

*The*  
**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

**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY



# How “Radical” Was the American Revolution?

by Jonathan Burack

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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 Therefore, a scaffolding is provided here to help students master historical content in a way that will be manageable and useful to them.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.



## ★ 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.



## ★ *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.



## ★ *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.**



## 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



## Part 1: The Revolution—Providing the Context

**Note to the teacher:** The next pages provide materials meant to help students better understand the American Revolution and consider how radical it was. The materials also seek to teach students the Five Habits of Historical Thinking.

This section includes the following:

- **PowerPoint presentation: *The Five Habits of Historical Thinking***

This presentation illustrates five habits of thought or modes of analysis that guide historians as they construct their secondary accounts of a topic. These Five Habits are not about skills used in analyzing primary sources. (Those are dealt with more explicitly in a handout in the next section.) These Five Habits are meant to help students see history as a way of thinking, not as the memorizing of disparate facts and pre-digested conclusions. The PowerPoint uses several historical episodes as examples to illustrate the Five Habits. In two places, it pauses to ask students to do a simple activity applying one of the habits to some of their own life experiences.

If you have used this PowerPoint with other *Historian's Apprentice* units, you may not need to use it again here.

- **Handout: “The Five Habits of Historical Thinking”**

This handout supplements the PowerPoint presentation. It is meant as a reference for students to use as needed. If you have used other *Historian's Apprentice* units, your students may only need to review this handout quickly.

- **Warm-Up Activity**

A simple exercise designed to help you see what students know about the American Revolution, what confuses them, or what ideas they may have absorbed about it from popular culture, friends and family, etc. The goal is to alert them to their need to gain a clearer idea of the past and be critical of what they think they already know.

- **Introductory essay: “How ‘Radical’ Was the American Revolution?”**

The essay provides enough basic background information on the topic to enable students to assess primary sources and conflicting secondary source interpretations. At the end of the essay, students get some points to keep in mind about the nature of the sources they will examine and the conflicting secondary source interpretations they will debate.

- **PowerPoint presentation: *How “Radical” Was the American Revolution?***

This PowerPoint presentation reviews the topic for the lesson and shows how the Five Habits of Historical Thinking can be applied to a clearer understanding of it. At two points, the presentation calls for a pause and prompts students to discuss some aspects of their prior knowledge of the topic. The proposed sequences suggest using this PowerPoint presentation *after* assigning the introductory essay, but you may prefer to reverse this order.



# 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?



## ***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 served 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



depended on the support of their masters. From the point of view of republican ideas, such people could not be disinterested leaders. However, they did still have rights and new roles to play in political life.

At the bottom, a mass of black slaves had virtually no rights at all. Some of the Revolution's leaders hated slavery and saw how deeply it clashed with the Revolution's republican values. Others did not. That any of these leaders owned slaves may seem completely at odds with their talk of equality, liberty, and rights. Yet in a society in which so many were dependent on others, slavery may well have seemed merely the strictest of many kinds of subordination.

Aside from slaves, what about the others—small farmers, artisans, women? Did the Revolution bring radical change for them, or did it simply preserve a

way of life such people already knew? Some of them longed for change; others simply wanted to protect what they had.

Historians differ on this as well. Some point out that in town meetings, in colonial assemblies, in local churches, in the widespread ownership of land, colonial society was already more open and equal than in Europe. The Revolution, they say, merely preserved what already existed. Other historians say the Revolution did bring radical change. It undermined older notions of authority and began trends that would transform the nation over time, if not in the present. That is, it goaded Americans to see things anew and in fact “turn the world upside down” in their thinking and their actions.

## Points to Keep in Mind

### Historians' Questions

Historians have interpreted the American Revolution in many ways. At first, it was depicted as a great and heroic struggle for freedom, a monumental break with the past. This heroic view gave way in this century to more scholarly views. One group of historians began to view the Revolution as more conservative than radical. They said the colonists had always enjoyed a great deal of liberty and self-government in their town meetings, assemblies, and churches. Differences between rich and poor were not great, compared with Great Britain. No true aristocracy based on birth existed. In the view of these historians, those fighting the Revolution merely sought to preserve a way of life they already knew well.

Other historians have disagreed, and some have returned in a different way to a view of the Revolution as radical. That is, they say it did more than result in a political change but also altered social and economic realities in major ways. It did this by ending any notion of a society based on hereditary privilege or rule by a superior elite. Some historians also claim the Revolution awakened artisans, women, even slaves to their own rights and gave them the ideas and ideals they needed to struggle for those rights.

### The Primary Source Evidence

For this lesson, you will study ten primary source documents on the American Revolution. These will illustrate the different views of several groups in the Revolution and those of some of its key leaders. Together, these sources will give you evidence to use decide how radical the Revolution was. They will also enable you to make some informed judgments of your own about what two historians say about this same question.

### Secondary Source Interpretations

After studying and discussing the primary sources, you will read two short passages from two books about the American Revolution. The two historians who wrote these passages agree about most of the facts, but they make quite different overall judgments about how radical the American Revolution was. You will use your own background knowledge and your ideas about the primary sources as you think about and answer some questions about the views of these two historians.



