

**What Happened in Massachusetts?**  
***Using Primary Sources to Learn about George Washington in  
Massachusetts during the Revolutionary War***  
**For grades 3-5**

Scope and Sequence:

This sequence of lessons is part of a year-long curriculum focusing on colonial history in Massachusetts. Students will have previously studied the Pilgrims' voyage and early days in Plymouth, colonial life (1 lesson for this topic is included below), and the events leading up to the Revolutionary War, including the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Siege of Boston, and Bunker Hill.

Multiple standards from the Massachusetts State Frameworks will be met throughout this sequence of lessons. Students will develop skills as well; they will think like historians and become familiar with the use of primary sources to draw conclusions.

I currently teach third grade at a public school in Massachusetts, and this summer participated in the NEH's Summer Institute for teachers "George Washington and His Legacy: Myths, Symbols and Reality". The Institute gave me the opportunity to become familiar with many resources available to teachers. Our class visited the Longfellow House in Cambridge, Massachusetts, also known as Washington's Cambridge Headquarters during the Revolutionary War. There, I was exposed to the Massachusetts curriculum guide designed for middle school and high school students by Marc Nachowitz, the full text of which is available at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/sec/mus/muspdf/gwcurric.pdf>. This is a great resource for ideas, primary sources, and background information. Since the lessons are written for middle and high school students, I worked on adapting several lessons to make them relevant for elementary aged students. Of the Revolutionary lessons that follow here, Lessons 1, 2, and 3 are adapted from Nachowitz's unit.

The Longfellow House would be a possible field trip for local schools to wrap up the unit. Their website is [www.longfellowfriends.org](http://www.longfellowfriends.org), and there is a link to the National Park Service's official site for the house. The house was George Washington's headquarters while he was in Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, and was later owned by the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who appreciated the house's role in Revolutionary history.

## COLONIAL TIMES LESSON

**Objective:** Students will compare manners in colonial life with those of today.

**Standard:** (Cities and Towns of Massachusetts 3.12) Explain how objects or artifacts of everyday life in the past tell us how ordinary people lived and how everyday life has changed.

**Teacher's Note:** This lesson uses *The Rules of Civility*, a list of manners used by middle- and upper-class schoolchildren in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. George Washington copied these rules as a youngster; while historians cannot prove the extent to which he followed these throughout his life, one can find many similarities between the Rules and the way he lived his life. One might argue that middle- and upper-class schoolchildren may not have been “ordinary people”; however, if you have used the text *If You Lived in Colonial Times...* (by Ann McGovern) with your class, you might discuss similarities between the manners mentioned in this text and those mentioned in the *Rules of Civility*.

Access a list of *The Rules of Civility* at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/civility/index.html> (Read a description of the Rules and click on the link to see them transcribed, as well as pictures of the original.)

### Activity:

- Discuss what manners are and why we have them. Are they the same in every country and across time? What are some manners that exist today?
- There are documents that show us what manners people in colonial times valued. (Here, you'll be using *The Rules of Civility*; refer to it as a primary source document, one that is from the time period studied, though you won't be using an original copy! The idea of primary sources will be covered later in greater depth.)
- Students will get a chance to look at the different Rules of Civility. Go over one as a group and “translate” into modern English. Do we still follow this rule? When/where/why?
- Students work in pairs to “translate” some of the Rules of Civility, and decide whether we still follow these rules today.

**Closure:** Go over as a whole group, focusing on the similarities and differences between manners in colonial times and today (this can be visually supported with a Venn Diagram; you might also have students fill out their own Venn before discussing as a group), and have students sum up what they learned in the end with the sentence starter “I learned...” (For example, “I learned that colonial people had some similar manners to us, and some

different manners.”) You could also have students complete a Venn after the activity as a post-assessment. To tie directly back to the standard, have students finish the sentence “One example of how everyday life has changed is...”

**Differentiation:** Provide a list to some or all with common phrases used (nor, for example). Talk about the structure of sentences (often use “not” after the verb), and if you don’t used mixed groups, then consider the language of the rules you give to each group.

**Extension:** Students can individually re-write rules on separate pages and illustrate. (They can easily type each rule and print using Landscape format.) These can be compiled and bound into a book. Alternatively, students could act out some of the rules, with one student breaking the rule, and another admonishing him or her in the original language of the rule.

