

Background Information for Teachers

Much of what we know about the historic capture of Fort Ticonderoga by Ethan Allen, Benedict Arnold, and the Green Mountain Boys on May 10, 1775, comes from the letters, journals, and diaries of the participants. This activity for students includes descriptions of the capture from the point of view of three men: Ethan Allen, Benedict Arnold, and Jocelyn Feltham. Even though all three were present during the capture, their accounts don't always agree.

History is not a list of facts; it is the interpretation of facts. These three men each have a bias and reasons for including or excluding certain facts. In the hours and days after the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold are engaged in a heated contest to see who would ultimately take command of the captured Fort. In the dozens of letter Ethan Allen writes in the days after May 10th, Benedict Arnold is only mentioned in one—the letter written to the New York Committee of Safety. Why? There was a warrant for Allen's arrest in New York, and it was to Allen's advantage, in that one letter, that his actions in capturing the fort not be seen as by his action alone.

On the other hand, Jocelyn Feltham, second in command of the British troops at Ticonderoga, is writing a report to General Thomas Gage, the Commander-in-Chief of all British forces in North America. Feltham doesn't care whether Allen or Arnold is in charge. His chief motivation is to defend his actions and those of his commander, Captain William Delaplace.

Student Activity

Have your students read the excerpts from three accounts that follow:

- Benedict Arnold to the Committee of Safety in Massachusetts
- Ethan Allen to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress
- Jocelyn Feltham to Lt. General Thomas Gage

Depending on the reading abilities of your students, they may find some of the language unfamiliar. You may wish to read the letters out loud with your students. Then have your students analyze the letters, considering how the descriptions are alike and how they differ, using the following document

Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6

Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8

Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.9

Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

The Capture of Fort Ticonderoga

Benedict Arnold to the Committee of Safety in Massachusetts ¹

Ticonderoga, May 11, 1775

Gentlemen:

I wrote you yesterday that arriving in the vicinity of this place, I found one hundred and fifty men collected at the instance of some gentlemen from Connecticut (designed on the same errand on which I came) headed by Colonel Ethan Allen, and that I had joined them, not thinking proper to wait the arrival of the Troops I had engaged on the road, but to attempt the Fort by surprise; that we had taken the Fort at four o'clock yesterday morning without opposition, and made prisoners, one Captain, one Lieutenant, and forty odd privates and subalterns, and that we found the Fort in a most ruinous condition and not worth repairing. . . . On and before our taking possession here, I had agreed with Colonel Allen to issue further orders jointly, until I could raise a sufficient number of men to relieve his people, on which plan we proceeded . . . since which, Colonel Allen, finding he had the ascendancy over his people, positively insisted I should have no command, as I had forbid the soldiers plundering and destroying private property. The power is now taken out of my hands and I am no longer consulted, nor have I a voice in any matters. There is here at present near one hundred men, who are in the greatest confusion and anarchy, destroying and plundering private property, committing every enormity, and paying no attention to publick service. . . . Colonel Allen is a proper man to head his own wild people, but entirely unacquainted with military service; and as I am the only person who has been legally authorized to take possession of this place, I am determined to insist on my right, and I think it my duty to remain here against all opposition, until I have further orders.

I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your most obedient humble servant,

BENEDICT ARNOLD

¹ Taken from *American Archives, 1840 edition*, edited by Peter Force (CD ROM produced by Fine Books Company), page 557.

The Capture of Fort Ticonderoga

Ethan Allen to the Massachusetts Congress¹

Ticonderoga, May 11, 1775

Gentlemen:

I have to inform you with pleasure unfelt before, that on break of day of the tenth of May, 1775, by the order of the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, took the Fortress of Ticonderoga by storm. The soldiery was composed of about one hundred Green Mountain Boys, and near fifty veteran soldiers from the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay. The latter was under the command of Colonel James Easton, who behaved with great zeal and fortitude, not only in council, but in the assault. The soldiery behaved with such resistless fury, that they so terrified the King's Troops that they durst not fire on their assailants, and our soldiery was agreeably disappointed. The soldiery behaved with uncommon rancour when they leaped into the Fort; and it must be confessed that the Colonel has greatly contributed to the taking of the Fortress, as well as John Brown, Esq., Attorney at Law, who was also an able counsellor, and was personally in the attack.

