



Exploring Loyalist Perspectives in Colonial North Carolina's "Backcountry"

Overview

While the traditional narrative of the American Revolution often centers on Patriot colonists who rebelled against British control, equally compelling are the perspectives and lived experiences of Loyalist colonists (or "Whigs" & "Tories") who remained loyal to the Crown, as well as indigenous populations, enslaved people, "Free People of Color," and other less centered stories. In this lesson, students will examine sentiment in North Carolina's "**Backcountry**" (west of present-day Orange County), which leaned heavily Loyalist due to a historic "east-west" divide in the colony. Through primary source review, reading, and discussion, students will explore who Loyalists were, why they chose to support the British Crown, and how they were impacted. Students will synthesize their learning by creating a "Life Road Map" of a North Carolina Loyalist, in which they deepen their understanding of an individual historical figure.

Grades

5-8

Materials

- Primary Source: [Address of Sundry Inhabitants of the Counties of Rowan and Surry to Governor Martin](#)
- [Map: North Carolina at the Beginning of 1775](#)
- [Brainstorm Activity: Perspectives on Independence](#)
- Overview Reading & Questions: [Loyalist or Patriot? Choices in Colonial North Carolina](#)
- NC Historic Site: [House in the Horseshoe](#) (for reference)
- [House in the Horseshoe Reenactment](#) (3-minute video)
- Life Road Map supplies:
 - Chart paper or bulletin board paper, markers and other art supplies
 - Access to reference materials, and/or internet-connected devices for research
 - [Gallery Walk Viewing Guide](#) (optional)

Duration

90+ minutes (aspects of the lesson can be edited or omitted for shorter implementation time)

Preparation

Prior to this lesson, it is recommended that students have an understanding of [North Carolina's Regulator Movement](#), which set the stage in North Carolina's "Backcountry" for Loyalist sentiment to grow.

Procedure

Warm Up: An Introduction to "Backcountry Loyalists" in Colonial North Carolina

1. As a warm-up, provide students with a copy (virtual or printed) of the primary source, [Address of Sundry Inhabitants of the Counties of Rowan and Surry to Governor Martin](#) (a copy is attached at the end of this document.) Let the class know that it was likely created in March 1775, but provide no additional information at this point. Instruct students to pair up, read through the document, and discuss:
 - What words or phrases stand out to you or seem most important and why?
 - Who is this address from and who is it to?
 - What message is being conveyed in this document? What specific passages evidence this?

- What is the purpose of this address? Why do you think it was created and sent to the Royal Governor of North Carolina at the time (1775?)
2. Once students have had 8-10 minutes to review and discuss the address, bring the class together to share their thoughts and responses to the questions provided. Further discuss:
 - Why do you think this is specifically addressed from “sundry inhabitants of Rowan and Surry Counties” to Governor Martin?
 - Students will likely need context that "sundry" is an older colonial term meaning various or several. "Sundry inhabitants" in this context simply denotes that the message represents a group of residents from different backgrounds, occupations, and social statuses who have collectively signed/endorsed this message to Governor Martin.
 - Where were Surry and Rowan counties in 1775 North Carolina?
 - Project the [Map of North Carolina at the Beginning of 1775](#) and ask students to comment on the location. Why might the location of the creators of this address be significant?
 - Teachers can use this [Google Earth Presentation](#) to explore the map.
 - Does anything surprise you about this primary source? How does it differ than the voices we typically think of when studying the American Revolution?
 3. As the class discusses, make sure that students develop an accurate understanding of the document and provide further background:
 - This is the text of a letter expressing loyalty to the British Government during the American Revolution. It was sent by Loyalists from Rowan and Surry Counties to Governor Josiah Martin, likely around March of 1775. The original letter was written and signed by Loyalist Samuel Bryan and 194 others. In 1890, it was printed as shown and published in a volume North Carolina's State and Colonial Records. ([Source](#))
 - While the traditional narrative of the Revolution often centers on colonists who rebelled against British control (“Patriots”), an equally important part of the story are the perspectives and lived experiences of colonists who remained loyal to the Crown (“Loyalists” or “Tories”), as well as indigenous populations, enslaved people, “Free People of Color,” and other less centered stories.
 - Like all of the American colonies, North Carolina had Loyalists who supported the British in the American Revolution. And like the Patriots who expressed their sentiments in political statements and petitions, at times Loyalists also formally expressed and recorded their sentiments and political views.
 - This document is an example of one such statement, which was made by Loyalists from Rowan and Surry Counties written most likely sometime around March of 1775. During that time period, these counties and other inland counties were considered part of the "backcountry" of North Carolina (or frontier), which included today's Piedmont and Mountain areas, west of today's Orange County. (Again, refer students to the [Map of North Carolina at the Beginning of 1775](#) and point out the North Carolina “Backcountry” to them.)
 - The address expressed the loyalty of the signers to the British Constitution and Crown and expressed protest against meetings and activities that were being undertaken by Patriots. The address was written and presented to Royal [Governor Martin](#), with the signatures of [Samuel Bryan](#), a Loyalist, and 194 others.