## REVOLUTIONARY LESSONS

### Lesson 1 (adapted from Nachowitz)

**Objective:** Students will use primary sources to draw conclusions about George Washington's character.

**Standard:** (General Standard 8, Understanding a Text) Students will identify the basic facts and main ideas in a text and use them as the basis for interpretation. 8.17 Distinguish fact from opinion or fiction.

#### Activity:

- Explain to students that they are going to be working as historians do, and will be using primary sources to find the answer to a question. Give students some background information – that Washington was appointed to run the Continental Army as the colonists began to unify against the British. Explain what a primary source is, versus a secondary source. Use the June 15 entry from **Document 1: Washington's Pay** to model using a primary source to answer a question (How much was George Washington given per month for pay and expenses? \$500). Show students Washington's quote from the following day (excerpted below in Document 1) and explain what he was saying. Tell students that Washington asked NOT to be paid a salary for his work, and only wanted to be reimbursed for expenses. Explain that historians can take a primary document and "figure out" something about a person. (This could be organized on a T chart, see sample below.) Explain that as a class, you are going to use primary documents to answer the question of what George Washington's character was like. (Discuss the terms character, personality trait, etc., as necessary.) Come up a possible characteristic of George Washington based on the fact that he was offered \$500 a month and only wanted to be reimbursed (that he wasn't doing it for money; that he was generous).
- As a class, preview any vocabulary and look at **Document 2: Thomas Jefferson**. Students should think-pair-share about what Thomas Jefferson thought about George Washington, and what their opinion is about Washington after reading this. Add to chart.
- Preview vocabulary for the excerpt of **Document 3: Letter From John Adams to Abigail Adams**. If you've worked with character traits with your students before, these are great words for them to be familiar with. Encourage students to focus on "getting the gist" as Colonial English is written differently than modern English. Have students work in pairs to figure out what Adams thinks of Washington here.

**Closure:** Share about the letter as a group and add to the class T chart.

Now tell students that historians have to be very careful when they're trying to "figure out" things about historical figures. Review the difference between a fact and opinion. Looking at the side of the T chart which lists the primary sources, label each as fact or opinion (only the first document recorded facts, while the second two showed individuals' opinions of Washington). Tell them that historians have to be extra-careful when looking at the second two documents (Jefferson's and the letter). Why? Explain that if a historian read only one or two documents that express opinions about Washington, and Washington's enemy wrote them, they might have a very different view of him than if they only read 2 documents, but that were written by his best friend. Therefore, historians need to read as many documents as possible before making their own opinion. There are tens of thousands of documents about Washington, and some historians spend their whole lives reading them. (Depending on your class, you can talk about the fact that Washington did have a conflicted relationship with Jefferson, yet he still wrote this about Washington. Adams didn't always express the most positive sentiments about Washington, either.)

But, since they are learning to be historians, they can practice making an opinion today. Look at the right side of the T chart and ask, "Overall, what can we assume about George Washington?" (That he was smart, generous, a good leader, etc.) Most people would probably agree with us. This is part of what made Washington such an important part of our history. You may bring up, however, that while all these things are true, Washington wasn't perfect. For example, George Washington was a slave owner. Although he freed his slaves in his will, historians disagree about what this meant for someone who fought against the British for freedom.

Washington was chosen by the Continental Congress to lead the Continental Army in 1775, after the Battle of Lexington and Concord, during the Siege of Boston. Students will learn about his time in Cambridge over the next 2 lessons. They will also be using primary documents to find out facts as well as others' opinions of Washington.

**Documents for Lesson 1** (1 and 2 excerpted from <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/sec/mus/muspdf/gwcurric.pdf> )

**Document 1: Washington's Pay**  
Journals of the Continental Congress, Volume 2, 1774-1789  
Massachusetts Archives

Thursday, June 15, 1775

*Resolved*, That a General be appointed to command all the continental forces, raised, or to be raised, for the defence of American liberty.

That five hundred dollars, per month, be allowed for his pay and expences.

The Congress then proceeded to the choice of a general, &par; by ballot, &par; when George Washington, Esq. was unanimously elected.

*Resolved*, that the Congress will to Morrow again resolve itself into a committee of the whole to take into consideration the state of America.

Adjourned till to Morrow &par; at eight o'clock. &par;

(excerpt from Friday, June 16, 1775, quote from Washington)

“As to pay, Sir, I beg leave to assure the Congress, that, as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to have accepted this arduous employment, at the expense of my domestic ease and happiness, I do not wish to make any proffit from it. I will keep an exact Account of my expenses. Those, I doubt not, they will discharge, and that is all I desire.”