From, gentleman, your most obedient humble servant,

ETHAN ALLEN

1. Taken from American Archive, 1840 edition, edited by Peter Force (CD ROM produced by Fine Books Company), page 556.

The Capture of Fort Ticonderoga

Lieutenant Feltham's Report to Lieutenant General Gage¹

New York, June 11th 1775

Sir:

Capt Delaplace of the 26th reg^t has given me directions to lay before you in as plain a narrative as I can the manner of the surprizal of the fort of Ticonderoga on the 10th May with all the circumstances after it that I thought might be of any service in giving your Ex^y any light into the affair. . . the 10th of May, on which morning about half an hour after three in my sleep I was awaken'd by number of shrieks, & the words no quarter, no quarter from a number of arm'd rabble I jump'd up about which time I heard the noise continue in the area of the fort I ran undress'd to knock at Capt Delaplaces I step[ped] back, put on my coat & waist coat & return'd to his room, there being no possibility of getting to the men as there were numbers of the rioters on the bastions of the wing of the fort on which the door of my room and back door of Capt Delaplaces room led, with great difficulty, I got into his room being pursued from which there was a door down by the stairs in the area of the fort, I ask'd Capt Delaplace who was now just up what I should do, & offer'd to force my way if possible to our men, on opening this door the bottom of the stairs was fill[e]d with the rioters & many were forcing their way up, knowing the Comm^o Officer lived there, as they had broke open the lower rooms where the officers live in [the] winter, and could not find them there, from the top of the stairs I endeavour'd to make them hear me, but it was impossible, on making a signal not to come up the stairs, they stop'd, & proclaim'd silence among themselves, I then address'd them, but in a st[y]le not agreeable to them I ask'd them a number of questions, expecting to amuse them till our people fired which I must certainly. . . thought would have been the case, after asking them the most material questions I could think viz by what authority they entered his majesties fort who were the leaders what their intent &c &c I was inform'd by one Ethan Allen and one Benedict Arnold that they had a joint command, Arnold informing me he came from instructions recd from the congress at Cambridge which he afterwards sh[o]wed me. Mr Allen told me his orders were from the province of Connecticut & that he must have immediate possession of the fort and all the effects of George the third (those were his words) Mr Allen insisting on this with a drawn sword over my head & numbers of his followers firelocks presented at me alledging I was commanding officer & to give up the fort, and if it was not comply" with, or that there was a single gun fired in the fort neither man woman or child should be left alive in the fort Mr Arnold begg'd it in a genteel manner but without success, it was owing to him they were prevented getting into Capt Delaplaces room, after they found I did not command. Capt Delaplace being now dress'd came out, when after talking to him some time, they put me back into the room they placed two sentry's on me and took Capt Delaplace down stairs they also placed sentrys at the back door, from the beginning of the noise till half an hour after this I never saw a Soldier, tho' I heard a great noise in their rooms and can not account otherwise than that they must have been seiz'd in their beds before I got on the stairs, or at the first coming in, which must be the case as Allen wounded one of the guard[s] on his struggling with him in the guard room immediately after his entrance into the fort.

I have the honour to be, gentleman, your most obedient humble servant,

JOCELYN FELTHAM

1. Taken from *Chronicles of Lake Champlain: Journeys in War and Peace* by Russell P. Bellico (Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 1999), pages 198-201.

Reporting the Events of May 10, 1775

Read the three descriptions of the events that took place at Fort Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775. They were written by Ethan Allen, Benedict Arnold, and Jocelyn Feltham.

What are three things all three letters agree on?

1)

2)

3)

How are the letters of Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold different?

Why do you think they might be different?

Of the three letter writers, who do you believe came the closest to describing what really happened on May 10, 1775? Why do you think this?