

The Time Trial of Benedict Arnold

Purpose

By debating the legacy of Benedict Arnold, students will build reasoning and critical thinking skills and an understanding of the complexity of historical events and historical memory.

Program Summary

In this presentation, offered as a public program at the National Museum of American History from December 2010-April 2011, an actor portrays a fictionalized Benedict Arnold, hero and villain of the American Revolution. Arnold, in dialogue with an audience that is facilitated by an arbiter, discusses his notable actions at the Battle of Saratoga and at Valcour Island, as well as his decision to sell the plans for West Point to the British. At the conclusion of the program, audience members consider how history should remember Arnold, as a traitor, or as a hero. This set of materials is designed to provide you an opportunity to have a similar debate with your students. Included in this resource set are a full video of the program, to be used as preparation for the classroom activity, and Arnold's conversation with the audience divided by theme, to be used with the resources offered below for your own *Time Trial of Benedict Arnold*. A full version of the program is available [here](https://vimeo.com/129257467). [<https://vimeo.com/129257467>]

Grade levels 5-8

Time Three 45 minute periods

National Standards

National Center for History in the Schools:

United States History Standards; Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s);

Standard 2: The impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History and Social Studies: Speaking and Listening Standards

Comprehension and Collaboration, standard 1:

Grades 6-8: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade level topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Comprehension and Collaboration, standard 3:

Grade 6: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Grade 7: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Grade 8: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Historical Background

Benedict Arnold was born on January 14, 1741 in Norwich Connecticut, the son of a merchant. Arnold fought in the French and Indian War before going into business as an apothecary. He joined the Revolutionary cause as head of a Connecticut militia company in March of 1775, where his first engagement was in the Battle of Fort Ticonderoga in May 1775.

In October 1776, American troops in a ragtag collection of newly built boats faced an advancing line of British ships on Lake Champlain in New York. The Americans, under the command of Benedict Arnold, were forced to retreat, but not before they fought the British to a standstill. Although most of Arnold's flotilla, including the gunboat *Philadelphia*, sank on the first day of battle, his leadership in the Battle of Valcour Island successfully delayed British efforts to isolate New England and therefore helped ensure a victory at Saratoga in 1777.

Fought in 1777 in northern New York State, the Battle of Saratoga was a major battle of the Revolutionary War. Benedict Arnold was a leader of the American offensive, which forced the surrender of British troops under General John Burgoyne. In the first battle at Saratoga, the British lost two men for every one American casualty. In terms of ground gained, however, both sides fought to a draw. In the second battle, British losses were four to one. The rebels' victory was overwhelming. After many negotiations, Burgoyne officially surrendered on October 17, 1777. At least 1,000 British coalition forces were killed in two days of horrific fighting at Saratoga; nearly 5,000 surrendered and were held as prisoners of war until 1783.

When news of the American victory reached Europe, France entered the war on the side of the patriots. Money and supplies flowed to the American cause, providing Washington's Continental Army with the support necessary to continue its fight against Great Britain. Britain's loss at Saratoga proved disastrous. It signaled to the European powers that the rebels were capable of defeating the English on their own. More than any other single event, the Battle of Saratoga proved decisive in determining the eventual outcome of the war.

However, when Arnold felt that his military service and sacrifice were not recognized by Congress, he began secret negotiations with the British in 1779. The following year, he presented the British with drawings of West Point and a strategy on how to capture the garrison without losses. Arnold's plot was discovered, and his British contact was hanged by the Continental Army. Arnold served in the British army until the end of the war. In 1782, he and his family moved to London where he died in 1801.

Additional Resources

From the National Museum of American History

[*The Price of Freedom: Americans at War*](#) (see "War of Independence"):
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory>

Gunboat Philadelphia

[<http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/gunboat-philadelphia>]

From the Library of Congress

George Washington Papers

[<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/1780.html>]

Includes Washington's orders to Arnold to take control of West Point; Washington's reprimand of Arnold for his conduct as commander of Philadelphia; and a letter from Arnold pleading for his wife, a Loyalists sympathizer and co-conspirator, among others.

