

## Missing Pieces of the Puzzle: African Americans in Revolutionary Times

“Tell them that if I am Black I am free born American & a revolutionary soldier  
& therefore ought not to be thrown entirely out of the scale of notice.”

-John Chavis to Willie P. Mangum, March 10, 1832

### Overview

In a puzzle, each piece counts. Yet often when studying the Revolutionary War, we forget to acknowledge the important roles Africans and African Americans played, whether in fighting for either side of the war, or fighting for their own rights to freedom. Without including their pieces of the puzzle, the history we learn is incomplete. In this lesson, students will learn how Blacks were contributing to colonial society, making active choices to survive their bondage and striving to shape and control their own lives amidst the Patriots’ struggle for political freedom. By participating in an in depth class discussion centering around a Power Point presentation, students will explore the roles of Blacks during the Revolutionary War, gaining an understanding of the contradiction of a nation seeking independence while simultaneously denying freedom to those enslaved. Students will share their new understanding by creating an artistic bulletin board-sized puzzle (“Every Piece Counts”) focused on the roles African Americans played during the Revolutionary War.

### Grades

5, 8, 11

### Materials

- African Americans in Revolutionary Times Power Point; available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format) at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/05/AfricanAmericansRevWarPPT1.pdf>
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
  - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu)
- African Americans in Revolutionary Times Power Point Notes Sheets, attached
- Missing Pieces of the Revolutionary War Puzzle, assignment attached
- A bulletin board that says "Each Piece Counts" with enough large pre-cut puzzle pieces for each student or pair pinned onto it
- Template of puzzle pieces, attached (these pieces serve as an example of puzzle shapes; ideally, teachers will enlarge each shape on a half or whole piece of chart paper or poster board to create a final bulletin board sized puzzle)
- Optional teacher resources (all quotes throughout the lesson come from these two sources):
  - “The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina” by Jeffrey J. Crow
  - “A History of African Americans in North Carolina,” by Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, & Flora Hatley (Chapter 3: The Revolution and Its Aftermath)

### Essential Questions:

- What role did Africans and African Americans play during the Revolutionary War?
- What were the various choices those enslaved made to achieve their freedom during the Revolutionary period?
- What were the pros and cons of Blacks choosing to runaway, rebel, or join either side of the War?
- What was the climate of race relations like after the Revolutionary War?
- In what ways did blacks continue to struggle for their freedom in post-Revolutionary years?

## Duration

- 60+ minutes
- Time will vary based on which PPT slides are used, how much class discussion ensues, and whether class time is provided for completion of “Missing Pieces of the Revolutionary War Puzzle” activity.

## Student Preparation

Students should have a basic knowledge of the events causing and occurring during the Revolutionary War.

## Procedure

### Slavery During Revolutionary Times

1. Write the words “Revolutionary War” on the board. As a warm up, ask students to brainstorm what first comes to mind when considering these words, explaining that there is no “right or wrong” response. Note student responses underneath the words. Answers may range from “bullets” and “guns” to “Thomas Jefferson” and “George Washington.” Once students are finished, review their list. If important topics such as the contribution of free Blacks and enslaved people to the war, the names of black soldiers, as well as black resistance to slavery during the Revolutionary period, are missing from the list discuss with students why they think they omitted this information. Explain to students that this lesson will focus on learning about the sometimes unacknowledged role of Blacks during the Revolutionary period. Further discuss:
  - What role do you think Africans and African Americans may have played during the Revolutionary War?
  - What choices do you imagine they may have been faced with during this tumultuous period? (note these in a list on chart paper so that it can be returned to later in the lesson)

2. Give students an overview, such as:

“Afro-Americans were active, not passive, beings who in the face of unremitting adversity struggled to maintain their dignity, their African heritage, and even their lives, from the violent and brutalizing aspects of slavery obtained in North Carolina as elsewhere. They were, moreover, rational men and women who from necessity had to weigh the impact of each and every action they made. The slightest misstep in racial etiquette and expected behavior could bring whipping or mutilation. For blacks, then, the fight for liberty associated with the American Revolution took place in a more ambiguous context than for whites. While many Negroes joined the patriot side, many more allied with the British who openly courted a black rebellion in the South and enticed slaves with promises of freedom. The hundreds of black Carolinians who followed the redcoated columns in the southern campaign of 1780-1782 or swam to the British fleet off the Cape Fear in 1776 attest to the magnitude of black longings for freedom. If the fear of servile insurrection preoccupied the minds of white Carolinas, the hope for freedom captivated the hearts of their slaves.”

