

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

6 Things You Should Know (But Probably Don't)

Think you know everything you need to about the birth of our nation? Here's what the history books sometimes leave out. BY MARY KATE FRANK

The Revolutionary War (1775-1783) is likely one of the first historical events you learned about in school. By now, you may have studied it or listened to the *Hamilton* soundtrack enough to think you know all there is to know. But the story of our nation's founding is not as straightforward as it is sometimes portrayed. Here are some little-known truths about the fight for America's independence.

1 The beef wasn't just about taxes.

Starting in 1764 with the Sugar Act, the British Parliament imposed a series of taxes on the 13 American Colonies to raise money to pay off war debt (see Key Events, p. 20). The taxes angered the colonists. Each colony was officially ruled by British monarch King George III and Parliament. Each had its own local government and elected representatives. The colonists believed they should be taxed by their own governments, not Parliament. That is why their rallying cry became "No taxation without representation!"

In other words, the real conflict was about who had the power to pass laws affecting the Colonies, says Matthew Skic. Skic is from the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "The colonists were upset the decision [on taxes] was coming from Great Britain and not the American assemblies," he says.



Commander of the Continental Army George Washington nearly got the boot.

2 George Washington almost lost his job.

George Washington was commander of the Continental Army and future first U.S. president. Who would dare second-guess him? Plenty of people, actually. In the fall of 1777, after a few **Patriot** defeats, some congressmen questioned whether Washington was the right leader. They debated replacing him with General Horatio Gates. Gates had won an important battle in Saratoga, New York (*see map, p. 21*).

But people loyal to Washington defended him, including the Marquis de Lafayette (*see number 4*). Washington found out what was going on. He confronted his chief rivals, Gates and General Thomas Conway. They backed down.

Washington succeeded in part because his devotion to his troops inspired the same in them. For instance, in March 1783, some officers grew frustrated and discussed **mutiny**. Washington spoke with them directly. This persuaded them to squash their plans.

WHO KNEW?
In a letter to Gates, Conway referred to Washington as "weak." Ouch!

3 African-Americans battled for the nation's freedom—and their own.

Historians estimate that 500,000 African-Americans were enslaved in the Colonies at the time of the war. Slaves faced a hard decision. Should they choose a side and take up arms, hoping to gain personal liberty? In 1775, the British promised freedom to Patriot-owned slaves who escaped and joined **Loyalist** forces. Thousands of slaves risked their lives to try.

The Americans were less willing to recruit and arm blacks. However, more than 5,000 free and enslaved African-Americans eventually served in the Continental Army. Black soldiers "played a role in almost every significant battle," says Kenneth Davis. He is the author of the Don't Know Much About History series.

After the war, the British moved about 3,000 of the former slaves who had fought with them to Canada, giving them their freedom. But many other slaves were returned to their owners. "Most of the slaves who served in the Continental Army didn't get their freedom," says Don Hagist of the *Journal of the American Revolution*. →

KEY EVENTS The American Revolution

1764-1773

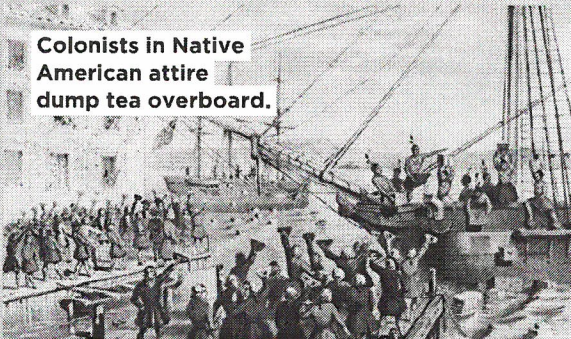
Taxation and Protest

To raise money to pay off old war debt, Britain's Parliament taxes the colonists on such items as sugar, glass, and paper. Many colonists protest the taxes by refusing to buy British goods.

December 16, 1773

Boston Tea Party

In their first major act of defiance, Patriots protest a British tax on tea by dumping 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor. Britain later punishes the colonists with laws known as the Intolerable Acts.



Colonists in Native American attire dump tea overboard.

April 19, 1775

The War Begins

The first shots of the Revolutionary War are fired at the battles of Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts.

July 4, 1776

Independence Declared

The Continental Congress officially adopts the Declaration of Independence.

October 19, 1781

British Surrender

British General Charles Cornwallis surrenders to George Washington in Yorktown, Virginia.

September 3, 1783

Peace Treaty

The U.S. and Britain sign the Treaty of Paris, which recognizes the United States as an independent nation.

4 A French teen became America's biggest fan.

In 1777, a 19-year-old French aristocrat known as the Marquis de Lafayette arrived in America. He was itching to join the colonists' fight. Lafayette had no combat experience. But he did have a grudge against England. His father had been killed battling British troops in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

Lafayette offered to join the Continental Army at his own expense. With nothing to lose, Congress named the teen a general. It was hoping to take advantage of his connections in France.

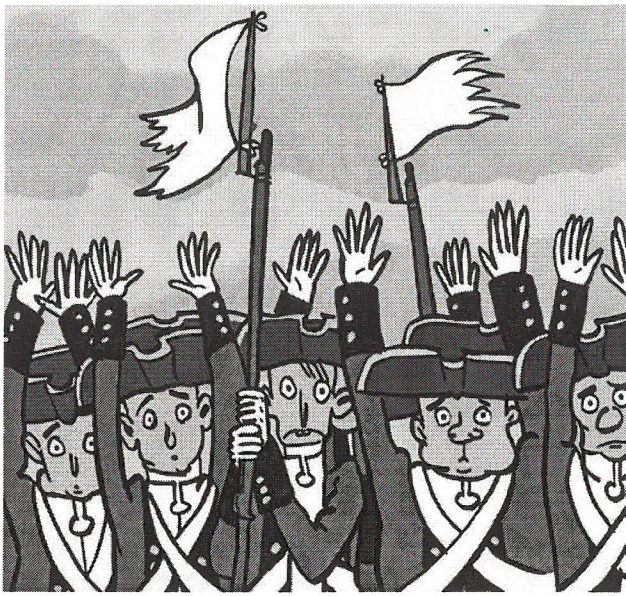
"He was basically an unpaid intern," writes Sarah Vowell in her book *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States*. The French rookie's excitement endeared him to George Washington. The two became close friends.

Between battles, Lafayette wrote letters to French officials. He relentlessly pushed them to support the Patriots' cause. Thanks in part to his efforts, France formally backed the Americans in 1778. Its military and financial help proved crucial.

Lafayette came in handy during the fighting as well. His troops helped contain the British during the Yorktown, Virginia, campaign. Indeed, writes Vowell, the Frenchman "turned out to be the best friend America ever had."

WHO KNEW? Lafayette named his only son Georges Washington Lafayette, as "a tribute of respect and love for my dear friend."





5 The Americans won—but not necessarily on the battlefield.

“When you look at it battle by battle, the Americans lost far more than they won,” says Hagist. After all, the inexperienced colonists were up against a professional army. Why, then, did Great Britain surrender? The British “didn’t have a good strategy for how to put down a popular rebellion,” says Hagist. Even though the Americans were outmatched repeatedly, they persisted. They also had aid from France and other allies. The war dragged on and on. This eventually stretched Britain’s resources to the limit.

6 The fighting didn’t actually end at Yorktown.

It is popular belief that the war ended when British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered on October 19, 1781, in Yorktown, Virginia. But that is only partly true. The British did admit defeat, but by that point Spain and the Netherlands had joined the war against them. It took nearly two years for all parties to hammer out peace **treaties**. In the meantime, “an awful lot of fighting continued to occur,” says Hagist.

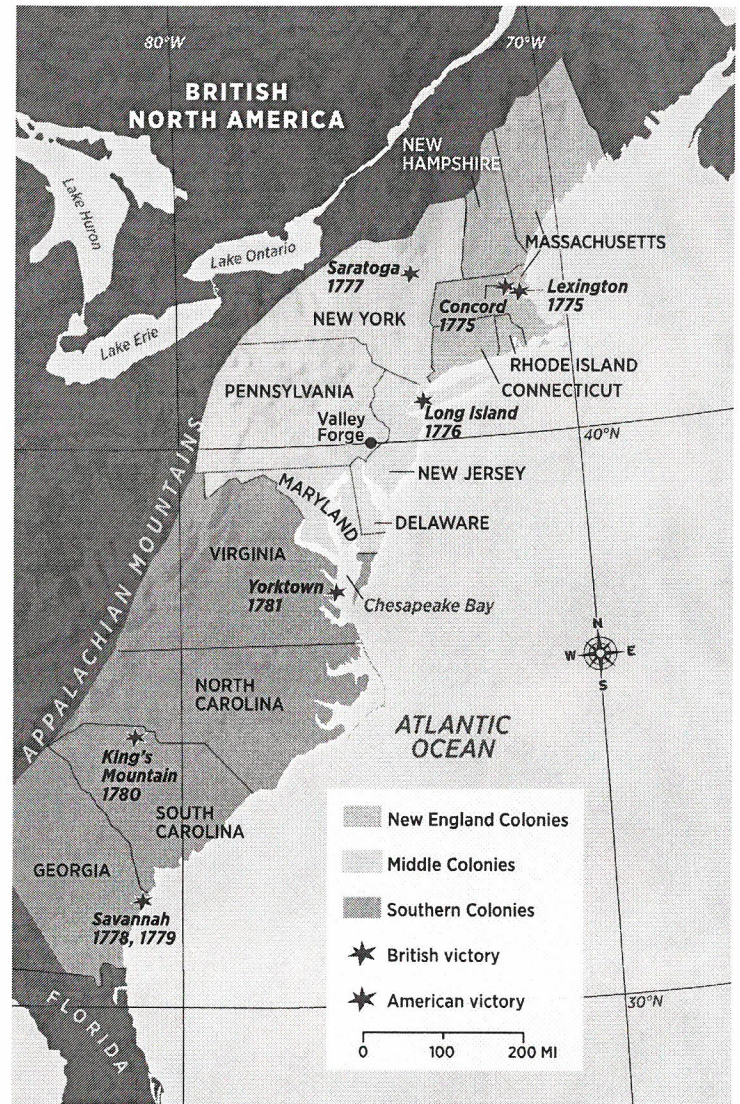
An early version of the peace deal (called the Treaty of Paris) was signed in France in November 1782. Getting this news to troops fighting far away took months. As a result, the *real* last battle of the war happened on June 29, 1783. It took place off the coast of India in the Bay of Bengal. There, French and British fleets were attacking each other. A British ship flying a white flag arrived to tell them the war had been over for a while. ♦

WHO KNEW?
 Revolutionary War battles took place not only in North America and Europe but also in Africa and Asia.

CORE QUESTION What were some key factors that led to the U.S. victory?

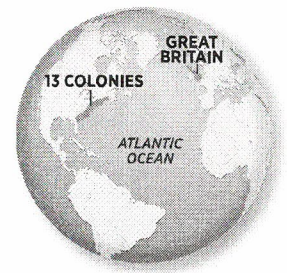
Revolutionary America

This map of the 13 American Colonies shows some key battles of the Revolutionary War (1775-1783).



Map Skills

1. In which colony were the two earliest labeled battles fought?
2. Which colonies made up the Middle Colonies?
3. Which labeled battles were fought in the Southern Colonies? Which side won each?
4. On what body of water does Yorktown, Virginia, have coastline?
5. What is the approximate latitude and longitude of Valley Forge, Pennsylvania?



Test Prep

Know the News: The American Revolution:

6 Things You
Should Know
(But probably don't)

Read the article on pp. 18-21, then answer these questions.

- 1. Which is a central idea of the article?**
 - Ⓐ The Revolutionary War began in 1775.
 - Ⓑ Historians are still uncovering new details about the war.
 - Ⓒ Despite the American Revolution being an important historical event, there are still misconceptions and little-known details about it.
 - Ⓓ The colonists could not have won the war without France's help.
- 2. Which statement best supports that central idea?**
 - Ⓐ "The story of our nation's founding isn't as straightforward as it's sometimes portrayed."
 - Ⓑ "More than 5,000 African-Americans . . . served in the Continental Army. "
 - Ⓒ "Some congressmen questioned whether [George] Washington was the right leader."
 - Ⓓ "France formally backed the Americans in 1778."
- 3. Which conclusion can you draw from the article's first section, "The beef wasn't just about taxes"?**
 - Ⓐ The colonists wanted to hold a local election to replace King George III.
 - Ⓑ The colonists wanted their local governments to make the laws for all of Great Britain.
 - Ⓒ The colonists did not want their local governments to have to pay taxes at all.
 - Ⓓ The colonists believed their local governments, not Great Britain, should tax them.
- 4. In which year did the Boston Tea Party take place?**

Ⓐ 1752 Ⓑ 1773 Ⓒ 1781 Ⓓ 1805
- 5. Which best explains why the author refers to the Marquis de Lafayette as "America's biggest fan"?**
 - Ⓐ He volunteered to join the Continental Army at his own expense.
 - Ⓑ He became a general despite lacking combat experience.
 - Ⓒ He named his son after Washington.
 - Ⓓ He helped contain the British during the Yorktown, Virginia, campaign.
- 6. Which of these statements is a fact?**
 - Ⓐ Washington should have been replaced as commander of the Continental Army.
 - Ⓑ The colonists lost more battles than they won during the Revolutionary War.
 - Ⓒ The colonists were right to be upset about laws being passed without their say.
 - Ⓓ The colonists would not have won the war without Lafayette's help.
- 7. What does *persisted* mean in this sentence? "Even though the Americans were outmatched repeatedly, they persisted."**
 - Ⓐ surrendered
 - Ⓑ weakened
 - Ⓒ conquered
 - Ⓓ kept going
- 8. Why did fighting continue after British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered?**
 - Ⓐ The British were winning more battles than the colonists.
 - Ⓑ It took nearly two years for all the countries involved to sign peace treaties.
 - Ⓒ Some of Washington's officers wanted to quit.
 - Ⓓ Lafayette wanted to keep fighting.
- 9. How does the map contribute to the article?**
 - Ⓐ It underscores the fact that Revolutionary War battles took place on multiple continents.
 - Ⓑ It reinforces the importance of African-Americans' contributions during the war.
 - Ⓒ It highlights some key British and American victories during the war.
 - Ⓓ It illustrates Washington's strategy.
- 10. Why might the editors have chosen humorous images to accompany the article?**
 - Ⓐ to prove that the Revolutionary War was funny
 - Ⓑ to grab readers' attention and engage them in the story
 - Ⓒ to illustrate a lesser-known side of Lafayette
 - Ⓓ to show images readers would recognize from history books

Building Vocabulary

KEY STANDARD

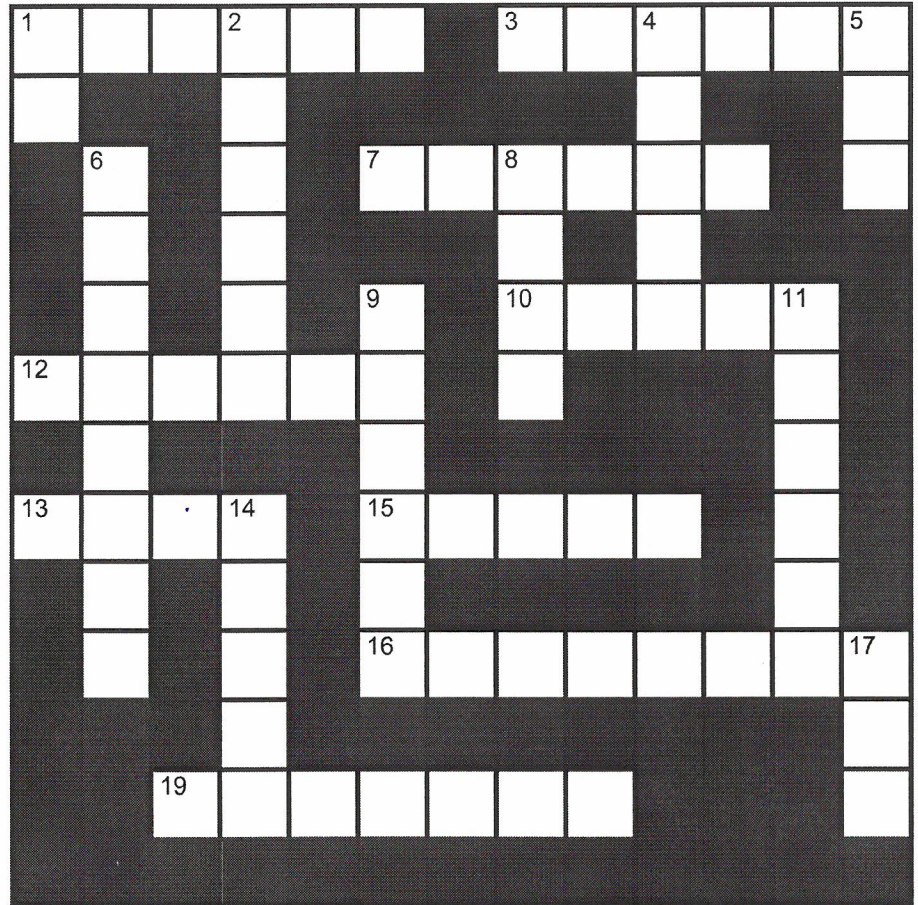
RI.6-8.7

Crossword Puzzle

Here are a few clues for you to puzzle over. Answers to starred clues are in the article on pp. 18-21 of *JS*. For the rest, you're on your own!

Across

- *1 George Washington talked frustrated officers out of staging a _____.
- *3 The _____ Tea Party
- *7 Britain's monarch: _____ III
- *10 The Treaty of _____ ended the Revolutionary War.
- *12 Lafayette's home country and America's most important European ally during the war
- 13 A writer of verses
- *15 Washington's chief rival: Horatio _____
- *16 An American colonist who remained faithful to Britain's king
- *19 The first shots of the war were fired at Lexington and _____.



Down

- 1 _____, myself, and I
- *2 Lafayette "was basically an unpaid _____."
- *4 The _____ Act was imposed on the colonies by Parliament in 1764.
- *5 Site of the Battle of Saratoga: _____ York
- *6 American colonists who supported independence from Britain
- 8 What you might say when you make a mistake
- *9 The real last battle of the Revolution was fought at the Bay of _____.
- *11 The British promised freedom to _____ who would fight on their side.
- 14 Capital of Japan
- *17 The colonists believed their own government, not Parliament, should _____ them.

6 Things You should probably know (but don't)