

History

Year 8 - Lesson 5

# Revolutionary War

Enquiry: Did the Enlightenment fuel a Revolution in America?

Mr Arscott



Between 1775 and 1783 a lot had changed. A conflict which had started about taxes had turned into a war where the 13 Colonies fought to be independent of the British **Empire**.

Surprisingly, this new country, the United States of America won. This painting seems to suggest the British were still embarrassed they were defeated.



Different names are given to the conflict fought between Britain and its American colonies between 1775 and 1783. Sometimes it is called the American War of Independence and sometimes it is called the American Revolutionary War. The first name is useful because a consequence of the war was that a new independent country was created called the United States of America (USA). Today this is one of the most powerful countries in the world. The second name however is more interesting as it raises questions about the war and the changes America experienced. Was the war a revolutionary mass movement which included lots of people? Was the war revolutionary because of its consequences? Was it revolutionary because it contained new Enlightenment ideas? Or, was it not revolutionary at all?



How the war was fought and the fact Britain eventually lost was surprising. The British had a professional and experienced army. Whereas the Americans had untrained militias and originally many colonists opposed the fighting and said they were loyal to Britain. However, the British army's behaviour was seen as brutal and George III started to be referred to as a **tyrant**. Gradually more Americans came to support the war and the militias formed into a professional army under the leadership of General George Washington. The Americans also received support from France and Spain which contributed to their eventual victory. Another key reason why the Americans won was the popularity of the war in America compared to Britain. This is best evidenced by the popular support American women lent to the war. Women led **boycotts** against British goods to harm Britain financially. Some women, like Deborah Samson (right), were so committed to the American victory that they disguised themselves as men and fought in the war themselves.



The USA had declared itself independent in the early stages of the war. The **constitution** that the leaders then designed was equally important. This constitution was inspired by some Enlightenment ideas. America was to become a republic which would be led by a president. To prevent future presidents becoming tyrants, the constitution used Montesquieu's idea of the separation of powers. To this day, American Presidents control the government but cannot vote for new laws or decide questions of innocence or guilt. Instead Congress debates and votes on new laws and judges decide whether people are innocent or guilty of breaking the law.



# Glossary

**Boycott:** a refusal to buy certain products as a protest.

**Congress:** the name of the USA's parliament. Congress is responsible for passing laws and agreeing budgets.

**Constitution:** the rules about how a country should be run.

**Empire:** a group of countries all ruled by one monarch.

**Republic:** a political system without a king or queen.

**Tyrant:** a cruel ruler who abuses their power.



## Comprehension Questions: answer in full sentences

1. What was the official name of the country that won the war of 1775-1783?

Sentence starter: *The country that won the war of 1775-1783 was called....*

2. What two names are given to the battles fought between Britain and America in 1775-1783?
3. Who led the American armies?
4. What kind of government did independent America choose for itself?
5. Challenge question: What were the key reasons why America won the War of Independence?



# Extension Question

6. What type of change did America experience between 1783 and 1787?

Choose option 1, 2 or 3 and choose which examples to use to support your argument.

| Sentence starters options:                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. <i>Between 1775 and 1787 America was changed by Enlightenment ideas. For example...</i></p> <p>2. <i>Between 1775 and 1787 American experienced limited change which could be described as 'conservative'. For example....</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Separation of Powers in USA's new constitution</li><li>- Republic rather than monarchy</li><li>- Fight for liberties</li><li>- Alliances with France and Spain</li><li>- Militias become trained army under Washington</li><li>- Fight for sovereignty</li><li>- Fight for taxes</li></ul> |