[Proclamation of Benedict Arnold, October 20, 1780 transcription:](#)

[\[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/homefrnt/arnold.html\]](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/homefrnt/arnold.html)

From the University of Michigan

[Spy Letters of the American Revolution](#) See July 15, 1780, Benedict Arnold to John André, in which he offers to sell West Point [<http://clements.umich.edu/exhibits/online/spies/lounge.html>]

Readings

For teachers:

Benedict Arnold's Navy, James L. Nelson

Benedict Arnold: Revolutionary Hero, James Kirby Martin

The Gunboat Philadelphia and the Defense of Lake Champlain in 1776, Philip K. Lundeborg

For students:

Spitfire: A North Country Adventure, Kate Messner

Triangle Histories of the Revolutionary War: Battles- Battle of Valcour Bay, Scott Ingram

Author Jean Fritz has also written a variety of books on the colonial and Revolutionary War eras, including *Traitor: The Case of Benedict Arnold* and *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?*

Materials for Students

Copies of biography of Benedict Arnold, timeline, and vocabulary

Copies of primary source documents (one copy for each group member)

Motivation

Begin by asking students if they have ever heard of Benedict Arnold. Collect responses if they have and create a KWL chart about Benedict Arnold. Explain to students that they will be investigating a famous character from the Revolutionary War and show the video introduction. Or, as an additional motivating activity, before viewing the introduction to *Time Trial of Benedict Arnold*, students may view episode #32 of [Liberty's Kids](http://libertyskids.com) [<http://libertyskids.com>] about Benedict Arnold, available on [YouTube](http://youtu.be/9JEXcuqVGQ) [<http://youtu.be/9JEXcuqVGQ>].

Procedure

After viewing the [introduction](#) to the program [<https://vimeo.com/161090528>]

ask students, *Who is Benedict Arnold?* Explain that they will each have the opportunity to investigate a document that helps to tell Arnold's story. Divide the students into groups, and provide each group with a separate set of documents (sources for groups 3-6 can be found in the [George Washington Papers](#) at the Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>) :

Group 1: [Portrait of Benedict Arnold](#), Library of Congress [<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b15941/>]

Group 2: [Benedict Arnold oath of allegiance](#), National Archives and Records Administration [<http://research.archives.gov/description/300357>]

Group 3: [George Washington's General Orders, April 6, 1780](#), reprimanding Benedict Arnold for conduct as commander of Philadelphia, part 1

Group 4: [George Washington's General Orders, April 6, 1780](#), reprimanding Benedict Arnold for conduct as commander of Philadelphia, part 2

Group 5: [George Washington orders Arnold to take command of West Point, August 3, 1780](#)

Group 6: [Letter to George Clinton, governor of New York, September 26, 1780](#), on Arnold's defection

Have students examine the documents, then explain who they think he is based on what they learned from the document. As you review, use the PowerPoint slides to discuss each document. Ask the class to consider the question again, based on all of the descriptions they learned from each group. Has their opinion changed? Is he a traitor, or a hero?

Note: Students may use the primary source analysis worksheets included in [Engaging Students with Primary Sources](#) (<http://historyexplorer.si.edu/PrimarySources.pdf>) as they examine their assigned document, or to differentiate, create a modern version of each document for students. Very advanced readers may be provided [Benedict Arnold's proclamation on October 20, 1780](#).

Next, explain that Benedict Arnold is a complicated figure in American history, recognized both for his heroism in leading major battles for the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War and for his treachery in conspiring to turn over a major fort to the British. Explain to students that they will be participating in a conversation with Arnold about his deeds, and will decide how they as a class view his story.

Use the following prompt questions to begin the conversation about Arnold's actions, then provide the recorded response, or have students develop a list of their own questions about Arnold and select the appropriate recording as a response.

Is Benedict Arnold a traitor?

[If I Am a Traitor](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129259318>]

If Benedict Arnold is known as a traitor, whom or what did he betray? Of what may we accuse Arnold?