**Document 2: Thomas Jefferson**  
Excerpted by permission of Simon & Schuster.  
From: The Letters of Thomas Jefferson, 1743-1826

"[George Washington's] mind was great and powerful, without being of the very first order; his penetration strong . . . and as far as he saw, no judgment was ever sounder. It was slow in operation, being little aided by invention of imagination, but sure in conclusion. . . . He was incapable of fear, meeting personal dangers with the calmest unconcern. Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose, whatever obstacles opposed."

Document 3: Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams (1775)  
[http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/browse/letters\\_1774\\_1777.html](http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/browse/letters_1774_1777.html)

**June 17**

I can now inform you that the Congress have made Choice of the modest and virtuous, the amiable, generous and brave George Washington Esqr., to be the General of the American Army, and that he is to repair as soon as possible to the Camp before Boston.

...I hope the People of our Province, will treat the General with all that Confidence and Affection, that Politeness and Respect, which is due to one of the most important Characters in the World. The Liberties of America, depend upon him, in a great Degree.

Sample T-chart

Primary Sources Say...	So Historians Think...
* George Washington didn't want \$500/month, he just wanted to be paid back for expenses when he was Commander-in-Chief	He was generous, he wasn't fighting to make money. He was fighting for the colonies.
* Jefferson says he was slow to make a decision, but his decisions were good. He was very brave.	He was careful and brave.
* Adams thinks he is honest, kind, generous, and brave, and deserves respect.	He was honest, kind, generous, brave, and deserves respect.

## Lesson 2 (adapted from Nachowitz)

**Objective:** Students will describe Washington's rules for the troops in Cambridge.

**Standard:** (Cities and Towns of Massachusetts 3.9) Identify historic buildings, monuments, or sites in the area and explain their purpose and significance.

**Teacher's Note:** See Nachowitz Lesson 3 for good background information about Washington's command (including Dorchester Heights, which will be addressed in the next lesson).

### Activity:

- Explain that students will be using primary sources to learn about Washington's command in Cambridge, where he went after being named Commander-in-Chief.
- Using Google Earth, show students where Arlington is, and zoom out to scroll over to Cambridge and the Cambridge Headquarters (105 Brattle St, Cambridge MA; also called the Longfellow House for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poet who later lived in the house. This will be addressed later in the mini-unit).
- Students will answer the question, "What rules did General Washington make for the troops?" They will work in groups of 2 or 3 to find the answer using the General Orders of July 4, 1775 as their source. They should list the rules in modern English.
- Go over the rules as a group. Then, each group should make a poster displaying the rules in words and pictures, as if they were designing it for General Washington to post. Each poster should have a title.

**Closure:** Share posters. Read GW's hopes for the army, and explain that this was a fancy way of saying that he wanted all the colonies to work together (it's also how they actually spoke then!). You can talk a bit about how the colonies viewed themselves as separate, and they just started being called the "United Colonies".

**Extension:** There are several other excerpts from the General Orders which are a little more challenging, but can also be used for the same activity to expand upon the rules used above. Also, students can write down what rules they would make for their army, and what they would do to get the different colonies to work together.

## Documents for Lesson 2 (excerpted from the Nachowitz curriculum)

### Rules from the General Orders:

No Person is to be allowed to go to Fresh-water pond a fishing or on any other occasion as there may be danger of introducing the small pox into the army.

It is strictly required and commanded that there be no firing of Cannon or small Arms from any of the Lines, or elsewhere, except in case of necessary, immediate defence, or special order given for that purpose.

### More Rules from the General Orders:

The General most earnestly requires . . . and expects, of all Officers, and Soldiers, not engaged on actual duty, a punctual attendance on divine Service, to implore the blessings of heaven upon the means used for our safety and defence.

### More Rules from the General Orders for Officers:

All Officers are required and expected to pay diligent Attention to keep their Men neat and clean; to visit them often at their quarters, and inculcate upon them the necessity of cleanliness, as essential to their health and service. They are particularly to see, that they have Straw to lay on, if to be had, and to make it known if they are destitute of this article. They are also to take care that Necessarys be provided in the Camps and frequently filled up to prevent their being offensive and unhealthy. Proper Notice will be taken of such Officers and Men, as distinguish themselves by their attention to these necessary duties.

### Lesson 3 (Adapted from Nachowitz)

**Objective:** Students will explain what happened in Dorchester Heights and its significance to the Siege of Boston.

**Standard:** (Cities and Towns of Massachusetts 3.9) Identify historic buildings, monuments, or sites in the area and explain their purpose and significance.