## Five Habits of Historical Thinking

History is not just a chronicle of one fact after another. It is a meaningful story, or an account of what happened and why. It is written to address questions or problems historians pose. This checklist describes key habits of thinking that historians adopt as they interpret primary sources and create their own accounts of the past.

### *History Is Not the Past Itself*

When we learn history, we learn a story about the past, not the past itself. No matter how certain an account of the past seems, it is only one account, not the entire story. The “entire story” is gone. That is, the past itself no longer exists. Only some records of events remain, and they are never complete. Hence, it is important to see all judgments and conclusions about the past as tentative or uncertain. Avoid looking for hard-and-fast “lessons” from the past. The value of history is in a way the opposite of such a search for quick answers. That is, its value is in teaching us to live with uncertainty and see even our present as complex, unfinished, open-ended.

### *The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation*

Historians can’t observe the past directly. They must use evidence, just as a detective tries to reconstruct a crime based on clues left behind. In the historian’s case, primary sources are the evidence—letters, official documents, maps, photos, newspaper articles, artifacts, and all other traces from past times. Like a detective, a historian defines a very specific problem to solve, one for which evidence does exist. Asking clear, meaningful questions is a key to writing good history. Evidence is always incomplete. It’s not always easy to separate fact from opinion in it, or to tell what is important from what is not. Historians try to do this, but they must stay cautious about their conclusions and open to other interpretations of the same evidence.

### *Time, Change, and Continuity*

History is about the flow of events over time, yet it is not just one fact after another. It seeks to understand this flow of events as a pattern. In that pattern, some things change while others hold steady over time. You need to see history as a dynamic interplay of both change and continuity together. Only by doing this can you see how the past has evolved into the present—and why the present carries with it many traces or links to the past.

### *Cause and Effect*

Along with seeing patterns of change and continuity over time, historians seek to explain that change. In doing this, they know that no single factor causes change. Many factors interact. Unique, remarkable and creative individual actions and plans are one factor, but individual plans have unintended outcomes, and these shape events in unexpected ways. Moreover, individuals do not always act rationally or with full knowledge of what they are doing. Finally, geography, technology, economics, cultural traditions, and ideas all affect what groups and individuals do.

### *As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View*

Above all, thinking like a historian means trying hard to see how people in the past thought and felt. This is not easy. As one historian put it, the past is “another country” in which people felt and thought differently, often very differently from the way we do now. Avoiding “present-mindedness” is therefore a key task for historians. Also, since the past includes various groups in conflict, historians must learn to empathize with many diverse cultures and subgroups to see how they differ and what they share in common.



## 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.



## 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.



# The Primary Sources for the Lesson

## Document 1

**Information on the source:** William Henry Drayton was a wealthy South Carolina planter who at first supported the British as the crisis in the colonies grew. In a series of letters to the *South Carolina Gazette* in 1769, he opposed a committee urging the non-importation of British goods in protest against the Townshend Acts of 1767. On that committee were not only wealthy planters and merchants, but also “mechanics,” or artisans. Drayton was offended by the presence of mechanics, as is clear in this passage from his September 16, 1769, letter to the *Gazette*. (Drayton later turned patriot himself and backed the Revolution after the “Intolerable Acts” closed Boston in 1774.)

*A man who can “boast of having received a liberal education” and men who have read a little . . . I think such men should make proper use of such advantages, and not have consulted de arduis reipublicae [about difficulties of governing], with men who never were in a way to study, or to advise upon any points, but rules about how to cut up a beast in the market to the best advantage, to cobble an old shoe in the neatest manner, or to build a necessary house. Nature never intended that such men should be profound politicians, or able statesmen; and*

*unless a man makes proper use of his reading, he is but upon a level with those who never did read. From which reasoning I conclude, that in point of knowledge, all the members of the committee are upon a level with each other. —A learned body of statesmen truly! —Will a man in his right senses, be directed by an illiterate person in the prosecution of a law-suit? Or, when a ship is in a storm, and near the rocks, who, but a fool, would put the helm in the hand of a landsman?*

## Document 2

**Information on the source:** The mechanics Drayton addressed in his September 16 letter to the *South Carolina Gazette* (Document 1) did not much like his tone. In a letter of their own dated October 3, 1769, they expressed their feelings. This passage is from that letter.