[You Betrayed Your Country](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129444671>]

[<https://vimeo.com/129456919>]

[You Betrayed General Washington](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129457773>]

[You Betrayed the Declaration of Independence](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129448610>]

[You Began a Conspiracy](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129458343>]

[You Betrayed Congress](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129450578>]

[Did You Take Money?](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129453690>]

[You Betrayed the Soldiers](#)

Possible prompt for the following sections: Why should we consider Benedict Arnold a hero?

[How Were You Injured?](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129452827>]

[Why Should You Be Remembered?](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129451836>]

Prompt for conclusion: How should we remember Benedict Arnold: traitor, hero, or something in between?

[Verdict: Acquittal](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129476975>]

[<https://vimeo.com/129477250>]

[Verdict: Undecided](#)

[<https://vimeo.com/129477536>]

[Verdict: Conviction](#)

Final Activity Ideas

- Have students imagine that a member of Congress has [proposed legislation](#) to build a monument to Arnold on the National Mall. Have each member of the class write a short speech responding to this proposal. If students believe Arnold should receive a monument, ask them to design their ideal monument for him. To extend this activity, partner with another school to view the videos, then have students present their speeches [via Skype](#).
- Have students write a letter from a friend of Benedict Arnold to Arnold explaining why s/he does or does not support his actions.

Vocabulary

Definitions adapted from Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, www.m-w.com

Reville (verb): hate

Tyranny (noun): oppressive power

Exemplary (adj.): worthy of serving as an example; commendable

Tenacity (noun): the state of being tenacious, holding fast or sticking to something

Venerable (adj.): deserving honor or respect

Fraudulent (adj.): done by trickery or deceit

Avow (verb): declare or affirm

Fallacy (noun): untruth; falsehood

Grievance (noun): complaint

Vassalage (noun): state of being in a subordinate position, under another's power

Impropriety (noun): quality of being improper or not appropriate

Vehemently (adj.): in a forceful way

Betwixt (adj.): between

Foolhardy (adj.): foolishly adventurous or bold

Accolade (noun): praise or recognition

Asperse (verb): to attack with false charges; slander

Nefarious (adj.): evil

Enmity (noun): hatred



Biographical Sketch of Benedict Arnold

Benedict Arnold was a successful businessman and merchant by the age of twenty-one, and sailed many times for trade in the West Indies and Canada. Elected captain in the Connecticut militia in 1774, he was later given command of all American forces on Lake Champlain. Under his authority, a flotilla (a small fleet of ships) was built and made ready for action on the lake.

On October 11, 1776 Great Britain attempted to take Lake Champlain in New York, destroy the naval fleet of the Continental Army, and take control of Fort Ticonderoga. Benedict Arnold's leadership during this battle created a yearlong delay in Britain's planned invasion of Lake Champlain and the Hudson Valley. In this battle, the gunboat *Philadelphia* was sunk. The sunken ship was recovered and is now on view at the National Museum of American History. This allowed the newly formed Continental Army to recover during the winter and to achieve victory at Saratoga, New York, in the autumn of 1777, which brought support for the American effort from France.

By 1780, Arnold was conspiring to hand control of an important fort at West Point, New York, to the British. The plot was exposed, after which Arnold served the British, then moved to England at the war's end.

Timeline

April 1775: Battle of Lexington and Concord, start of the Revolutionary War

May 1775: Arnold participates in the capture of [Fort Ticonderoga](#).

December 1775: Arnold leads an invasion of Quebec, in which his leg is severely injured.

October 1776: Arnold slows the British advance at the Battle of Valcour Island on Lake Champlain.

August 1777: Arnold and his troops succeed in reversing the British at [Fort Stanwix](#).

October 1777: Arnold leads American troops to victory at the [Battle of Saratoga](#); Arnold is again wounded in the leg.

May 1779: Arnold begins providing information to British sources.

August 1780: George Washington [orders Arnold to take over command of West Point](#)

September 1780: Arnold's conspiracy is discovered during a review of the fort by General Washington. Arnold's British contact, [Major John André, was caught](#) with documents demonstrating the plan and incriminating Arnold. Upon hearing of André's capture, Arnold flees to a British warship, the *Vulture*, waiting in the Hudson River. André is hanged on October 2. Arnold spends the rest of the war as a brigadier general in the British army.