**Teacher's Note:** See Nachowitz Lesson 3 for good background information about the army's activities, and the projected role of Dorchester Heights in an elaborate attack to take back Boston which was not actualized in its entirety. The documents in this lesson should be copied for each group, and cut apart so that they can be jumbled (by the teacher) and then ordered (by the student/s). There is a timeline sheet below that students can use to organize the events and then explain them in their own words.

#### Activity:

- Review the Siege of Boston, using GoogleMaps as necessary to show students where the troops were based in Cambridge, and explain how Dorchester Heights would be a good place for the Continental Army to control. Tell them that Washington and his advisors speculated that winning Dorchester Heights could help them take back Boston.
- The students' task will be to answer, "What happened at Dorchester Heights? Did the Continental Army succeed in ending the Siege of Boston?"
- Students can work in pairs or individually. Each group should get a set of documents (these are excerpts from letters written by Washington). They should first order them chronologically. Then, they should read through the documents and figure out what happened. They can explain each event in their own words (a phrase or two) and write this explanation on the timeline.

**Closure:** Go over the timeline as a group. Note that when the British first saw the fortifications put up overnight, one officer estimated that it was the work of 15,000 – 20,000 men, whereas in reality it was about 2,000. Washington and his troops left shortly after the Siege ended to meet the British in New York.

**Extension:** Have students read from the Revolutionary War Soldier's Diary and find the dates of the fortification of Dorchester Heights. Have them see if the soldier writes on these dates, and whether he participated in taking

Dorchester Heights. This diary is available through the Longfellow House website: [www.longfellowfriends.org](http://www.longfellowfriends.org) .

Documents Lesson 3 (Documents excerpted from the Nachowitz curriculum)

George Washington to Continental Congress, March 7, 1776  
George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799:  
Series 3a Varick Transcripts.

Cambridge, March 7, 1776.

Sir:

... But to return, on Monday Evening as soon as our firing commenced, a considerable detachment of our men, under the command of Brigadier General Thomas, crossed the Neck and took possession of the two Hills, without the least Interruption or annoyance from the Enemy, and by their great Activity and Industry before the morning advanced the Works so far, as to be secure against their Shot. They are now going on with such expedition that in a little time I hope they will be complete, and enable our Troops stationed there, to make a vigorous and obstinate stand.

... When the Enemy first discovered our works in the morning, they seemed to be in great confusion, and from their movements to have intended an attack.

**MILITARY JOURNAL, DURING THE AMERICAN  
REVOLUTIONARY WAR FROM 1776 TO 1783; DESCRIBING  
The Events and Transactions of this Period BY JAMES  
THACHER, M.D. LATE SURGEON IN THE AMERICAN ARMY.  
MILITARY JOURNAL - 1776**

March 5<sup>th</sup>

The anxious day has closed, and the enemy has failed to molest us. From appearances, however, there are strong reasons to suppose that they have only postponed their meditated work till another day.

Letter from Boston Selectmen

Boston, 8 March, 1776.

... his Excellency General Howe is determined to leave the Town with the

Troops Under his Command . . . his Excellency Genl. Howe . . . has no intention of destroying the Town, unless the Troops under his command are molested during their Embarkation or at their departure.

John Scollay, Timothy Newell, Thomas Marshall, Samuel Austin.

George Washington to John Hancock, President, Continental Congress, March 19, 1776

George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 3a Varick Transcripts.

Head Quarters, Cambridge, March 19, 1776.

Sir:

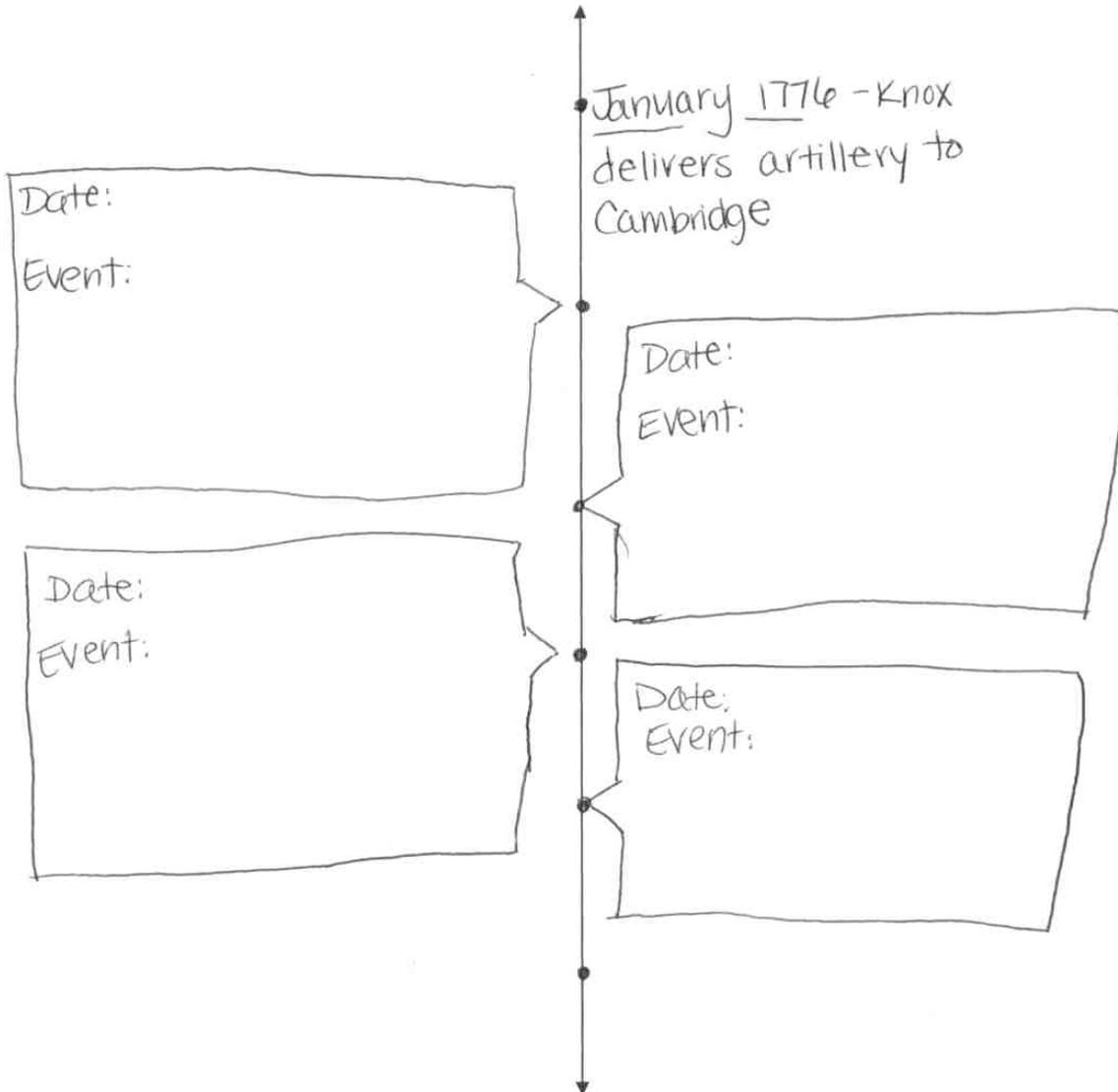
It is with the greatest pleasure I inform you that on Sunday last the 17th. Instant, about 9th O'Clock in the forenoon the Ministerial Army evacuated the Town of Boston, and that the Forces of the United Colonies are now in actual Possession thereof. I beg leave to congratulate you Sir, and the Honorable Congress on this happy event, and particularly as it was effected without endangering the Lives and property of the remaining unhappy Inhabitants.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Dorchester Heights Timeline

What happened in Dorchester Heights? Arrange the documents in time order and place each on a dot on the timeline. Then, write a summary of what happened in your own words for each event on the timeline.



## Lesson 4

**Objective:** Students will analyze poetry and compare different views of George Washington.

**Standard:** (General Standard 10) Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics of different genres. (10.2) Distinguish among forms of literature such as poetry, prose, fiction, nonfiction, and drama and apply this knowledge as a strategy for reading and writing.

**Teacher’s Note:** This lesson can be done with the whole group, or as a guided reading style lesson with a small group. You will be introducing and studying a stanza from Longfellow’s poem “To a Child”. I have included two versions of this stanza – one is the complete stanza, and the other omits 3 lines from the stanza. The complete stanza is a little harder, but offers great opportunity for talking about figurative language and picturing. Consider that oftentimes, working with poetry requires several lesson periods. Also discuss why this wouldn’t be considered a primary source, and the difference between poetry and historical sources.

### Activity:

- Go over vocabulary that will be seen in the stanza. One way to approach this is to show the students a word, pronounce it together, and then talk about its meaning. With students who need more reinforcement, you can have them practice using the words in a sentence and making flashcards (by drawing pictures or writing definitions). This in itself would be one session, and probably most effective as a small group. You need to choose these words based on your students; keep in mind that some may need vocabulary support and some may simply need decoding support. Possibilities include oft, recalls, dwelt, (yonder, broad, besieging, encircled; if you are using the full stanza), majestic, tread, gloom, weary.
- Activate background knowledge. Who is often called the “Father of his Country”? Why? What do we know about Washington’s command in Cambridge? Where did he stay? This poem was written by Longfellow about the house in Cambridge where Washington lived when the troops were stationed in Cambridge (and where Longfellow, also the author of “Paul Revere’s Ride”, lived himself. See website [www.longfellowfriends.org](http://www.longfellowfriends.org) for more information. Longfellow valued the rich history of the house.)
- Teach the poem as you would normally present a new poem to students. Possible activities include illustrating the different parts of the stanza (for example, breaking it down into 4 3-line sections), talking and/or writing about why George Washington might have felt so weary, etc.

**Closure:** What did Longfellow think of Washington? Students should use lines from the poem to support their opinion.

From "To a Child" by Henry  
Wadsworth Longfellow

Once, ah, once, within these walls,  
One whom memory oft recalls,  
The Father of his Country, dwelt.  
And yonder meadows broad and damp  
The fires of the besieging camp  
Encircled with a burning belt.  
Up and down these echoing stairs,  
Heavy with the weight of cares,  
Sounded his majestic tread;  
Yes, within this very room  
Sat he in those hours of gloom,  
Weary both in heart and head.

From "To a Child" by Henry  
Wadsworth Longfellow

Once, ah, once, within these walls,  
One whom memory oft recalls,  
The Father of his Country, dwelt.

...

Up and down these echoing stairs,  
Heavy with the weight of cares,  
Sounded his majestic tread;  
Yes, within this very room  
Sat he in those hours of gloom,  
Weary both in heart and head.

## Lesson 5

**Objective:** Students will analyze poetry and compare different views of George Washington and of the American Revolution.

**Standard:** (General Standard 10) Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics of different genres. (10.2) Distinguish among forms of literature such as poetry, prose, fiction, nonfiction, and drama and apply this knowledge as a strategy for reading and writing.

**Teacher’s Note:** This lesson uses a very small excerpt from Camillo Querno’s poem “The American Times: A Satire in Three Parts”. This is fairly difficult; it may be better presented in the whole group, allowing the class to work through the lines together and “get the gist”. (Also discuss this as a primary source.) It may be a good way to introduce *George vs. George: The American Revolution as seen from Both Sides*, by Rosalyn Schanzer, and begin talking about perspective and why the British (as well as a significant number of colonists) didn’t agree with the colonists’ desire to be free of British rule.

### Activity:

- Preview vocabulary, activate background knowledge, and present the poem as you would normally. Explain that the poem is addressed to Washington. Discuss what the author thought of Washington the author may have felt this way. Ask or note why the author uses “thy King” and “thy Country” – to what country is the author referring?
- *George vs. George* is a good resource for talking about perspectives, as is *If You Lived at the Time of the American Revolution*, by Kay Moore. *George vs. George* has an in-depth description of the Stamp Act, as well as a description of Lexington and Concord from the British perspective. Even though these events pre-date Washington’s post as Commander-in-Chief, you can use it to help students understand how to look at the war from a different perspective. (Note that Moore’s book does reference rape later in the text, but earlier sections are appropriate.)
- Have students work in pairs to create an advertisement (“propaganda”) supporting the American or British side. They should try to persuade the reader to join their cause, and therefore need to provide reasons for joining either side. Remind students that no one knew who was going to win – and the colonists were the underdog. (New Yorkers teaching in Massachusetts might like to compare this to, say, the Giants winning the Super Bowl against the previously undefeated Patriots in 2008.)

**Closure:** Students share their posters. Remind them that no one knew the colonists would win this war, which made it a hard decision at the time. Some families split their loyalties on purpose so that someone would be on the winning side no matter what. Some families were actually divided over the decision.

**The American Times  
A Satire in Three Parts  
by Camillo Querno**

**Hear thy indictment, Washington, at large;  
Attend and listen to the solemn charge:  
Thou hast Supported an atrocious cause  
Against thy King, thy Country, and the laws;**

...