3. As a resource in building student understanding of Blacks during the Revolution, teachers can refer to the [“African Americans in Revolutionary Times Power Point.”](#) Rather than using the PPT as a lecture, teachers are encouraged to use the information on the slides for the basis of class discussion. Teachers are also encouraged to edit the power point as they see fit, omitting, editing, or adding slides. (As the information is extensive, teachers should determine how to break up or condense the information according to the needs of their particular classroom.)
4. When discussing the PPT, instruct students to write their thoughts on the attached “Blacks in Revolutionary Times Power Point Notes Sheets,” answering the questions posed in the left column. To reinforce each section, students should draw pictures or symbols in the right column that illustrate what they learned.

### **A Parallel Struggle for Freedom**

5. Hand out the attached note sheet and open the "African Americans in Revolutionary Times Power Point" to Slide 2, "A Parallel Struggle for Freedom." As an introduction to this content, discuss:
  - Why did some colonists (Patriots) want to be free from Great Britain's rule?
  - How did colonists envision their desired freedom? Meaning, what would that freedom look like to them? (Teachers are seeking answers such as, they wanted to have a voice in their government, they did not want to be taxed from officials across the ocean, etc.)
  - Given what you know about the revolutionary period and the War for Independence, how do you imagine Blacks (both free Blacks and those enslaved) may have felt during this time or been affected?
  - What did the freedom Blacks envisioned look like? How do you imagine the freedom Blacks envisioned compared or contrasted to the freedom Patriots envisioned?
  - Can anyone define the word "irony," or describe what makes a situation "ironic?" (Accept student answers; guide your students to realize that when something is ironic, there is a contradiction between what is said and what is meant ... it can be simplified to mean "saying one thing and doing another.")
  - Do you find anything ironic regarding the Patriot's fight for freedom during the American Revolution?
6. Go through Slides 3-5 with students, reminding them to write their thoughts and draw their summary images on their note pages and posing questions that illicit class discussion, such as:
  - Why do you think Thomas Jefferson condemned King George for slavery, while he himself was a slave owner?
  - What do you think Jefferson meant by, "...all men are created equal...?"
  - What message is James Otis trying to convey (slide 5)?

### **African American Choices During the War for Independence**

7. Direct student attention to their brainstormed list of choices that Blacks had during the Revolutionary period (completed in Step 1), allowing students to add to the list if anything else has come to mind. Move on to Slide 6 and tell students that they will be learning about some of the actual choices those enslaved made. Tell students that after discussing all of the choices, they will be making a decision on which choice they think would have been the best to make. Thus, throughout the exploration of these choices, they should consider the pros and cons of the options discussed and be prepared to argue which would have been the most effective choice, or which they believe they would have made were they in the same situation during the 1770s.
8. Throughout slides 8-24, remind students to fill in their notes sheets, draw their summary images, and further discuss:
  - The Choice of Rebellion
    - What were the pros and cons of slaves choosing to rebel?
    - Why do you think that slave insurrections weren't more common? Why were most attempts unsuccessful?
    - Why were slave owners so fearful of slave rebellions?
    - How did slave owners try and prevent rebellions?
  - Choosing to Join the Loyalists
    - What were the pros and cons of slaves choosing to join the loyalists?
    - Evaluate the effectiveness of the British promoting slave runaways and rebellions. Do you think this helped their side? Explain.
    - What contributions did Blacks make to the British army?
  - Choosing to Join the Patriots
    - Why did the Continental Army first restrict and later allow Blacks to join them?

- Why did some Blacks choose to side with the Patriots? What were the pros and cons of this decision?
- What contributions did Blacks make to the Patriot army?

9. Upon arriving at slide 25, discuss:

- Are their additional choices slaves had during the Revolutionary period? (see the Carolina K-12's lesson, "Slave Resistance in Colonial Times," available in the Database of Civic Resources.)

10. Tell students to consider all of the choices discussed thus far and to respond in writing on their notes sheet:

- Based on all the choices we have discussed, which choice do you think you would have made were you enslaved during the Revolutionary period and why? What benefits and consequences might this choice have resulted in?