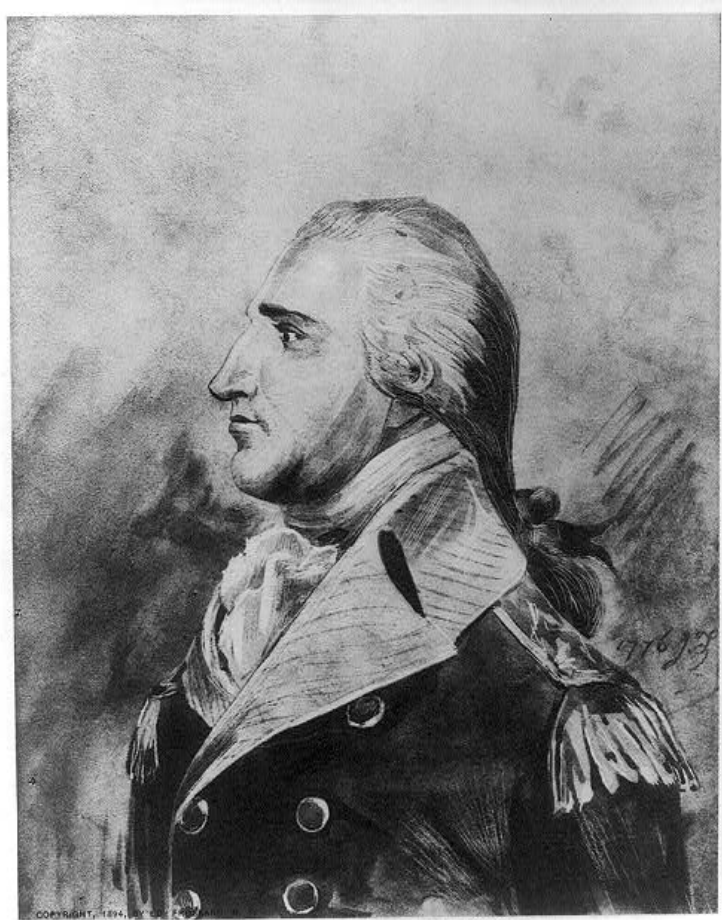
October 1780: Arnold issues a proclamation urging Americans to side with the British.

January 1781: Arnold leads a British invasion of Virginia, forcing Thomas Jefferson, then governor of Virginia, to flee his home, Monticello.

October 1781: Lord Cornwallis surrenders British troops at Yorktown.

September 1783: Treaty of Paris is signed, formally ending the war.

Group 1:



Portrait of Benedict Arnold, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Based on this image, who do you think Benedict Arnold is? How would you describe him? Write your thoughts below:

Group 2:

I Benedict Arnold Major General
do acknowledge the UNITED STATES of AMERICA to be Free, Independent and Sovereign States, and declare that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience to George the Third, King of Great-Britain; and I renounce, refuse and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him; and I do swear that I will, to the utmost of my power, support, maintain and defend the said United States against the said King George the Third, his heirs and successors, and his or their abettors, assistants and adherents, and will serve the said United States in the office of Major General which I now hold, with fidelity, according to the best of my skill and understanding.
Sworn before me this 30th May 1778 at the Artillery Park Valley Forge Henry B. Clinton

Benedict Arnold Oath of Allegiance, National Archives and Records Administration

Based on this document, who do you think Benedict Arnold is? How would you describe him? Write your thoughts below:

Group 3:

Head Quarters, Morristown, Thursday, April 6, 1780.

At a General Court Martial whereof Major General Howe was President, held on the 1st. of June last at Middle Brook and afterwards at Morristown from the 23rd. of December to the 26th. of January, in consequence of a resolution of the Honorable the Congress, for the trial of Major General Arnold on the following Articles contained in the proceedings of the Executive Council of the State of Pennsylvania at the City of Philadelphia the 3rd. of February 1779.

