of Princeton, and the Siege of Yorktown.

The Introductory Activity dispels the common misconception that the Revolution was primarily fought by "minutemen" militiamen using guerilla tactics against the British, and establishes the primary role of the Continental Army in the American war effort. The Learning Activities uses student organizers to focus students' online exploration of the battles of New York, Princeton, and Yorktown, focusing on Alexander Hamilton's role. The Culminating Activity challenges students to create their own organizer for a different Revolutionary War battle.

This lesson is best used during a unit on the American Revolution, after the key causes for the conflict have been established.

Subject Matter: History

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Distinguish between "irregular" and "regular" military forces in the 18th century and outline their relative merits
- Explain the context and consequences for the battles of New York, Princeton, and Yorktown
- Describe the general course of events in each of these actions, noting key turning points
- Discuss how historical fact can sometimes be distorted or embellished for effect
- Outline Alexander Hamilton's military career and discuss what motivated him to pursue it with such determination.

Learning Standards:

United States History Content Standards for Grades 5 -12

(from the National Center for History in the Schools at

<http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/us-history-content-standards>)

United States Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

Standard 1: The causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory.

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Standard 1C: The student understands the factors affecting the course of the war and contributing to the American victory. Therefore, the student is able to:

- 5-12 Appraise George Washington's military and political leadership in conducting the Revolutionary War.
- 7-12 Explain how the Americans won the war against superior British resources.
- 5-12 Analyze United States relationships with France, Holland, and Spain during the Revolution and the contributions of each European power to the American victory.

United States History Thinking Standards

(from the National Center for History in the Schools at

<http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/historical-thinking-standards-1>)

Standard 2 - Historical Comprehension: The student comprehends a variety of historical sources: Therefore, the student is able to:

- **Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations** but acknowledge that the two are related; that the facts the historian reports are selected and reflect therefore the historian's judgment of what is most significant about the past.
- **Draw upon data in historical maps** in order to obtain or clarify information on the geographic setting in which the historical event occurred, its relative and absolute location, the distances and directions involved, the natural and man-made features of the place, and critical relationships in the spatial distributions of those features and the historical event occurring there.

Media:

Video:

From REDISCOVERING ALEXANDER HAMILTON:

- **A Longing For War**

A brief summary of Alexander Hamilton's military career during the early campaigns of the American Revolution.

- **Recognition and Glory**

Hamilton is made Washington's closest aide, and finally finds battlefield glory at Yorktown.

Websites:

“Revolutionary War Animated”

<http://revolutionarywaranimated.com>

An educational website featuring detailed interactive tactical animations of all major Revolutionary War battles.

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MATERIALS:

For the teacher:

- A computer with internet access connected to a projector and speakers for classroom use.
- “The Battle for New York” Student Organizer Answer Key (attached at end of lesson)
- “The Battle of Princeton” Student Organizer Answer Key (attached at end of lesson)
- “The Siege of Yorktown” Student Organizer Answer Key (attached at end of lesson)

For each of five group of students:

- A computer with internet access.

For each student:

- “The Battle for New York” Student Organizer (attached at end of lesson)
- “The Battle of Princeton” Student Organizer (attached at end of lesson)
- “The Siege of Yorktown” Student Organizer (attached at end of lesson)

Prep for the Teachers:

Prior to teaching this lesson, you will need to:

Print out sufficient quantities of each student organizer.

Preview all of the video segments and websites used in the lesson.

Download the video segments used in the lesson to your classroom computer, or prepare to watch them using your classroom’s internet connection.

Bookmark the website used in the lesson on each computer in your classroom. Using a social bookmarking tool such as delicious.com or diigo (or an online bookmarking utility such as portaportal) will allow you to organize all the links in a central location.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

1. Ask students what they know about how the American Revolution was fought and won. (*Answers will vary, but will probably include mention of the minutemen.*) Ask students who the minutemen were. (*Patriot militiamen, loosely and locally organized, who were prepared to muster and fight the British “at a minute’s notice.”*) Ask what a militia is. (*An “irregular” military force composed of ordinary citizen volunteers rather than the professional soldiers of a regular army.*) How did the minutemen engage—let alone defeat—trained British soldiers in battle? (*Answers will vary, but will probably include “guerilla” tactics, in which minutemen sharpshooters fired from behind stone fences at*

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British soldiers wearing their bright red uniforms and marching in neat formations.) Explain that this is the traditional view of Revolutionary War combat, and that it does indeed accurately describe the very earliest engagement between the patriot militias and British regulars at the battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19th, 1775; it is not representative, however, of how the overwhelming number of decisive Revolutionary War battles were fought, and of the American patriot army that fought them.