11. Once students have had ample time to write out their thoughts, instruct students to either share and discuss in partners, small groups, or solicit volunteers to read their response to the whole class. Additional information to share with students:

"Many slaves took the freedom ideology of the prerevolutionary period and applied it to their own situation in order to obtain their own freedom. They began to petition for freedom, run away, rebel, and many joined the American or, more often, the British Army which promised freedom after the war. The Revolution period saw an increase in such forms of self-emancipation. Historians estimate that, between 55,000 and 100,000 (17% of all slaves), emancipated themselves by running away during these years, including larger numbers of women than in prerevolutionary times. The war years brought more opportunities to men and women to run away successfully and they took advantage of them in order to make personal statements about the institution of slavery. While many ran off to join family members and friends in various cities, others ran to the British line in hopes that they would be set free. Some even ran off to form maroon communities where they could live freely among themselves.

The decision to flee was not an easy one for most slaves. Often times slaves fleeing for their freedom were caught and either executed, forced to work hard labor or deported to the West Indies. Even those who successful in escaping to British lines were forced to take shelter in refugee camps that were poorly equipped to handle so many people. Here women and children often met starvation, disease and death. They risked starvation due to their lack of ability to support themselves. Slaves who ran away also risked harming family and friends who stayed behind. Many plantations suffered due to the lack of workers and thus starvation and hard times were present throughout the southern regions. Even when slaves were able to achieve their freedom there was a constant threat that they would be recaptured, their dreams of freedom ripped away, and returned to their masters or worse."

Source: [http://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/The\\_Untold\\_Story\\_The\\_Black\\_Struggle\\_for\\_Freedom\\_PF.pdf](http://www.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/The_Untold_Story_The_Black_Struggle_for_Freedom_PF.pdf)

12. Continue through the remainder of the PPT, focusing on the situation after the war and the continuing struggle for freedom. Additional information to share and discuss with students:

"It is difficult to determine whether the struggle for black freedom during the Revolutionary War was worth the costs that many had to endure. At first glance an optimist might say that the slaves were successful in affecting the institution of slavery. Some slaves gained freedom after fighting in the war. The governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, who had promised slaves of Patriots freedom in 1775 if they fought for the British, evacuated some blacks after the peace treaty was signed. Upwards of 5,000 gained freedom after serving in the Patriot army. Others were lucky enough to escape with French Troops. During the 1780's slaves in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and

Rhode Island were set free, generally by gradual emancipation. New York and New Jersey adopted gradual emancipation laws in 1799. These new free blacks migrated to seaports like New York and Philadelphia where they established churches and schools that began to establish the African American culture." Source: <http://asp1.umbc.edu/newmedia/sites/chetah/pdf/Printer%20Friendly.pdf>

### **The Missing Pieces of the Revolutionary War Puzzle**

- 13.** To culminate student understanding, hand out the attached assignment, "The Missing Pieces of the Revolutionary War Puzzle" and go over it with students. Teachers should determine whether to have students complete this individually or in partners, all well as how much class time or homework time will be provided for completion. Go over the project description with students, answering any questions. Direct student attention to a bulletin board that says "Each Piece Counts" (teachers should have this completed prior to introducing the project; the board should contain large pre-cut puzzle pieces for each student or pair. Sample puzzle shapes are attached, which can be enlarged freestyle by hand onto chart or poster board paper.) Tell students that once their research is complete, they will choose their puzzle piece for finishing the project. Let students know when their puzzle piece is due, explaining that they will present their "piece of the puzzle" to class on the due date, then pin it back to the bulletin board. (Teachers may want to consider displaying the final "completed" puzzle in a public area of the school.)

### **Additional Activities**

- Slavery and the Making of America is a four-part series documenting the history of American slavery from its beginnings in the British colonies to post-Civil War Reconstruction. Episode Two, "Liberty in the Air," discusses slavery during the Revolutionary period. Use this video to better help students learn about and visualize life for Blacks during the 1700s. There are additional lessons regarding Blacks during this period available at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/about/index.html>.
- Use PBS's pieces of historical fiction to allow students to further explore the role of Titus in the Revolutionary War: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/teachers/readings.html>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## African Americans During the Revolutionary Times – Power Point Notes