Examining Less-Centered Perspectives of the American Revolution

4. Explain to students that this lesson will be focused on examining the less known/less centered perspectives of North Carolina Loyalists in the Backcountry, considering indigenous populations, enslaved people, and other perspectives that have often been side-lined to the experiences of Patriot colonists during the American Revolution.
 - While it is difficult to know exactly, historians estimate that around 60% - 85% of North Carolina’s colonial population favored independence (Patriots), whereas 15%-30% of North Carolina’s colonial population were Loyalists. Still others would have attempted to maintain neutrality, and all of these stances could be fluid throughout the years of the conflict. ([Source](#)) The bottom line, however, is that

there is more complexity to the narrative that all of the colonies and the diverse people living within and outside them were unified in opposition to the British Crown. Discuss:

- Why do you think it's more common to study/acknowledge the stance of the Patriots during the American Revolution, with Loyalist narratives and/or the narratives of people who were not colonists (such as indigenous people, enslaved people, etc.) often sidelined?
- Why it is important to also study the views, actions, and stories of non-Patriots during this time period? How does this approach, of looking at many sides/perspectives/lived experiences, apply to other periods of history as well as current issues/events?

5. Have students return to their pairs and provide them with the [Brainstorm Activity: Perspectives on Independence](#) (again, this can be provided electronically or in print.) Tell students to take 5-8 minutes to consider all of the people living during the period of the Revolution, and what their various perspectives may have been. Who may have been supportive of the Patriots? Who would have wanted to remain Loyal to the British Crown? Who might have attempted neutrality? Point out to students that such perspectives and alliances could also be fluid, so they may list the same people or groups under different categories. Also point out the complexity that while groups might have commonalities, individuals within those groups can diverge. (For instance, all "women," or all "Native Americans," don't think the exact same way.)
6. After students have had time to generate ideas independently, create a collective chart up front and discuss their responses.

Deepening Understanding: Loyalist or Patriot? Choices in Colonial North Carolina and the Backcountry

7. Give students (electronically or in print) [Loyalist or Patriot? Choices in Colonial North Carolina & the Backcountry](#), which provides an overview reading and corresponding questions. (This can be completed in reading partners, or independently then discussed in partners/small groups. The time required for completion will depend on the reading level of students.) After students have finished, discuss the questions as a class to ensure understanding.

NC Historic Site: The House in the Horseshoe

8. Call students' attention back to the map on their handout, and ask if any of them have heard of or visited any of these locations. (Point out whichever locations are closest to their school.) As they explore the geography of the state as related to Revolutionary War engagements, ask them to find the spot labeled [House in the Horseshoe](#), so-called for its location in a horseshoe-like bend. Share some information about the site with students:
 - It was one of the first big houses constructed in North Carolina's frontier and was built by Whig (Patriot) Colonel Philip Alston around 1770-1772.
 - It was here that Alton's band of Patriot colonists were attacked in the home by Loyalists led by David Fanning in 1781. Remind students that the closing paragraph of their reading described Loyalist militia leader [David Fanning](#) as "a successful NC Loyalist guerrilla who once kidnapped the governor of North Carolina."
 - On the morning of July 29, 1781, while Alston and his band of revolutionaries were camped at the home, they were attacked by David Fanning and his band of Loyalists.
9. Tell students they will watch a three-minute video of the [House in the Horseshoe Reenactment](#), which will give them a creative look at how things may have played out that day. (Remind students that this is a reenactment by modern day actors at the Historic Site, thus they will see visitors in attendance in the background of some shots.) After they watch, discuss:
 - According to David Fanning's quote at the beginning of the video, what was his purpose for attacking the house? ("...I was determined to make examples of them...")
 - How would you describe the attack and defense strategies you witnessed?

- How would you describe Temperance Alston?
 - Why do you think Temperance Alston placed the children in the fireplace?
 - What led Temperance to surrender? What was she risking to walk into the middle of a battle to try and negotiate a peaceful ending?

10. Explain to students that they can visit the House in the Horseshoe today and see many of the bullet holes that riddled the house. As for the home, though “Alston was distinguished as a lieutenant colonel in the state militia, a justice of the peace, and a state senator, his later career was seen as disreputable. Twice indicted for murder, he was removed as justice of the peace and suspended from the state legislature for various reasons. In 1790, Philip Alston sold the house and plantation and left the state.” ([Source](#))