*Mr. Drayton may be assured, that so far from being ashamed of our trades, we are in the highest degree thankful to our friends, who put us in the way of being instructed in them; and that we bless God for giving us the strength and judgment to pursue them, in order to maintain our families, with a decency suitable to their stations in life. Every man is not so lucky as to have a fortune ready provided to his hand, either by his own or his wife’s parents, as has been his [Drayton’s] lot; nor ought it to be so with all men; and Providence accordingly hath wisely ordained otherwise, by appointing the greatest part of mankind, to provide for their support by manual labor; and we will be bold to say, that such are the most useful people in a community . . .*

*Mr. Drayton has thought fit to take some freedoms with us; and therefore we shall take the liberty to*

*ask him, whether he really can claim any merit from possessing an estate not obtained, or obtainable, by his own industry? And we further enquire of him, whether, if he had his bread to get by the labor of either his head or hands, he is qualified for any one sort of business that requires knowledge or skill to conduct it? He might probably earn a scanty pittance, was he to hire himself as a pack-horseman in the Indian trade, serving some Mechanic as a laborer, or, if he behaved well, he might drive a cart or dray about the streets of Charles Town; but surely he could neither pretend to build a house to shelter himself from the weather, not sole his own shoes as they ought to be done; though we will not deny, but that he might contrive to help himself to a slice of a dead ox, when sharp set.*



### 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."*



## Document 6

**Information on the source:** Esther Reed was wife of the governor of Pennsylvania during the Revolution. After the fall of Charleston, South Carolina, to the British in 1780, she set out to urge women to become involved in aiding the war effort. On June 10, 1780, she published a pamphlet titled "The Sentiments of an American Woman." This is a part of that pamphlet:

*On the commencement of actual war, the Women of America manifested a firm resolution to contribute as much as could depend on them, to the deliverance of their country. Animated by the purest patriotism, they are sensible of sorrow at this day, in not offering more than barren wishes for the success of so glorious a Revolution. They aspire to render themselves more really useful; and this sentiment is universal from the north to the south of the Thirteen United States. Our ambition is kindled by the fame of those heroines of antiquity who have rendered their sex illustrious, and have proved to the universe, that, if the weakness of our Constitution, if opinion and manners did not forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as Men, we should at least equal, and sometimes surpass them in our love for the public good. I glory in all that which my sex has done great and commendable, I call to mind with enthusiasm and admiration, all those acts of courage, of constancy and patriotism, which history has transmitted to us: [Descriptions of several women from the Bible, Roman history, etc. follow] . . . So many famous*

*sieges where the Women have been seen forgetting the weakness of their sex, building new walls, digging trenches with their feeble hands, furnishing arms to their defenders, they themselves darting the missile weapons on the enemy, resigning the ornaments of their apparel, and their fortune, to fill the public treasury, and to hasten the deliverance of their country, burying themselves under it ruins, throwing themselves into the flames rather than submit to the disgrace of humiliation before a proud enemy . . .*

*But I must limit myself to the recollection of this small number of achievements. Who knows if persons disposed to censure, and sometimes too severely with regard to us, may not disapprove our appearing acquainted even with the actions of which our sex boasts? We are at least certain, that he cannot be a good citizen who will not applaud our efforts for the relief of the armies which defend our lives, our possessions our liberty?*

## Document 7

**Information on the source:**

A portion of *The Boston Gazette, and Country Journal*, March 12, 1770. It shows four coffins bearing a skull and crossbones and the initials of four of the five men killed in the "Boston Massacre" on March 5, 1770. The killings resulted from British soldiers opening fire after being taunted by an angry mob. The four men were ropemaker Samuel Gray, young apprentice Samuel Maverick, mariner James Caldwell, and African American sailor Crispus Attucks. Irish immigrant Patrick Carr died a few days after this account appeared.





## Document 8

**Information on the source:** Prince Hall was an African American leather worker who might have been a freed slave or might have been free-born. By the time of the Revolution, he was a property owner and voter in Boston and a Freemason. On January 13, 1777, he petitioned the state of Massachusetts on behalf of all slaves.

*To the Honorable Counsel and House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts Bay in General Court assembled, January 13, 1777: The petition of a great number of Negroes detained in a state of slavery in the bowels of a free and Christian country humbly show that your petitioners apprehend that they have in common with all other men, a natural and unalienable right to that freedom, which the great parent of the*

*universe hath bestowed equally on all mankind . . .*

*They cannot but express their astonishment, that it hath never been considered, that every principle from which America has acted in the course of their unhappy difficulties with Great [Britain], pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your petitioners.*

## Document 9

**Information on the source:** Architect and engineer Benjamin Latrobe wrote a letter in 1806 to Italian reformer Phillip Mazzei, complaining of the loss of authority by “gentlemen” in the new American democracy. Here is part of that letter.

*The want of learning and science in the majority is one of those things which strikes foreigners who visit us very forceably . . . For instance from Philadelphia and its environs we send to congress not one man of letters. One of them is indeed a lawyer but of no eminence, another a good Mathematician, but when elected he was a clerk in a bank. The others are plain farmers. From the next county is sent a Blacksmith, and from just over the river a Butcher. Our state legislature does not contain one individual of superior talents. The fact is, that superior talents actually excite distrust . . . Of this state of society, the solid and general advantages are undeniable, but to a cultivated mind, to a man of letters, to a lover of the arts, it presents a very unpleasant picture. The importance attached to wealth, and the freedom which opens every legal avenue to everyone individually has two effects, which are unfavorable to morals. It weakens the ties that bind individuals to each other, by making all citizens rivals in pursuit of riches, and it renders the means by which they are attained more indifferent.*

## Document 10

**Information on the source:** In 1842, an historian named Mellen Chamberlain interviewed Revolutionary War veteran Levi Preston, who was 91 years old. Chamberlain asked Preston why the colonists decided to fight for independence. The book *Liberty and Freedom* by David Hackett Fischer contains information on sources with two very slightly different versions of this interview.