2. Ask students what the advantages of a volunteer militia like the minutemen might have had over a regular army. (*Answers will vary, but should include the fact that militias could be quickly formed to face military immediate threats, and then return to their regular occupations and responsibilities afterward; moreover, being volunteers, they didn't require payment as regular soldiers did.*) What might some disadvantages of a militia be? (*Answers will vary, but should include the fact that they're not well trained, disciplined, or experienced; moreover, because they're not paid, and have other occupations and responsibilities to attend to, they can't be counted on for reliable service during longer campaigns.*) Explain that while the minutemen militia had succeeded in severely bloodying the British at Lexington and Concord, patriot leaders immediately recognized that such a loosely organized force would not be able to stand up to the British Army once it had recovered and reevaluated its opposition. On June 14, 1775, a "Continental Army," consisting of most of the patriot militias which had converged around Boston and New York, was officially established by resolution of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Tell students that in this lesson they will be taking a closer look at several of the battles fought by this new "regular" army, with special emphasis placed on the role played by one of its young officers—Alexander Hamilton.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

1. Ask students who they think was leading the new Continental Army? (*George Washington.*) Explain that George Washington—the Continental Army's newly appointed 43-year-old Commander-in-Chief—was one of the relatively few American officers with any military experience at the start of the war. Ask students where they think Washington and other officers had his military experience. (*In the service of the British during the recent French & Indian War.*) Explain that most Continental officers had only previously served in various peacetime colonial militias, and were as inexperienced as the men they commanded. One such officer was a 21-year-old artillery officer from New York named Alexander Hamilton. Frame the first video clip by explaining that it is excerpted from REDISCOVERING ALEXANDER HAMILTON—a PBS documentary hosted by Richard Brookhiser. Provide a focus question for the clip by asking in what actions Alexander Hamilton's artillery company served during the campaign in and around New York. PLAY Clip 1: "A Longing for War."

2. PAUSE the clip at 29:41, after Brookhiser says that "Hamilton's unit sees action in the retreat from New York, here in what is now Chinatown, and later in the battles of Harlem Heights and White Plains.") Review the focus question: in what actions did Hamilton's artillery company serve during the campaign in and around New York? (*The retreat from New York, the Battle of Harlem Heights, and the battle of White Plains.*) Ask students how many of them have ever heard of the Battle for New York. (*Few will have heard of it.*) Explain that the Battle for New York was, in terms of the number of soldiers engaged, the largest battle of the American Revolution, played out across all five boroughs of what is now New York City. Ask students if they find it strange that so few

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people have ever heard of the battle. (Yes.) Ask why they think this might be. (Accept all answers.)

3. Distribute the “Battle for New York” student organizer. Have students divide into groups of 4-5 and have each group log on to “Revolutionary War Animated” (at <http://www.revolutionarywaranimated.com>). Explain to students that this website offers detailed tactical animations of major Revolutionary War battles. Have students click on the “Battle for New York” in the “1776” section of the timeline on the left side of the screen, and then click “View The Battle Animation” in the middle of the screen. Explain that they will have 20-30 minutes to use the controls on the lower left corner of the screen to advance through the different stages of the battle, completing their organizers as they go.

4. After 20 minutes have passed, have groups take turns reading their answers to the class, encouraging questions, corrections, and discussion among the groups. Ask students again why they think so few Americans have heard of this battle. (Accept all answers, but suggest that it may have something to do with the fact that it was a massive American defeat.) Explain that despite this, many historians believe that this battle actually demonstrates some good generalship on Washington’s behalf. Ask students why they think this might be? (Accept all answers, but explain that Washington’s evacuation of Long Island, the retreat up Manhattan, and the final escape to New Jersey ultimately saved the fledgling Continental Army from destruction and the Revolution itself from an early, ignominious end. Essentially, Washington and his army lived to fight another day.)

Provide focus questions for the remainder of Clip 1 by asking what the role of Hamilton’s unit was in the subsequent retreat across New Jersey toward Pennsylvania, and what role it played during the attack on Trenton. RESUME playing Clip 1.