Processing Activity: Imagining the Life of a Backcountry Loyalist

11. As a culminating activity, students will work individually or in small groups to create a [“Life Road Map”](#) of a loyalist in North Carolina. The purpose of a Life Road Map is to deepen student understanding of a historical figure through research, and to summarize their story to better understand their perspectives, positions, and experiences. This also helps students understand that the people we study in history are not monoliths. Students can select an actual person, or creatively map out a representative role from a category of people who were known to be Loyalists (but still based on factual information researched.)
- Students will need a large sheet of chart or bulletin board paper on which to design their work.
 - The journey should represent important decisions, events and pivotal moments that would have shaped this person’s life.
 - Students can add details to their maps, including factors that may have influenced them, such as historical events, important relationships, goals, beliefs, traditions, and historical realities (fear, conformity, prejudice, laws and societal expectations of the time period, etc.).
12. Teachers will want to determine how much class time (and/or homework time) to provide for completion. The activity will require that students:
- Select their particular Loyalist or representative role from people who were Loyalists.
 - Research the person/category of people and the context in which they lived. Provide leveled research materials or suggestions (via curated webpages, library sources, etc.) to make access of information reasonable. Students should be challenged but not overwhelmed in their efforts to understand content. (Sample links to appropriate sites are provided in the Google Slide Presentation and hyperlinked below.)
 - As students research, they are seeking pivotal moments or important decisions from their person’s life or inferred moments/decisions if focusing on a category. (Encourage students to think about significant events, choices, milestones, influences, etc.)
 - Final Road Maps should include at least 5 “points of influence/impact” throughout the person’s life. At least one should be prior to the war, one during the war, and one after the war. Remind students as they research and determine which life points to feature, the ultimate goal of the Life Road Map is to portray the “story” of their chosen Loyalist to better understand their individual perspectives, positions, and lived experiences during this period of American history.
 - As students map out their person’s life, they should also work to add visuals (art, images, primary sources, etc.) While many students gravitate towards a timeline approach in their final product (which is fine), they can also choose to go in more creative directions. The final product should be bold, creative, colorful, and factually accurate.
13. While teachers should provide some level of choice to students, it should also be ensured that diverse categories of Loyalists are represented (i.e., enslaved Loyalists, free Black Loyalists, women, indigenous people, etc.) Sample people and representative roles that students might select include:
- [A member of the Royal North Carolina Regiment](#)
 - [John Dunn](#)

- [Benjamin Booth](#)
- [Member of the Loyalist Militia](#)
 - [Colonel David Fanning](#)
 - [Lt. Colonel Donald McLeod](#)
 - [John Pyle](#)
 - [John Hamilton](#)
 - [Samuel Bryan](#)
- [Women of the Loyalist Movement](#)
 - [Flora McDonald](#)
 - [Janet Smith MacNeill \(Jennie Bahn\)](#)
- [A member of the Black Pioneers, Black Loyalists](#)
 - [Thomas Peters](#)
 - Sally Peters
- [A member of the Royal North Carolina Regiment](#)
 - [Cherokee Loyalists](#)
 - [Dragging Canoe](#)

14. Let students know the due date, and on that day, have them display their work around the classroom and participate in a [gallery walk](#), in which they circulate to view everyone’s work. Ask students to document important observations and take-aways from each Life Road Map. This could be as simple as, “Write down something you learned from each poster and something you liked about each poster.” Or, for a more organized opportunity for peer assessment provide a [Viewing Guide](#) to fill out as they tour the gallery.

Final Reflections & Optional Extension

15. After the Gallery Walk, allow time for a final whole-class debriefing. Ask students to share something they learned, ask any remaining questions, respond to the work of other classmates, etc. Allow students to also weigh in on the culminating question regarding which Loyalist perspective makes most sense to them and why, and also which side they would align with if they lived during the Revolution and why.
16. As an optional extension, at this point teachers can group students based on shared views and instruct them to briefly build an argument for their chosen perspective based on what they learned from the lesson. Teachers can further tell students to engage in a short debate between the Loyalist perspectives and Patriot perspectives. However, before starting, switch students around so that they are required to argue for the perspective *opposite* of what they chose. This allows students to build an argument from the evidence they learned, while also considering different perspectives, learning to make counterarguments, and engage in inquiry.
17. As an [Exit Ticket](#), provide the following 3 reflection prompts for students to complete:
- Some American colonists chose to be Loyalists during the Revolution because...
 - One impact of the choice to remain loyal to Great Britain was...
 - The “Loyalist” story is important because...

Address of sundry Inhabitants of the Counties of Rowan and Surry to Governor Martin.

Permit us on the behalf of ourselves and many others of his Majesty's most dutiful subjects within the Counties of Rowan and Surry to protest against any person or persons who may violate any of his Majesty's Laws or the Peace of this Government. We are truly invigorated with the warmest Zeal and Attachment to the British Constitution and Laws upon which our Lives and fortunes and the welfare of the Province now depend and we utterly protest against meetings of people against the peace thereof or anything which may give birth to sedition and insurrection. We cannot but express to your Excellency that we consider all such Associations at this Crisis of very dangerous fatality to your Excellency's good Government of this Province distress the internal welfare of this Country and mislead the unwary from the paths of their duty and we do assure your Excellency that we are determined with the assistance of God in our respective stations steadfastly to continue his Majesty's loyal subjects and to contribute all in our power for the preservation of the public peace and that we shall endeavour to cultivate such sentiments in all those under our care and warm their breasts with true zeal for his Majesty and affection for his Illustrious Family. May the Almighty God direct his Council his Parliament and all those under him that their endeavours may be for the advancement of piety and the safety, honor and welfare of our Sovereign and his Kingdom that the malice of his enemies may be asswaged, their wild designs confounded and defeated, so that the whole world may see his sacred person and Country are the special objects of Divine dispensation and Providence.

[Signed by Samuel Bryan and 194 others.]