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Slavery in the Colonies</b></p> <p>What do you already know about slavery during colonial times?</p>          <p>New facts learned:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Image</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A Parallel Struggle for Freedom</b></p> <p>When considering slavery, what is ironic about Patriots protesting for their freedom from British rule?</p>          <p>Who was Prince Hall?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Image</b></p>

<p><b>African American Choices During the War for Independence – <u>Rebellion</u></b></p> <p>Why were slave owners worried about rebellion, particularly during revolutionary times?</p> <p>What steps did slave owners take to prevent slave insurrection?</p> <p>What steps did the British take to promote slave rebellion and runaways?</p> <p>What steps did Blacks take towards attaining their freedom?</p>	<p><b>Image</b></p>
<p><b>African American Choices During the War for Independence – <u>Join the Loyalists</u></b></p> <p>Why did some Blacks choose to join the Loyalist fight?</p> <p>What effect did Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation have on Blacks?</p> <p>Who were the “Black Pioneers?”</p> <p>Who was Colonel Tye? How would you characterize him?</p> <p>Who was Boston King? How would you characterize him?</p>	<p><b>Image</b></p>

**African American Choices During the War for Independence –  
Join the Patriots**

**Image**

Why did some Blacks choose to join the Patriots?

Why did the colonies first prevent Blacks from fighting but later allow it?

Who was John Chavis? How would you describe him?

List additional ways Blacks were involved in the Revolutionary War (other than choice):

Based on all the choices we have discussed, which choice do you think you would have made were you enslaved during the Revolutionary period and why? What benefits and consequences might this choice have resulted in?



<p><b>After the War</b></p> <p>What conflict regarding slaves existed after the War?</p> <p>What were the various fates of slaves who had joined the war upon its end?</p> <p>What did slave owners want to see happen regarding their runaway slaves following the war?</p> <p>What did some British officials, such as Sir Guy Carleton, want to see happen to the slaves who had joined the British?</p> <p>Why did the slave population of NC grow faster in the 1790s than in any other decade?</p>	<p><b>Image</b></p>
<p><b>Continuing the Struggle for Freedom</b></p> <p>Why was the post-Revolutionary period so turbulent regarding slavery?</p> <p>In what ways did Blacks continue their struggle for freedom?</p> <p>How did Quakers view the institution of slavery?</p> <p>How did Quillo represent the ideology of the American Revolution?</p>	<p><b>Image</b></p>

## The Missing Pieces of the Revolutionary War Puzzle



In a puzzle, each piece counts. Yet often when studying the Revolutionary War, we forget to acknowledge the important roles Blacks played, whether in fighting for either side of the war, or fighting for their own rights to freedom. We have left their pieces of the puzzle out and the history is incomplete without them. Beyond well known Revolutionary figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, or Paul Revere, there were Blacks who were making just as many and as important contributions, even though lesser known. In this project, you will work to create an inclusive puzzle, complete with the roles African Americans played during the Revolutionary War.

1. Choose a topic or individual from the list below (should you want to focus on a topic or individual not listed, you must get preapproval first).

### General Topics/Themes from Revolutionary Times

Black Revolutionary Seamen  
Contributions of Black Patriots  
Contributions of Black Loyalists  
1st Rhode Island Regiment  
Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment  
Forms of Slave Resistance during Revolutionary Times  
The Black Pioneers  
The Book of Negroes

### Individuals During Revolutionary Times

Richard Allen	Absalom Jones
Crispus Attucks	James Armistead Lafayette
Martial Besse	Pompey Lamb
Seymour Burr	Lambert Latham
Brazillai Lew	Prince Whipple
Jean-Baptiste Mars Belley	John Marrant
John Chavis	Saul Matthews
Austin Dabney	Peter Salem
William Flora	Venture Smith
James Forten	Caesar Tarrant
Prince Hall	Colonel Tye/Titus
Lemuel Haynes	Salem Poor
Edward Hector	

2. Research your topic/individual. Find at least 3 different sources that share information regarding your topic/individual and the connection/contribution to the Revolutionary War.
3. Choose a puzzle piece from the bulletin board. Decorate the puzzle piece so that it will educate viewers regarding your topic/individual. Your final puzzle piece must:
  - Contain text explaining the importance or contributions of your topic/individual
  - Contain a drawn image representing your topic/individual
  - Clearly educate the viewer on this topic/individual
  - Contain accurate information, be creative, and lack mistakes.