First. "That while in the Camp of General Washington at Valley Forge last spring, he gave permission to a Vessel belonging to persons then voluntarily residing in this City, with the enemy, and of disaffected characters to come into a Port of the United States without the knowledge of the authority of the State or of the Commander in Chief tho' then present.

2nd. In having shut up the Shops and stores on his arrival in the City, so as even to prevent officers of the army from purchasing, while he privately made considerable purchases for his own benefit as is alledged and believed.

3rd. In imposing menial offices upon the sons of Freemen of this State, when called for by the desire of Congress, to perform militia duty, and when remonstrated to hereupon, justifying himself in writing upon the ground of having power so to do. For that when a citizen assumed the character of a soldier, the former was intirely lost in the latter, and that it was the duty of the militia to obey every order of his Aids (not a breach of the laws and constitution) as his (the General's) without judging of the propriety of them...

*George Washington's General Orders, April 6, 1780,
reprimanding Benedict Arnold for conduct as commander of Philadelphia
The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, part 1*

Based on this information, who do you think Benedict Arnold is? How would you describe him? Write your thoughts below:

Group 4:

The Court passed the following sentence:

The Court having considered the several charges exhibited against General Arnold, the evidence produced on the trial and his defence are of opinion with respect to the first charge: That he gave permission for a vessel to leave a port in possession of the enemy, to enter into a port in the United States; which permission circumstanced as he was, they are clearly of opinion he had no right to give, being a breach of article 5th., section 18th. of the rules and articles of war.

Respecting the 2nd. charge, that altho' it has been fully proved that the shops and stores were shut by General Arnold's orders on his arrival at Philadelphia, they are of opinion that he was justifiable in the order, by the resolution of Congress of the 5th. of June 1778, and His Excellency, the Commander in Chief's instructions of the 18th. of June 1778. And with respect to the latter part of the same charge, "The making considerable purchases while the shops and stores were shut," they are clearly of opinion that it is entirely unsupported and they do fully acquit General Arnold of it.

They do acquit General Arnold of the third charge...The Court in consequence of their determinations respecting the first and last charges exhibited against Majr. General Arnold, do sentence him to receive a reprimanded from His Excellency the Commander in Chief.

The Honorable the Congress have been pleased to confirm the foregoing sentence by the following resolution lately received.

In Congress, February 12th., 1780.

*George Washington's General Orders, April 6, 1780,
reprimanding Benedict Arnold for conduct as commander of Philadelphia
The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, part 2*

Based on this information, who do you think Benedict Arnold is? How would you describe him? Write your thoughts below:

Group 5:

Head Quarters at Peekskill, August 3, 1780.

Sir: You are to proceed to West point and take the command of that post and its dependencies, in which are included all from Fishkill to Kings Ferry. The Corps of Infantry and Cavalry advanced towards the Enemy's lines on the East side of the River will [also] be under your orders and will take directions from you, and you will endeavor to obtain every intelligence of the Enemy's Motions.

*George Washington Orders Arnold to Take Command of West Point,
The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress*

Based on this information, who do you think Benedict Arnold is? How would you describe him? Write your thoughts below:

Group 6:

Head Quarters, Robinsons, September 26, 1780.

Dear Sir: I arrived here yesterday on my return from an interview with the French General and Admiral and have been witness to a scene of treason as shocking as it was unexpected. General Arnold from every circumstance had entered into a plot for sacrificing West Point. He had an interview with Major Andre the British Adjutant General last Week at Jos. Smiths where the plan was concerted; by an extraordinary concurrence of incidents, Andre was taken on his return with several papers in Arnolds handwriting that proved the treason. The latter unluckily got notice of it before I did, went immediately down the river got on board the *Vulture* which brought up Andre and proceeded to New York.

I found the post in the most critical condition and have been taking measures to give it security which I hope will be to night effectual. With the greatest respect etc.

P.S. Smith is also in our possession and has confessed facts sufficient to establish his guilt
*Letter to George Clinton, governor of New York, September 26, 1780, on Arnold's defection
The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress*

Based on this information, who do you think Benedict Arnold is? How would you describe him? Write your thoughts below:
