

Lesson Title:

The Revolutionary War: Analyzing Eyewitness Accounts for Believability

Subjects:

U. S. History, World History

Suggested time:

One 50-minute class period

Grade Level:

8-12

Essential Questions:

- Why do accounts of the same event differ?
- What account of an event is most accurate?
- How do primary sources help us understand an historical event?

Learning Targets:

- Students will look closely at accounts of the same event and be able to determine why some are more/less reliable than others.
- Students will be able to support their claims with evidence from primary source documents.

Overview:

Students are accessing primary sources online and frequently use these sources to help support their opinions and learn about historical events. The skill of determining the validity of a source is one that is important for the 21st century. In this lesson, students examine different accounts of the same event, and begin to consider how to analyze these events for implicit bias and accuracy.

An event near the beginning of the American revolutionary war provides a fascinating case study for analyzing eyewitness accounts and other primary sources. Often referred to as the shot heard round the world, April 19, 1775 marks an event when British soldiers had a significant conflict with fledgling rebel colonists near Lexington Green. Guns were fired between these two groups, most reports concur that eight American colonists were killed, a British soldier was slightly wounded, and a Major's horse was wounded. However, accounts of that event are confused and even contradictory. Excerpts of eyewitness accounts are attached to this lesson for students to read and interpret. It will be helpful if students have background information to the events leading up the America's war of independence, but this lesson can be used even if students do not have that prior knowledge.

Materials:

- The attachment “Primary Sources: Revolutionary War Shots”

Procedure:*Step 1 (warm-up activity)*

To start this lesson, assess students’ prior knowledge by asking what they know about the phrase: “The shot heard round the world.”

This was a term connected to the opening of war efforts between the American colonies and the British government in the poem *Concord Hymn* by Ralph Waldo Emerson. However, it is also used in reference to a significant event that marks the beginning of a conflict, or of a dramatic event. It is a phrase that has been linked to wars other than the Revolutionary War, as well as sporting events such as basketball, baseball, soccer, and hockey.

Once you have a sense of the background students bring to the class session, tell them that today they will be learning about an event that many consider to be the start of the Revolutionary War. [Note: that this is more symbolic. It is very difficult to identify one event or even one shot that marked the beginning. Many skirmishes preceded and followed the one students will explore in this lesson.] Additionally, students will be engaging in the type of thinking that historians engage in: reading eyewitness and primary source accounts of the same event, and then determining what happened.

Step 2: Preparing to read the accounts of the first shot

Present students with these four statements (print, or project them):

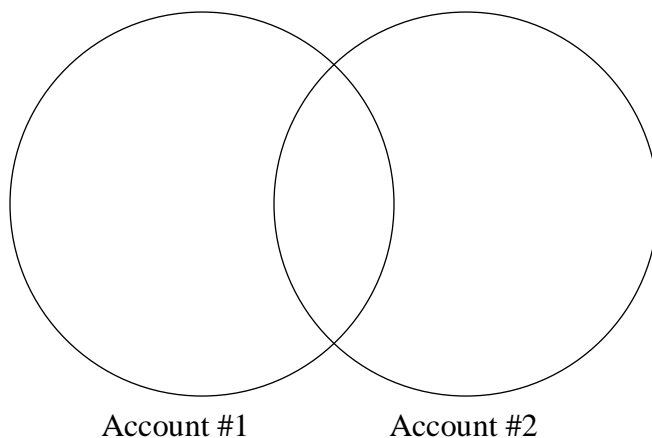
- 1) Historians are not sure who fired the first shot in Lexington; a shot that is credited with starting the Revolutionary War.
- 2) Back when this happened it was important to determine who fired first. If a soldier from the British army fired first, then the colonial army could claim that they were only protecting themselves and war was inevitable. If a colonist fired first, then the British could say they were simply enforcing the unruly behavior of the colonists, and this was not a reason for a prolonged conflict.
- 3) Historians do agree that the following similarities exist with each report of the event:
 - British Army was moving north to Concord from Boston, through Lexington
 - The event occurred in the early morning of April 19, 1775
 - Shots were fired
 - 8-9 men were wounded or killed
- 4) Four accounts provide four different perspectives of what happened. At the bottom of each account is the source (*in italics*).

Step 3: Analyzing and evaluating the primary sources

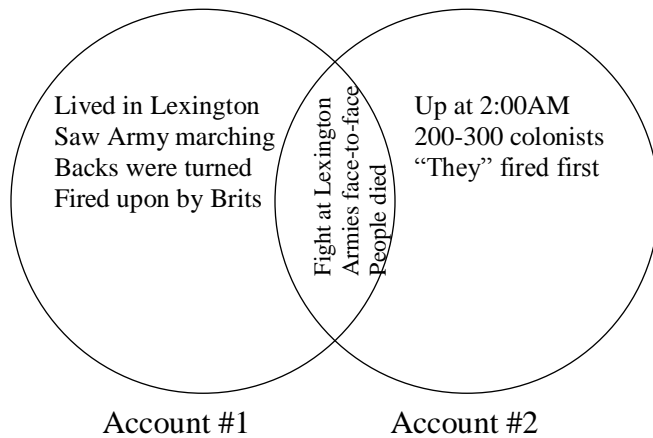
Handout to the students Account #1 and Account #2. Have students work in pairs, and guide them through this six-step process:

- 1) Who is the writer? Look at the description in italics at the end of the accounts. Before reading, have the pairs suggest one reason this may be a reliable source, and one reason this may be an unreliable source.
- 2) Read account #1 out loud while the students listen.
- 3) Ask for any questions about what you read. Emphasize that this was not written by one soldier, but was signed in agreement by 34 colonist (Minutemen). Have students turn to their partners and retell what happened according to Account #1. Give students about 10 minutes.
- 4) Read Account #2 out loud while students listen.
- 5) Ask for any questions about Account #2. Emphasize that this was the diary of an officer in the British army. Have students turn to their partners and retell what happened according to Account #2. Give students about 10 minutes.
- 6) Have students draw a Venn Diagram on a sheet of paper that resembles Figure #1 below.