5. PAUSE the clip at 30:37 after Brookhiser says “Next, Washington moves his army north to Princeton.” Review the focus questions: what was the role of Hamilton’s unit in the subsequent retreat across New Jersey toward Pennsylvania, and what role did it play during the attack on Trenton? (Hamilton’s artillery provided a rear-guard for Washington’s army as it retreated across New Jersey, and it provided covering fire from the high ground during the battle of Trenton.)

6. Distribute the “Battle of Princeton” student organizer. Have students divide into groups of 4-5 and have each group log on to “Revolutionary War Animated” (at <http://www.revolutionarywaranimated.com>). Have them click on “Trenton/Princeton” on the left side of the screen, then click “View The Battle Animation” in the middle of the screen, and finally click on the rectangle at the bottom of the screen labeled “Battle of Princeton.” Explain to students that as with “The Battle for New York,” they will have 20 minutes to use the controls on the lower left of the screen to advance through the different stages of the battle, completing their organizers as they go.

7. After 20 minutes have passed, have the groups take turns reading their answers to the class, encouraging questions, corrections, and discussion among the groups. Ask students if they can see any similarities between Washington’s strategy in the Battle for New York and the Battle of Princeton? (Accept all answers, but suggest that once again Washington demonstrates his ability to conduct a skilled fighting retreat, in this case saving his army from Cornwallis’s larger force at Trenton in order to defeat the

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smaller British force at Princeton.) Provide a focus question for the remainder of Clip 1 by asking what role Alexander Hamilton is said to have played in the Battle of Princeton. RESUME playing Clip 1 through to the end.

8. Review the focus question: what role is Alexander Hamilton said to have played in the Battle of Princeton? (*Legend has it that he led the artillery attack against the British forces inside Nassau Hall on the Princeton campus, and in the process a cannonball from his battery decapitated a portrait of King George II, demoralizing the British and prompting their retreat.*) When in the day's action did this action happen? (*At the end of the battle.*) Explain that Nassau Hall was located, then as now, in the heart of Princeton itself. Ask students, based upon the battle animation they have just viewed—and presuming this legend is even true—if they think Hamilton's action was as decisive as the tour guide makes it out to be? (*No.*) Why not? (*Even if Hamilton did order the firing of such a portentous cannonball, the action at Nassau Hall came only at the very end of a much longer battle which had already been decided by Washington's counterattack; the British were already in retreat by the time American troops—including Hamilton's battery—approached Princeton itself.*) Ask students why they think such a story might have gained currency. (*It's a good propaganda story about a man who went on to become a prominent Founding Father.*) Ask if propaganda needs to be completely true to be effective? (*No.*) Explain that whether or not the legend of Hamilton's attack on Nassau Hall is completely true, he did perform well enough to be noticed by General Washington. Provide a focus question for the next clip by asking students how Hamilton complemented Washington and in what capacity he served the general. PLAY Clip 2: "Recognition and Glory."

9. PAUSE Clip 2 at 34:18, after Brookhiser says "Hamilton still thirsts for military glory; he pesters Washington for a battlefield command, right up to the siege of Yorktown in October 1781, when Washington finally gives Hamilton his chance." Review the focus question: how did Hamilton complement Washington and prove such an invaluable aide to his mentor? (*Hamilton had a "quicksilver" intellectual wit which Washington didn't, and with his superb administrative abilities, was more Washington's chief of staff than simply an aide.*) Did Hamilton perform well in this capacity? (*Yes.*) Was he content to do so? (*No.*) Why not? (*He "thirsts for military glory" and wants to lead soldiers in battle.*) What might Hamilton's lingering desire for glory suggest about his performance at the Battle of Princeton? (*It was perhaps not as glorious and decisive as Princeton legend has it.*) Ask students if the chief of staff of the modern U.S. Army leads soldiers in battle? (*No.*) Why do they think Hamilton was so driven to risk his life in this manner? (*Accept all answers.*)

10. Distribute the "Siege of Yorktown" student organizer. Have students divide into groups of 4-5 and have each group log on to "Revolutionary War Animated" (at <http://www.revolutionarywaranimated.com>). Have them click on "Yorktown" on the left side of the screen, then click "View The Battle Animation" in the middle of the screen, and finally click on the rectangle at the bottom of the screen labeled "The Siege of Yorktown." Explain to students that they will again have 20 minutes to use the controls on the lower left of the screen to advance through the different stages of the battle, completing their organizers as they go.