**Chamberlain:** *Captain Preston, what made you go to the Concord fight?*

**Preston:** *What did I go for?*

**Chamberlain:** *Were you oppressed by the Stamp Act?*

**Preston:** *I never saw any stamps, and I always understood that none were ever sold.*

**Chamberlain:** *Well, what about the tea tax?*

**Preston:** *Tea tax? I never drank a drop of the stuff. The boys threw it all overboard.*

**Chamberlain:** *But I suppose you had been reading Harrington, Sidney, and Locke about the eternal principles of liberty?*

**Preston:** *I never heard of these men. The only books we had were the Bible, the Catechism, Watt's Psalms, and hymns and the almanacs.*

**Chamberlain:** *Well, then, what was the matter?*

**Preston:** *Young man, what we meant in going for those Redcoats was this: we always had been free, and we meant to be free always. They didn't mean we should.*



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 1

Planter William Henry Drayton's September 16, 1769, letter, in which he opposed a committee urging the non-importation of British goods to protest the Townshend Acts of 1767. Drayton was offended by the presence of mechanics on the committee.

### Sourcing

How does knowing something of Drayton's background help explain his attitudes in this passage?

### Contextualizing

From what you know of life in the Southern colonies in the 1700s, explain why a planter like Drayton might say, "Nature never intended" that people such as mechanics should try to be political leaders.

### Interpreting Meanings

At the end of the passage, Drayton talks about prosecution of a lawsuit and a ship at sea. What do these comments suggest about how he viewed political leadership?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 2

The mechanics Drayton addressed in his September 16, 1769, letter to the *South Carolina Gazette* (Document 1) did not much like his tone. In a letter of their own dated October 3, 1769, they expressed their feelings. This passage is from that letter.

### Sourcing

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How does knowing the status of these letter writers help explain their attitudes toward labor?

### Interpreting Meanings

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This letter uses ridicule in certain places to make its point more forcefully. What are some examples of this?

### Point of View

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How do the letter-writers differ from Drayton in their views about who can take part in political activity? How do you think they differ from him on the role of education and literacy in preparing citizens for a role in public life?

### Corroborating Sources

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What other sources for this lesson show that attitudes toward political participation by ordinary citizens might have been changing during the Revolutionary era?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 3

This 1853 painting shows George Washington standing among his slaves and other field workers harvesting grain. Washington's Mount Vernon mansion is in the background.

### Sourcing

This painting was done in 1853. How does that affect the reliability of its view of Washington and his plantation?

### Contextualization

What do you know about the social and political power of the Virginia Tidewater aristocracy? These planters controlled Virginia politics and produced some of the Revolution's most important leaders. Aside from wealth and slaves, what else might explain the power and prestige of this group?

### Interpreting Meanings

This painting seeks to depict Washington as a powerful leader and great landowner, but one also at ease with his hired hands and slaves. What specific features help the painting achieve this view of him?

### Point of View

Is this view of Washington meant to show him in a favorable way? Why or why not?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 4

A 1795 illustration showing an angry confrontation taking place during a colonial-era town meeting in a church.

### Contextualizing

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Explain why many colonial Americans were used to gathering in places like this to debate and make decisions for their communities or for each entire colony.

### Interpreting Meanings

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What impression of a town meeting does this image convey? What features in it help it to convey this impression?

### Point of View

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Do you think the artist admired the town meeting as a political institution? Why or why not?

### Corroborating Sources

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What other sources for this lesson back up this view of the colonists and their political attitudes and behavior?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 5

A passage from Alexander Hamilton's tract "The Farmer Refuted," dated February 23, 1775, a response to an earlier Loyalist attack on his views in the New York press.

### Sourcing

Alexander Hamilton was already a supporter of the revolutionary cause by 1775. He would also play a major role in framing the U.S. Constitution. How do these facts add to the significance of this passage as a primary source document?

### Contextualizing

Given the situation in 1775 in both New York and America, why might Hamilton find it useful to quote from one of the most respected British commentators on English common law?

### Interpreting Meanings

Hamilton thinks only people with a certain amount of property—either land (a 40-shilling freehold) or some equivalent of it—should have a right to vote. Sum up his reasons for this belief.

### Point of View

Do you think Hamilton in this passage looks down on poor people? Why or why not?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 6

Part of Esther Reed's June 10, 1780, pamphlet titled "The Sentiments of an American Woman."

### Sourcing

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How does knowing the author is a woman and the wife of a governor help you better understand the point of view expressed in this passage?

### Contextualizing

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How does knowing what was happening just south of Esther Reed's region in 1780 help explain the tone and language she uses in this passage?

### Interpreting Meanings

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Reed directs her message to the "Women of America." What do you think the significance of that form of address is?

What kinds of roles do you think Reed had in mind for women to play in the revolutionary struggle?

### Point of View

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Why do you think Reed felt a need to explain in detail "all that which my sex has done great and commendable" in past military and political conflicts? Who does she direct this account to, and how confident do you think she is of her own point of view?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 7

A portion of *The Boston Gazette, and Country Journal*, March 12, 1770, showing an illustration of four coffins bearing skull and crossbones and the initials of four of the five men killed in the “Boston Massacre,” on March 5, 1770.

### Sourcing

Considering the source for this report, how reliable and accurate would you expect it to be given the mood in Boston just after this incident?

### Contextualizing

What do you know about the Boston Massacre and, in particular, the nature of the crowd that taunted the soldiers? Do you think the incident proves ordinary Bostonians were seeking radical change, or was this merely a mob outburst against soldiers who were seen as foreign occupiers?

### Point of View

What attitude toward the victims and the soldiers do you think this newspaper page was meant to produce?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 8

Part of Prince Hall's January 13, 1777, petition to the state of Massachusetts to extend the liberty the colonists were fighting for to the slaves.

### Sourcing

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How does the information here help you understand why Prince Hall felt as he did about slavery and how he was able to make his feelings known?

### Contextualizing

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Given what you know about Massachusetts in the late 1700s, explain why a petition of this sort might have appeared there. Why would it have been less likely to have appeared in South Carolina or Virginia?

### Interpreting Meanings

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Hall says his petitioners' case is vastly strengthened by "every principle from which America has acted" in its clash with Great Britain. What does he mean by this?

### Corroborating sources

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Do any of the other sources for this lesson hint in any way at sympathy for the slaves on whose behalf Prince Hall was speaking? Which sources most express views that Hall would have pointed to as strengthening his petitioners' case?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 9

Benjamin Latrobe's 1806 letter to Phillip Mazzei complaining of the loss of authority by "gentlemen" in the new American democracy.

### Sourcing

Latrobe was an architect and engineer who considered himself a "gentleman." How do these facts help you understand his point of view?

### Contextualizing

By 1806, Thomas Jefferson was president and his Democratic-Republicans had replaced Federalists as the most powerful party. How do these facts add to your understanding of Latrobe's letter?

### Interpreting Meanings

What do you think Latrobe means by complaining that someone is a "lawyer but of no eminence"?

What do you think he means when he says the changing times "weaken the ties that bind individuals"?

### Point of View

Latrobe speaks about ordinary men in government—"plain farmers," for example. He also speaks about wealthy men—"the importance attached to wealth." Finally, he speaks of men with "cultivated minds." What did he think had gone wrong in the way these three groups participated in public affairs?



## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 10

Part of an interview that Mellen Chamberlain conducted in 1842 with Revolutionary War veteran Levi Preston, who was then 91 years old.

### Sourcing

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Note the date as well as the subject for this interview. How does this information affect your view of the value and reliability of this account?

### Interpreting Meanings

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What do you think Preston meant by saying “we always had been free”?

Harrington, Sidney, and Locke were political writers who influenced many Revolutionary leaders. What do Preston’s reading habits suggest about the role of these political writers in shaping the American Revolution?

### Point of View

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How radical does Preston seem to think the American Revolution was?



## Part 3: Analyzing the Secondary Sources

**Note to the teacher:** This next section includes passages from two secondary source accounts of the American Revolution, along with two activities on these sources. We suggest you first discuss the brief comment “Analyzing Secondary Sources” just above the first of the two secondary sources. Discuss the four criteria the first activity asks students to use in analyzing each secondary source. These criteria focus students on the nature of historical accounts as 1) problem-centered, 2) based on evidence, 3) influenced by point of view and not purely neutral, and 4) tentative or aware of alternative explanations.

Specifically, this section includes the following:

- **Two secondary source passages**

Give copies of these passages to students to read, either in class or as homework. The two passages are from *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty*, Clinton Rossiter (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Gordon S. Wood (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

- **Two student activities**

Activity 1

Students analyze the two passages, taking notes on the following questions:

- How clearly does the account focus on a problem or question?
- Does it reveal a position or express a point of view?
- How well does it base its case on primary source evidence?
- How aware is it of alternative explanations or points of view?

Activity 2

In pairs, students select two of the primary sources for the lesson that best support each author’s claims in the secondary source passages. Students discuss their choices with the class.



## The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

### Analyzing Secondary Sources

Historians write secondary source accounts of the past after studying primary source documents like the ones you have studied on the American Revolution. However, they normally select documents from among a great many others, and they stress some aspects of the story but not others. In doing this, historians are guided by the questions they ask about the topic. Their selection of sources and their focus are also influenced by their own aims, bias, or point of view. No account of the past is perfectly neutral. In reading a secondary source, you should pay attention to what it includes, what it leaves out, what conclusions it reaches, and how aware it is of alternative interpretations.

\* \* \* \*

### Secondary Source 1

**Information on the source:** The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty*, Clinton Rossiter (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), p. 448. In this passage, Rossiter makes the case for seeing the American Revolution as conservative, not radical. That is, the colonists were merely seeking to defend the open, prosperous and free society they already had. As for changes, they would only make them cautiously and slowly over the decades ahead.

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of this [American Revolution's] political theory was its deep-seated conservatism. However radical the principles of the Revolution may have seemed to the rest of the world, in the minds of the colonists they were thoroughly conservative and respectful of the past. Indeed, for generations to come Americans would be conservatives at home and radicals abroad. The explanation of this paradox lies in a decisive fact of history: By 1765, the colonists had achieved a society more open, an economy more fluid, and a government more constitutional than anything Europeans would know for years to come. Americans had secured and were ready to defend a condition of freedom that other liberty-minded men could only hope for in the distant future or plot for in

the brutal present. The political theory of the American Revolution, in contrast to that of the French Revolution, was not a theory designed to make the world over. The world—at least the American corner of it—had already been made over as thoroughly as any sensible man could imagine. Americans had never known, or had long since begun to abandon feudal tenures, a privilege-ridden economy, centralized and despotic government, religious intolerance, and hereditary stratification. Their goal therefore was simply to consolidate, then expand by cautious stages, the large measure of liberty and prosperity that was part of their established way of life.



## The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

### Secondary Source 2

**Information on the source:** The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Gordon S. Wood (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 4–8. In this passage from his introduction, Wood agrees that the American colonists already had a great deal of freedom even before the Revolution. Nevertheless, he says the Revolution did bring radical change to relationships between people and classes, and to their ideas about democratic governing.

There should no longer be any doubt about it: the white American colonists were not an oppressed people; they had no crushing imperial chains to throw off. In fact, the colonists knew they were freer, more equal, more prosperous, and less burdened with cumbersome feudal and monarchical restraints than any other part of mankind in the eighteenth century. Such a situation, however, does not mean that colonial society was not susceptible to revolution . . .

[This revolution's] changes were radical, and they were extensive. To focus, as we are today apt to do, on what the Revolution did not accomplish—highlighting and lamenting its failure to abolish slavery and change fundamentally the lot of women—is to miss the great significance of what it did accomplish; indeed, the Revolution made possible the anti-slavery and women's rights movements of the nineteenth century and in fact all our current egalitarian thinking. The Revolution not

only radically changed the personal and social relationships of people, including the position of women, but also destroyed aristocracy as it had been understood in the Western world for at least two millennia. The Revolution brought respectability and even dominance to ordinary people long held in contempt and gave dignity to their menial labor in a manner unprecedented in history and to a degree not equaled elsewhere in the world. The Revolution did not just eliminate monarchy and create republics; it actually reconstituted what Americans meant by public or state power and brought about an entirely new kind of democratic officeholder. The Revolution not only changed the culture of Americans—making over their art, architecture and iconography—but even altered their understanding of history, knowledge and truth. Most important, it made the interests and prosperity of ordinary people—their pursuits of happiness—the goal of society and government.



## The Secondary Sources: Activity 1

In this exercise, you read two short passages from much longer books about the American Revolution. For each secondary source, take notes on the following four questions (you may want to underline phrases or sentences in the passages that you think back up your notes):

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question? What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

*Seedtime of the Republic*, Rossiter

*Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Wood

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about how radical the American Revolution was? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

*Seedtime of the Republic*, Rossiter

*Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Wood

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

*Seedtime of the Republic*, Rossiter

*Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Wood

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

*Seedtime of the Republic*, Rossiter

*Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Wood

**In pairs, discuss your notes for this activity.**



## The Secondary Sources: Activity 2

This activity is based on the passages from *Seedtime of the Republic*, by Clinton Rossiter, and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, by Gordon S. Wood. From the primary sources for this lesson, choose two that you think best support each author's point of view about the American Revolution. With the rest of the class, discuss the two secondary source passages and defend the choice of sources you have made.

1. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Rossiter's interpretation of the Revolution. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.
2. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Wood's interpretation of the Revolution. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.
3. Does your textbook include a passage on the issue of how radical the American Revolution was? If so, with which of the two secondary sources (Rossiter or Wood) does it seem to agree most? What one or two primary sources from this lesson would you add to this textbook passage to improve it? Why?

**Discuss your choices with the rest of the class.**



## Part 4: Follow-Up Options

**Note to the teacher:** At this point, students have completed the key tasks of *The Historian's Apprentice* program. They have examined their own prior understandings and acquired background knowledge on the topic. They have analyzed and debated a set of primary sources. They have considered secondary source accounts of the topic. This section includes two suggested follow-up activities. Neither of these is a required part of the lesson. They do not have to be undertaken right away. However, we do strongly recommend that you find some way to do what these options provide for. They give students a way to write or debate in order to express their ideas and arrive at their own interpretations of the topic.

Two suggested follow-up activities are included here:

- **Document-Based Questions**

Four document-based questions are provided. Choose one and follow the guidelines provided for writing a typical DBQ essay.

- **A Structured Debate**

The aim of this debate format is not so much to teach students to win a debate, but to learn to listen and learn, as well as speak up and defend a position. The goal is a more interactive and more civil debating process.



## Document-Based Questions

Document-based questions (DBQs) are essay questions you must answer by using your own background knowledge and a set of primary sources on that topic. Below are four DBQs on the Revolution. Use the sources for this lesson and everything you have learned from it to write a short essay answer to one of these questions.

### Suggested DBQs

**Describe how ideas about political leadership seem to have changed from just before to just after the American Revolution.**

**“Let’s be real. For the slaves, for women, for the poorest Americans, the American Revolution meant no change at all.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).**

**“The Revolution was led by upper-class elites. Yet in leading it, they undercut the basis for their own authority and put common citizens in the driver’s seat.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).**

**Compare and contrast arguments for the radicalism or for the conservatism of the American Revolution. Which of these arguments is best supported by the primary sources for this lesson?**

### Suggested Guidelines for Writing a DBQ Essay

- **Planning and thinking through the essay**

Consider the question carefully. Think about how to answer it so as to address each part of it. Do not ignore any detail in the question. Pay attention to the question’s form (cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, assess the validity, etc.). This form will often give you clues as to how best to organize each part of your essay.

- **Thesis statement and introductory paragraph**

The thesis statement is a clear statement of what you hope to prove in your essay. It must address *all* parts of the DBQ, it must make a claim you can back up with the sources, and it should be specific enough to help you organize the rest of your essay.

- **Using evidence effectively**

Use the notes on your “Source Analysis” activity sheets to organize your thoughts about these primary sources. In citing a source, use it to support key points or illustrate major themes. Do not simply list a source in order to get it into the essay somehow. If any sources do *not* support your thesis, you should still try to use them. Your essay may be more convincing if you qualify your thesis so as to account for these other sources.

- **Linking ideas explicitly**

After your introduction, your internal paragraphs should make your argument in a logical or clear way. Each paragraph should be built around one key supporting idea and details that back up that idea. Use transition phrase such as “before,” “next,” “then,” or “on the one hand . . . but on the other hand,” to help readers follow the thread of your argument.

- **Wrapping it up**

Don’t add new details about sources in your final paragraph. State a conclusion that refers back to your thesis statement by showing how the evidence has backed it up. If possible, look for nice turns of phrase to end on a dramatic note.



## A Structured Debate

**Small-group activity:** Using a version of the Structured Academic Controversy model, debate alternate interpretations of this lesson's topic. The goal of this method is not so much to win a debate as to learn to collaborate in clarifying your interpretations to one another. In doing this, your goal should be to see that it is possible for reasonable people to hold differing views, even when finding the "one right answer" is not possible.

Use all their notes from previous activities in this lesson. Here are the rules for this debate:

1. Organize a team of four or six students. Choose a debate topic based on the lesson *How "Radical" Was the American Revolution?*

(You may wish to use one of the DBQs suggested for the Document-Based Questions activity for this lesson, or you may want to define the debate topic in a different way.)

2. Split your team into two sub-groups. Each sub-group should study the materials for this lesson and rehearse its case. One sub-group then present its case to the other. That other sub-group must repeat the case back to the first sub-group's satisfaction.
3. The two sub-groups then switch roles and repeat step 2
4. Your team either reaches a consensus which it explains to the entire class, or it explains where the key differences between the sub-groups lie



## Answers to “Source Analysis” Activities

### Source Analysis: Document 1

*Sourcing:* His status as wealthy planter could bias him against political participation by those of lower status.

*Contextualizing:* Since almost everywhere educated elites did actually rule, this might seem natural.

*Interpreting meanings:* He sees it as a technical skill only a few can possess after long training, etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 2

*Sourcing:* As “mechanics” or artisans, they place a higher value on manual labor or the skilled practice of a trade, etc.

*Interpreting meanings:* Answers will vary. Several passages could be seen this way, especially in the second paragraph and especially when criticizing Drayton’s high status and wealth as due merely to “luck” in his marriage, etc.

*Point of view:* They proudly insist their practical daily experience is valuable. They do not directly say anything about the role of learning, but by their own literate style, they may be seeking to prove they are as qualified in that area as Drayton is.

*Corroborating Sources:* Perhaps Prince Hall (Document 8), Latrobe’s letter (Document 9), etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 3

*Sourcing:* It should raise the issue of how reliable it is, or whether it offers an idealized view, etc.

*Contextualizing:* Answers will vary. The dependence of many people on the local large planter produced widespread solid political support for them. The painting suggests this aura of loyalty and dependency a man like Washington could command.

*Interpreting meanings:* Washington’s elegant clothing, even in the field; his dignified, commanding manner; the magnificent mansion just above him; yet his ease and comfort among his servants and slaves, who all appear to be working enthusiastically, etc.

*Point of view:* The painting seems meant to offer an idealized view of Washington and his plantation, but reactions here may vary.

### Source Analysis: Document 4

*Contextualizing:* Answers should mention colonial assemblies as well as town meetings as long-standing representative political bodies.

*Interpreting meanings:* It could be seen as wildly out of control. However, no actual violence has occurred. Someone in the pulpit does appear to be in charge, etc.

*Point of view:* Answers will vary, for reasons stated in the previous answer.

*Corroborating sources:* It could be seen as confirming Preston’s memories (Document 10), the mechanics who spoke up against Drayton (Document 2), etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 5

*Sourcing:* His views could represent those of many backers of the Revolution, etc., and this suggests that many of them did not favor full-fledged democracy.

*Contextualizing:* The Revolution was only just beginning. Loyalist sentiment was still very high in New York. Most of Hamilton’s audience still saw themselves as British subjects and looked to England for political ideas, etc.

*Interpreting meanings:* Answers will vary but should focus on the idea that such voters would lack a will of their own or be too easily influenced.

*Point of view:* Answers will vary and should be debated.



### Source Analysis: Document 6

*Sourcing:* It could help explain both her support for a greater role for women and her confidence in speaking out in public.

*Contextualizing:* The military situation was bad for the patriots, the tone expresses a certain anxiety or urgency, etc.

*Interpreting meanings:* She seems already to think of herself as an American, not a citizen of a state. She clearly implies an American audience of women are there to respond to her, etc.

She seems to see them not as soldiers, but as supportive in just about all other ways.

*Point of view:* She may be somewhat defensive, feeling a need to make her case to men, to show them she is educated enough, etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 7

*Sourcing:* Answers will vary, but they should express some caution about fully trusting a Boston newspaper at a time when Boston was strongly united against the British soldiers.

*Contextualizing:* Answers may vary. The incident could be interpreted either way. Discuss the responses.

*Point of view:* Again answers will vary, but they should stress the dramatic and sympathetic use of the images of coffins, etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 8

*Sourcing:* As a free African American, he would likely have had strong feelings against slavery; as a man with some education, he is able to express himself in very formal language, etc.

*Contextualizing:* Unlike the Southern colonies, Massachusetts had few slaves, was close to abolishing slavery, etc.

*Interpreting meanings:* Hall undoubtedly sees America's Declaration of Independence and its many other defenses of liberty and rights against Great Britain as principles that equally condemn slavery.

*Corroborating sources:* Answers will vary, but Hamilton's defense of property as a basis for voting, not ethnicity (Document 5) could be read this way, as could the mechanics' reply to Drayton (Document 2) with their defense of the dignity of manual labor, etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 9

*Sourcing:* It could help explain his discontent that cultivated men are not succeeding in politics.

*Contextualization:* The Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans presented themselves as champions of the common citizen, etc.

*Interpreting meanings:* It suggests that professional status or wealth alone are not enough to entitle someone to political authority.

Interpretations may vary and should be discussed.

*Point of View:* Answers will vary but should focus on all three groups.

### Source Analysis: Document 10

*Sourcing:* The long time lapse could have affected Preston's memory of his exact reactions, especially to specific events.

*Interpreting meanings:* Answers will vary, but could focus on the great amount of self-government long practiced in many colonies.

Preston's reading habits suggest religious views may have influenced people more than political theories.

*Point of view:* Answers will vary and should be discussed. In general, Preston seems to see the Revolution as more a conservative than a radical effort.



## Evaluating Secondary Sources: Activity 1

**These are not definitive answers to the questions. They are suggested points to look for in student responses.**

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question. What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here?

*Rossiter* raises the question of how radical the Revolution was. He concludes fairly forcefully that the colonists saw it as “thoroughly conservative and respectful of the past,” and he agrees with them.

*Wood*, in his first paragraph, qualifies his main point, but then he states it forcefully by claiming that the Revolution’s changes were radical. As with *Rossiter*, his entire passage here is built around the effort to back up his answer to the question of how radical the American Revolution was.

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about the outcome of the American Revolution? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

*Rossiter* describes in very positive language the features of colonial life he sees the colonists fighting to defend in the Revolution—prosperity, liberty, openness, etc. He is also clear about what they had long ago left behind—feudal privilege, despotism, hereditary stratification, etc.

*Wood* shares many of *Rossiter*’s views about what was positive about the American Revolution, but he insists it went far beyond earlier colonial society in giving dignity to ordinary citizens and enormous new hope to many still left out of full citizenship.

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

Neither *Rossiter* nor *Wood* cite specific primary sources. Both of these passages are more or less summaries of views these authors have developed or will develop in more detail in their books.

Both authors do ground their general comments in these passages on summaries of trends and events that could be confirmed or checked against source material.

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

*Rossiter* does not refer directly to alternative views that depict a more radical Revolution than he sees. However, his emphasis on how “remarkable” the conservatism of the Revolution was suggests he knows and is responding to different views that others hold.

*Wood*, in his first paragraph, directly qualifies his own view by acknowledging how much liberty whites, at least, already had in colonial society before the Revolution. In doing this, he can then go on to make his own claims about its radicalism in relation to alternate views others have expressed.



