

TEN Crucial Days

THE ROAD TO LIBERTY

Lesson Plans Developed by
American Institute for History Education

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To accompany NJN Public Television's Documentary
Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty



Public Television

Washington and Howe: Judgments on Generals

Grade Level: 6–12 *United States History*

Time Needed: Two 45-minute periods

Objectives: Students will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the motivations and characteristics of General Washington and General Sir William Howe.
2. Describe the main events of the Revolutionary War between the Battle of Breed's Hill and the aftermath of the Battle of Saratoga.
3. Evaluate the reliability of historical sources, both print and electronic.
4. Apply the following maxim to the topic of this lesson and evaluate its accuracy: "The winners write history, the losers are history."

NJCCC Standards Grades 6–12:

- 6.4.E.4.** Analyze strategic elements used during the Revolutionary War, discuss turning points during the war, and explain how the Americans won the war against superior resources.
- 6.4.E.5.** Analyze New Jersey's role in the American Revolution, including New Jersey's Constitution of 1776 as a revolutionary document, why some New Jerseyans became Loyalists, and the Battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Monmouth.
- 6.1.A.2.** Use critical thinking skills to interpret events, recognize bias, point of view, and context.
- 6.1.A.4.** Analyze data in order to see persons and events in context.
- 6.1.A.8.** Compare and contrast competing interpretations of current and historical events.

Key Terms:

- Hessians** n. German soldiers, from Hesse-Cassel, Hesse-Hanau, Brunswick, and several other small German states, who were hired by the British government or sent to fight with the British army to repay a debt to the British king.
- Musket** n. A standard firearm issued to both British and American soldiers in the Revolutionary War. Muskets were single-shot, smooth-bore weapons with an accurate range of under 75 yards.
- Bayonet** n. A three-sided blade with a sharp point that could be attached to the end of a musket, allowing the musket to be used as a pike or a spear, as well as a firearm.
- Frontal assault** n. A battle tactic in which one side attacks the enemy by sending large numbers of troops directly against their positions.

Background for Teachers:

During the first three years of the American War for Independence, the fortunes of the two sides were largely affected by the skills and personalities of their respective commanding generals, George Washington and Sir William Howe. In many ways, the final outcome of the war was prefigured during those years and personified by these two men, and the defining moment between the two may have been the events of the *Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty* depicted in this video.

History has portrayed Washington as the determined, heroic “founding father,” and Howe as his competent, but unimaginative and conventional British counterpart, who sometimes put creature comforts over military victories. In the course of this lesson, a more nuanced and less simplistic picture of these two leaders is presented.

Both leaders had their baptism of fire as young men in the French and Indian War. Washington, at age 22, was directly involved in the first fighting of the war, with his Virginia militia fighting French troops over rival claims to the Ohio River Valley at Fort Necessity. He also served with General Edward Braddock when they were defeated in a rout by French and Indian forces in 1755. While Washington fought with courage in battles that ended in defeat, Howe’s equally valorous efforts contributed to important British victories. Howe arrived in North America when he was 32 and led the first British brigade attacking the French at Quebec in 1759. He was also cited for his contribution to the British victory at Louisburg in 1761.

Contrary to what most people would expect, both generals were sympathetic to the colonial Patriots’ cause. Sir William Howe, who also held a seat in Parliament from 1758 to 1780—though he was often away serving in the military during that time—was a consistent and vocal critic of British policy toward the American colonies. This was also true of his brother, Admiral Richard Howe. They both felt the British position toward the American colonists was too harsh, and Sir William Howe repeatedly stated that he would turn down any assignment fighting against the Americans. He was against the Stamp Act, passed in 1765, and during his campaign for reelection in 1774, he spoke out against the Coercive Acts (also known as the “Intolerable Acts” in the colonies). He voiced his doubts that the “whole British army could enforce” these policies. When he was ordered to take command of British forces in the 13 colonies in 1775, he accepted; despite his reservations, he would obey the orders of the king. His brother, Richard, however, accepted appointment as British naval commander in America only on the condition that he and his brother would also serve as royal commissioners, authorized to negotiate a peace settlement with the colonists. They actually met with Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and other colonial leaders, but the talks were unsuccessful.

Also, both Washington and Howe exhibited outstanding bravery on the battlefield. They were true leaders, in the sense that they would not send their men into dangerous situations while they sat in safety, directing things from the rear. At the Battle of Princeton, Washington conspicuously rallied his troops to press an attack that was meeting heavy resistance. Mounted on a horse, he was an obvious and relatively easy target for British muskets as he led the attack, and many of his officers later expressed the feeling that they were sure he would be killed. Fortunately for the Continental army, he survived.

At the Battle of Bunker (Breed’s) Hill, Howe personally led his men in a frontal assault on the rebel breastworks, in the face of intense musket and rifle fire, and rallied them for a second and third assault when the first two failed. In winning this battle, the British took over 1,000 casualties. This was a brutal lesson for Howe, who took pains to arrange his future battle tactics so as to never place his soldiers in such a position again.

Both generals were also popular among their troops and inspired the loyalty of their men, partly due to their leadership on the battlefield and partly as a result of the efforts they took to secure the welfare of the soldiers.

While the Howe brothers were fighting the colonists with an eye toward reconciliation, Washington, by 1776, was totally committed to independence. He had no interest in any peace settlement that did not include independence.

Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton were the Continental army's first since they had succeeded in forcing Howe to withdraw from Boston on March 17, 1776. The city of Boston, where the hostilities had started, was a city of little strategic value to the British. The British occupation of New York City was strategically important, however, and Washington had been unable to keep the British from capturing the city. The Battles of Trenton and Princeton had followed a string of near disasters for Washington's army, which had brought them literally to the point where dissolution of the army might only be days away. Washington's boldness and determination at Trenton and Princeton would keep the Patriots' cause alive, but they might not have made it that far had Howe been more aggressive about following up his earlier routs of Washington's army in New York and New Jersey. For this, Howe has traditionally been criticized.

Some historians look at this history in a different way. They argue that Howe's goal was to defeat Washington's army and force them to negotiate a peace, not simply annihilate them. Howe, they claim, also had his limitations. While American history stresses the difficulties faced by the Continental army, Howe also faced resource and supply problems. His manpower pool was 3,000 miles away, and it took him months to replenish his troops. He had learned a hard lesson leading his troops in a frontal attack at the Battle of Breed's Hill, where the British won, but took more than 1,000 casualties, including 225 killed. He knew that if he lost that many men in every battle, it would be hard to replace them. When in the field, the British sometimes found it difficult to live off the land, as the Americans could, so they had to bring extensive baggage trains of supplies with them, which slowed their movement. Communication between cities and ships at sea was slow, and the political landscape in England was exceptionally complex, with the Parliamentary factions and royal officials squaring off at every turn.

Through the use of segments of the video *Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty* and readings from the websites provided in this lesson, students will be able to piece together a more nuanced and more interesting understanding of the chemistry between these two outstanding leaders.

Procedures:

Day 1

I. Anticipatory Set/Do Now Activity

- a. Based on what they've already learned, students will write a quick list of the advantages and disadvantages of the British and American sides in the Revolutionary War.
- b. Review and briefly discuss the student lists generated in (a.)
- c. Ask: Which side won "round 1" of the Revolutionary War (the war in the Boston area)?
Anticipated answer: The rebels won, forcing the British to evacuate Boston.

- d. Explain that in this lesson, we will look at what happens in “round 2.” Class will get some information from the video, and tomorrow students will gather additional information from websites.
- e. Students will watch the video *Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty* (about 25 minutes) and answer the following questions:
 - i. Since the Americans were able to drive the British out of Boston, how were the British able to defeat them so easily in New York?
 - ii. In what ways did Washington personally affect the victories over British and Hessian troops at Trenton and Princeton?
 - iii. What do you think would have happened if Washington had not attacked Trenton and Princeton, and had just waited out the winter in Pennsylvania instead?
 - iv. Why was Washington’s action such a surprise to the British troops, and to the public at large in the colonies and in England?
 - f. Discuss answers as a group.

II. Homework:

Find two websites that focus on the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, and compare what they say to the information presented in the video. What facts or interpretations from the video are also found on the websites? In what areas does the information in either the video or the website vary from each other or contradict one another?

Day 2

III. Anticipatory Set/Do Now Activity

- a. Students will take out and some will present what they found for homework.
- b. Instruct students that the video tells the story of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, focusing on Washington. In this class, we will focus on his opponent, General Sir William Howe.
- c. Students will work in groups of three (selected by the teacher), and research the following websites. Each student in a group will read through two of the websites (not the same ones), discuss them with their team, and then be ready to report out to the group what they learned about Howe. The websites include:
<http://www.americanrevwar.homestead.com/files/HOWE>HTM>
http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2001_winter_spring/howe_1.html
http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2001_winter_spring/howe_2.html
<http://franklaughter.tripod.com/cgi/bin/histprof/misc/howe.html>
<http://www.laughtergenealogy.com/bin/histprof/misc/howe.html>
<http://www.patriotresource.com/people/howe.html>
<http://members.aol.com/tjoschultz/whowe.html>
http://www.history.net.com/magazines/british_heritage/3027611.html
<http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312848/ghowe.htm>
http://www.answers.com/topic/william_howe_5th_viscount-howe

- d. Groups will report back to the whole class regarding what they read in the websites. Teacher will help identify conflicting viewpoints within the group.

Assessment:

1. Students will individually produce, using either listed columns or a Venn diagram, a comparison of the qualities, tactics, and motivations of General George Washington and General Sir William Howe during the period from 1775 to 1778.
2. Students should score 80 percent or higher on a content-based quiz or test on the events surrounding Washington and Howe.
3. Students will apply the following maxim to the Revolutionary War service of Generals Washington and Howe:
“The winners write history, the losers are history.”

Links:

Hessian Barracks:

<http://www.barracks.org/>

Battle of Trenton:

http://www.theamericanrevolution.org/battles/bat_tren.asp

<http://www.patriotresource.com/battles/trenton.html>

<http://www.myrevolutionarywar.com/battles/761226.htm>

http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle_trenton1776.html

Battle of Princeton:

<http://www.patriotresource.com/battles/princeton.html>

<http://www.myrevolutionarywar.com/battles/770103.htm>

<http://virtualology.com/revolutionarywarhall/BATTLEOFPRINCETON.COM/>

Revolutionary War in New Jersey

<http://www.doublegv.com/ggv/NJrev.html>

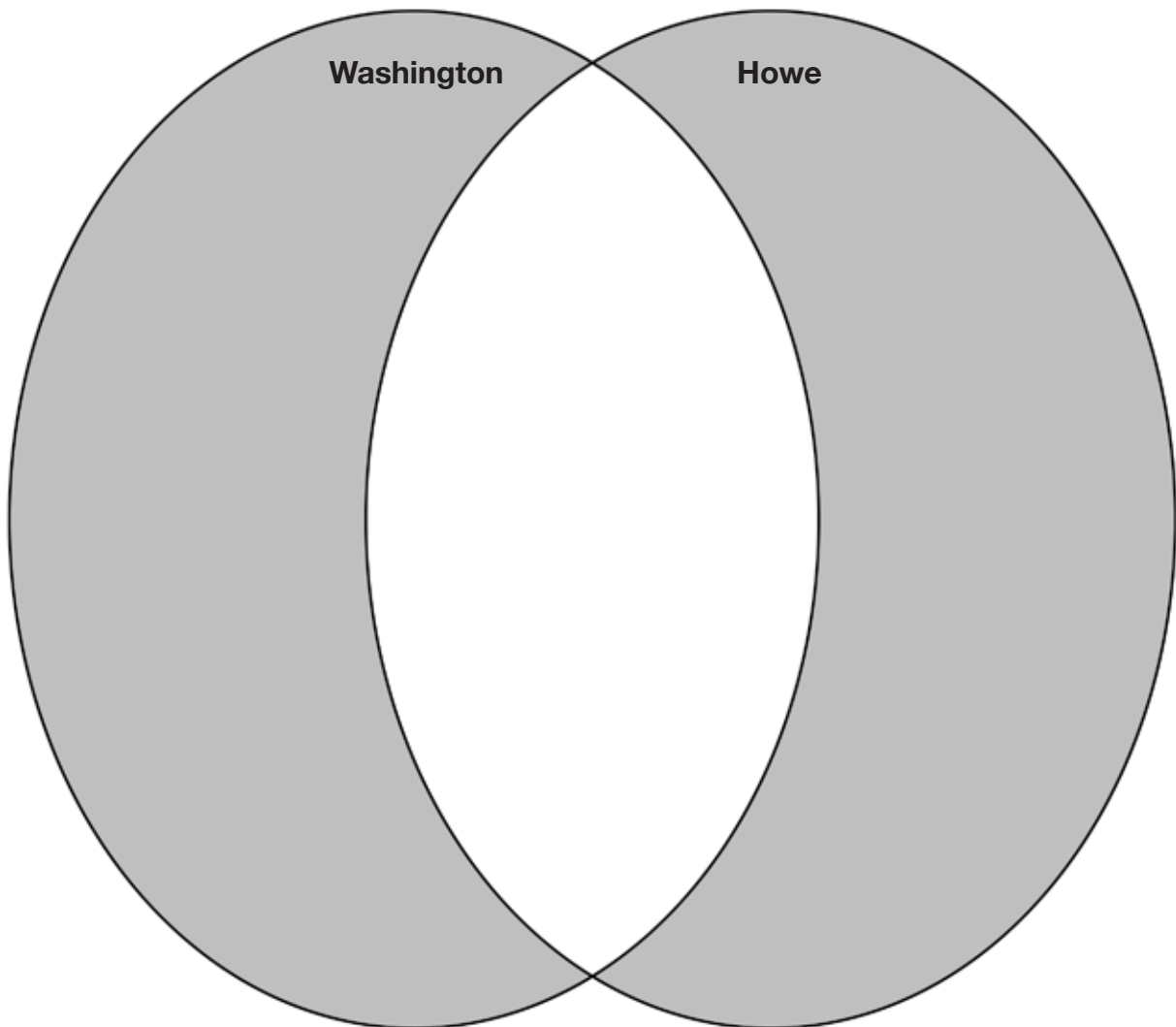
http://mapmaker.rutgers.edu/HISTORICALMAPS/REVOLUTIONARYWAR/Revolutionary_War.html

<http://www.njskylands.com/hsAmRev225.htm>

Venn Diagram

Lessons from the Battles of Trenton and Princeton

Comparing George Washington and Sir William Howe

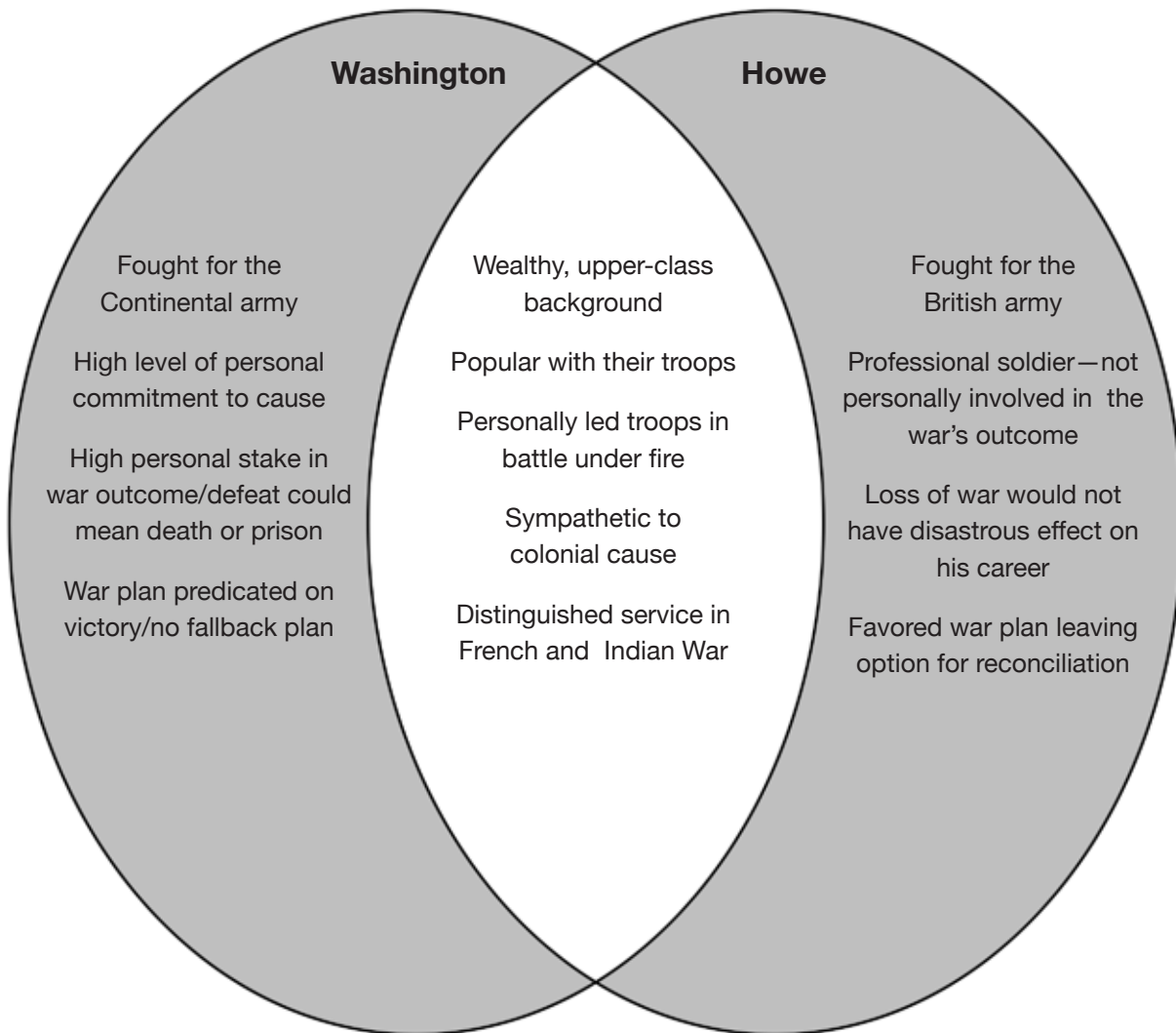


Venn Diagram

Lessons from the Battles of Trenton and Princeton

Comparing George Washington and Sir William Howe

(Possible Answers)



Question Worksheet

Directions:

Watch video *Ten Crucial Days: The Road to Liberty* (25 minutes) and answer the following questions:

1. Since the Americans were able to drive the British out of Boston, how were the British able to defeat them so easily in New York?
2. In what ways did Washington personally affect the victories over British and Hessian troops at Trenton and Princeton?
3. What do you think would have happened if Washington had not attacked Trenton and Princeton and had just waited out the winter in Pennsylvania instead?
4. Why was Washington's action such a surprise to the British troops, and to the public at large in the colonies and in England?