11. After 20 minutes have passed, have the groups take turns reading their answers to the class, encouraging questions, corrections, and discussion among the groups. Frame the **Rediscovering Alexander Hamilton** is a production of Manifold Productions, Inc., in association with WNET/Thirteen in New York City. Funding for **Rediscovering Alexander Hamilton** was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, BNY Mellon, the John Templeton Foundation, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Roger and Susan Hertog, the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation, The Lynde & Harry Bradley Foundation, and the Gilder Foundation.

remainder of the clip by explaining that it features a reenactment of Hamilton's famous action at the battle of Yorktown—the storming of Redoubt #10. Provide a focus question for the next clip by asking what this battle reenactment might somewhat accurately simulate about combat. RESUME playing clip through to the end.

12. Review the FOCUS question: what might this reenactment somewhat accurately simulate about combat? (*Anxiety, surprise, anticipation, adrenalin.*) Ask students how old Hamilton was at the siege of Yorktown in 1781. (*26 years old.*) Ask students if they think these feelings and emotions are something young men have always had a tendency to seek? (*Accept all answers, but suggest that for many young men—especially in the 18th century, but even today—war is romanticized as adventure and a proving ground.*) Ask students if there may have been another motivation for Hamilton to perform heroically in battle. Hint: it was mentioned at the beginning of the first video clip they watched, and has something to do with Hamilton's modest origins. (*Yes. Hamilton sees in military glory a means to "rise in the world"—in other words, to parlay his personal bravery into higher station and greater opportunity as a leader of his fledgling nation.*) Did Hamilton succeed in this ambition? (*Yes.*) Ask students if they think that military service remains an important asset for American politicians today. (*Yes. Military service—and especially combat experience—remains highly valued in the American political arena.*) Do students agree that it should? Why or why not? (*Accept all answers.*)

CULMINATING ACTIVITY:

1. Divide the class into eight groups. Assign each group one of the following battles to explore on “Revolutionary War Animated” (at <http://www.revolutionarywaranimated.com>):

- The Battle of Bunker Hill (1775)
- The Battle of Saratoga (1777)
- The Battle of Brandywine (1777)
- The Battle of Germantown (1777)
- The Battle of Monmouth (1778)
- The Battle of Camden (1780)
- The Battle of Cowpens (1781)
- The Battle of Guilford Court House (1781)

2. As homework or an in-class assignment, have each group create a student organizer about their assigned battle similar to those they completed earlier in this lesson. The specific questions and answers on each organizer will vary, but some key issues to be addressed include:

- Who were the opposing commanders and what were their respective battle plans?
- What was the composition of the opposing armies? Regulars? Militia? Mercenary?
- What was the terrain (geography) of the battlefield like, and how did this affect the battle?
- Who won? How closely did the battle go according to plan?

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- Was there a “decisive” moment in the battle when victory of defeat turned? If so, when? What caused it? Were there any major tactical mistakes or miscalculations on either side.
- What were the consequences of this battle?

3. When all organizers are completed, have different groups swap and complete each other’s organizers, using them as the basis for brief presentations to the class about each battle.

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Name: _____

Date: _____

“The Battle for New York”

Student Organizer

1. Why do the British want to capture New York, and how do they intend to do so?

2. Who will lead the British Army assault on New York?

3. Why doesn't Howe simply land his massive army directly on Manhattan?

4. What is the tactical error made by the Patriots defending Long Island, and how do the British exploit it?

5. How does Washington react?

6. What is Howe's second amphibious action of the battle, and what is its objective?

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7. Where does Washington retreat with his army after the battle?

8. What is the last American garrison in New York to surrender?

9. Who won the battle? What are the consequences of this victory?

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“The Battle for New York”

Student Organizer (Answer Key)

1. Why do the British want to capture New York, and how do they intend to do so? (*To divide the colonies. A British army will assault the city, while a second British army advances from Canada.*)
2. Who will lead the British Army assault on New York? (*General William Howe.*)
3. Why doesn't Howe simply land his massive army directly on Manhattan? (*Because they would be vulnerable to American artillery on Long Island.*)
4. What is the tactical error made by the Patriots defending Long Island, and how do the British exploit it? (*The Patriots don't defend their left flank at Jamaica Pass, which allows the British to get around their defenses and force a retreat back to Brooklyn Heights.*)
5. How does Washington react? (*He withdraws his army across the river to lower Manhattan.*)
6. What is Howe's second amphibious action of the battle, and what is its objective? (*Howe lands troops on Manhattan in an attempt to cut off the American troops on lower Manhattan.*) Does it work? Why or why not? (*No—the Americans retreat up Manhattan before the British can cut them off.*)
7. Where does Washington retreat with his army after the battle? (*New Jersey*)
8. What is the last American garrison in New York to surrender? (*Fort Washington.*)
9. Who won the battle? What are the consequences of this victory? (*The decisive British victory ensures that New York will remain under British control until the end of the war.*)

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Name: _____

Date: _____

“The Battle of Princeton”

Student Organizer

1. After his victory at Trenton, what does Washington order his army to do?

2. Who is in command of the British Forces send from Princeton?

3. Who is the patriot commander send to delay Cornwallis’ advance?

4. How does Washington get his army away from Cornwallis’s larger force at Trenton?

5. What was the purpose of this activity?

6. Where does Washington take his main force?

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7. Who is the British commander who intercepted Washington's Army?

8. What weakness does Mawhood's force exploit in the American column commanded by Brigadier-General Hugh Mercer?

9. What happens after this action to the soldiers under Brigadier-General John Cadwalader?

10. What is Washington's response to this situation?

“The Battle of Princeton”

Student Organizer (Answer Key)

1. After his victory at Trenton, what does Washington order his army to do? (Build defensive works along Assumption Creek.)
2. Who is in command of the British Forces sent from Princeton? (Lord Cornwallis.)
3. Who is the patriot commander sent to delay Cornwallis' advance? (Colonel Edward Hand.)
4. How does Washington get his army away from Cornwallis's larger force at Trenton? (He organizes a nighttime evacuation of Trenton, leaving behind a small force to tend campfires and make digging sounds.)
5. What was the purpose of this activity? (To fool the British into thinking that the entire Continental Army remained in Trenton, improving their defenses.)
6. Where does Washington take his main force? (Toward Princeton.)
7. Who is the British commander who intercepted Washington's Army? (Lt. Colonel Charles Mawhood.)
8. What weakness does Mawhood's force exploit in the American column commanded by Brigadier-General Hugh Mercer? (Realizing that the Mercer's men have few bayonets, he orders his men to charge, which scatters the Americans.)
9. What happens after this action to the soldiers under Brigadier-General John Cadwalader? (Being raw recruits terrified of the disciplined British soldiers, they panic.)
10. What is Washington's response to this situation? (He rallies his army and personally leads a counterattack which breaks the British line.)

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Name: _____ Date: _____

“The Siege of Yorktown” Student Organizer

1. Which nation has by 1781 allied itself with the American cause?

2. What is the role of the French fleet at Yorktown?

3. What is the traditional “place of honor” in an army’s deployment, and who assumes it in the Allied line? ‘

4. Which side has the artillery advantage, and why?

5. What is the First Parallel?

6. What does Colonel Alexander Hamilton order his men to do on the morning of October 7th?

7. What s prevents the Second Parallel’s extension to the river?

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8. How close to the Redoubts does the Allied army dig its trenches?

9. What order does Washington give to the two forces attacking Redoubts 9 and 10?

10. What prevents Cornwallis from evacuating most of his trapped army across the river to Gloucester?

“The Siege of Yorktown”

Student Organizer (Answer Key)

1. Which nation has by 1781 allied itself with the American cause? (France.)
2. What is the role of the French fleet at Yorktown? (To defend against attack by the British fleet and to support the siege.)
3. What is the traditional “place of honor” in an army’s deployment, and who assumes it in the Allied line? (The right flank; the Americans.)
4. Which side has the artillery advantage, and why? (The Allies, because their cannon are heavier, they have mortars capable of indirect fire, and the French artillery is more efficiently organized into batteries of uniform caliber.)
5. What is the First Parallel? (It is an Allied trench running parallel to the British fortifications.)
6. What does Colonel Alexander Hamilton order his men to do on the morning of October 7th? (Complete a display of arms on top of the completed First Parallel.)
7. What s prevents the Second Parallel’s extension to the river? (Redoubts 9 and 10, which are smaller British fortifications detached from their main line of defense)
8. How close to the Redoubts does the Allied army dig its trenches? (50 to 60 yards.)
9. What order does Washington give to the two forces attacking Redoubts 9 and 10? (That the nighttime attack should be conducted in silence, with bayonets.)
10. What prevents Cornwallis from evacuating most of his trapped army across the river to Gloucester? (A storm.)

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