

CHARACTER TRIAL OF BENEDICT ARNOLD: HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE CHANGING OF THE PAST



GRADES 7-8

OVERVIEW

Students will analyze a small collection of differentiated primary and secondary documents that showcase the events, contributions, and character of Benedict Arnold. These primary documents will include letters from Arnold, videos, and other documents about him that cast him in both a positive and negative light. Students will perform “close reading” activities with each document or video, and then develop an informed opinion about the character of Arnold. The students will then write a brief persuasive essay about Arnold that will be used to form the basis of a formal “Magnetic Debate”. This essay and subsequent debate will serve as the summative assessment for the lesson. Ultimately, this lesson will show that the history and contributions of important figures in our past can and have been altered to change our understanding. This will provide the students with critical analysis and research skills to help them become critical thinkers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- * Students will gain a better understanding of the reasons and purposes of altering our understanding of the past.
- * Students will know about the contributions of Benedict Arnold to the Patriot cause during the American Revolution, including why he ultimately defected to the British.
- * Students will become better historical thinkers who have the skills to engage and challenge the content they are being taught.

STUDENT STANDARDS

COMMON CORE:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/ social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).



INTRODUCTION

Reflect on Essential Questions:

1. How is history changeable? Why might people want to change our memory of the past?
2. Who was Benedict Arnold? How has our understanding of Benedict Arnold's contributions to the history of America been altered by propaganda and the desire to change our understanding of the past?

MATERIALS

* Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRLOLzmw5_M

* Excerpts (attached)

ACTIVITY

Day 1:

Students will look up the dictionary definition of "Benedict Arnold" – "traitor, turncoat". Pose the question: *"Why and how did this definition come to be? Based on this definition, who was Benedict Arnold?"* Provide the students with time to answer the question independently, and then let them share their responses out loud. Some may rely on prior knowledge to help them. (15 minutes)

Following this activity, the students will view the video excerpt, "Biography, Benedict Arnold A Man without a Country" (<http://www.biography.com/people/benedict-arnold-9189320/videos/benedict-arnold-a-man-without-country-2202642766>).

The students will then "Close Read" Arnolds letter, "To the Inhabitants of America", explaining his treason.

STUDENT STANDARDS

COMMON CORE:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.



STUDENT STANDARDS

C3 FRAMEWORK:

D2.His.3.6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

D2.His.6.6-8. Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.

D2.His.16.6-8. Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.

D3.3.6-8. Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.

Ask the students, *"What did Arnold do that made him a traitor? What sort of person do you think he was? Why is he remembered so terribly in American history?"* (15 minutes)

Following this, the students will make a "T Chart" in their notebooks with labels for "hero" and "traitor". Begin full Biography Video, and have the students write in the traits, events, and activities that make Arnold either a hero or a traitor on the appropriate side of the chart.

Day 2:

Complete and discuss Biography video, as well as the students "T Chart". Make a class T Chart on the board and have the students fill in their answers. The students will likely discover that Arnold had many more heroic traits. Following this activity, have the students Close Read the Primary Source "Arnold Letter to the Massachusetts Committee of Public Safety", followed by the article "Benedict Arnold: A Name Synonymous with Traitor". Have them annotate specific words and phrases that indicate heroic and traitorous traits as they read. Include the Saratoga article, as well as photographs of the "Boot Monument".

Day 3:

Revisit the question, "Who was Benedict Arnold?", and add "What lead to his betrayal"? Encourage the students to answer the question citing the many primary and secondary sources they encountered over the previous two days. Pose the question, "Why have the heroic actions of Arnold been erased from history?" and "What other people or events have we altered in our understanding of the past? Why might people want to change the way people and events are remembered?" Provide the students with ample time to answer these questions in their notebooks. A brief discussion may be held upon the completion of these questions.



Day 4:

Assign a brief persuasive essay (3-5 paragraphs) that has the students to argue that Arnold is either a hero or a traitor, citing the sources from the lesson. This essay will serve as part of the final summative assessment for the lesson.

Day 5:

Magnetic Debate: Have the students divide into three groups - those who believe Arnold is a hero, those who believe he is a traitor, and those who are unsure. Have the unsure students stand in the middle of the room, between the other two opposing sides. Establish a protocol where the students on both sides can share their thoughts and arguments. As these students argue, the students in the middle will "magnetize" towards the side that they believe has the most convincing arguments. This way, these unsure students serve an important role - that of debate judge. Participation in the debate can serve as an additional portion of the final summative assessment.