Figure #1:



Have students fill the empty circle labeled Account #1 with information from that account, and fill Account #2 with information from that account. Write in the space where the two circles intersect anything from the two accounts that are the same. See the example below:



Have each pair discuss which account they believe, and to support their belief with evidence from the two accounts or from the source of the accounts (5 minutes). Have each pair report to the class the account they selected. Note: Often it is interesting to keep a tally on the board about the two accounts. Students are able to hear classmates' opinions. After each group reports, tell the class that this is the work historians engage in when reading primary sources. They struggle with determining what to do with conflicting reports. However, they also bring in as many sources of evidence as possible.

Step #4: Analyzing additional sources of evidence

Have students form groups of 4 (Note: simply have two pairs of students form a group, and these new groups will be formed quickly). Have each group of four read Account #3 out loud to groupmates. After reading, ask students to discuss any new information that they learned about the events of April 19th 1775 from this account, as well as their opinions about the reliability of the account (*The London Gazette*). (10 minutes)

Have the students repeat the same process for Account #4 (*The United States: Story of a Free People*, 1963). (10 minutes)

Step #5: Sharing findings

Bring the groups back together and as an entire class ask different groups to share who they think fired the first shot, and which sources they used to draw that conclusion. Remind them that the answer is still debated, so they will not be able to prove that their conclusion is right. However, they can claim how these four accounts guide their thinking.

Step #6: Thinking about Causes

Ask the class to share what they learned about using evidence to explain an historical event. Tell the class that historians suggest identifying the author/source before looking at the evidence or account. Follow-up on the comment by asking them to explain why it is important to know the source first. How did the sources of the 4 accounts they reviewed today influence their opinions of the accounts? If time permits, have the class respond to the question: What makes a reliable source?

Extension #1:

Following this module, visit the “Why War: Causes of Conflict” exhibit at the Flying Heritage Collection. Ask the students to visit the “data visualization wall” and select the American Revolution. As they look at the description of events, including the start of the conflict, ask them to look for the multiple sources of evidence referred to by the curators of this exhibit. Have students report on how confident they were that the descriptions were accurate and based on reliable sources. What evidence from the exhibit can they provide to support their claims?

Extension #2:

Account 5 and Account 6 add two more sources of evidence that can be incorporated into the lesson above. Depending on how much time is available and on the interest levels of the students, add these two accounts to the mix by repeating *Step #4: Analyzing additional sources of evidence* with these additional accounts. Both represent very different sources of evidence: #5 is a novel (historical fiction); #6 is a personal narrative written seven years after the event. As with the first four, these accounts have strengths and flaws. Helping students understand that all sources are not equally valid is an important analytic skill.

Extension #3:

Account 7 and Account 8 are both written as summaries of the events, and not by witnesses. Both sources are highly reputed, although very removed from the actual events of April 19, 1775. The words and phrases of these two accounts are more difficult, and may not be at the appropriate academic language level for all students. Having them consider these along with the previous six accounts simply adds a level of complexity to the analysis of these sources. Again, repeating *Step #4: Analyzing additional sources of evidence* will be a helpful strategy for reviewing these final two accounts.

Language Support:

To aid those with limited English proficiency or others who need help with academic language, place them in groups with at least one student who speaks English as a first language. The handout on risk factors can also be given to ELLs the day before this activity, and ELLs should be told which risk factor they will examine.

Standards:**Washington Standards (EALRs/GLEs)****8th Grade Social Studies****EALR GLE GLE Description**

History 4.3.1 Analyzes and interprets historical materials from a variety of perspectives in U.S. history (1776—1900).

- 4.3.2 Analyzes multiple causal factors to create positions on major events in U.S. history (1776 – 1900).

9th and 10th Grade Social Studies

EALR GLE GLE Description

- Civics 1.3.1 Analyzes the relationships and tensions between national interests and international issues in the world in the past or present.
- History 4.2.1 Analyzes how individuals and movements have shaped world history (1450—present).
- 4.2.3 Analyzes and evaluates how technology and ideas have shaped world history (1450—present).
- 4.3.2 Analyzes the multiple causal factors of conflicts in world history (1450 – present).
- 4.4.1 Analyzes how an understanding of world history can help us prevent problems today.

11th Grade Social Studies

EALR GLE GLE Description

- History 4.2.3 Analyzes and evaluates how technology and ideas have shaped U.S. history (1890— present).
- 4.3.1 Analyzes differing interpretations of events in U.S. history (1890—present).
- 4.3.2 Analyzes multiple causes of events in U.S. history, distinguishing between proximate and long-term causal factors (1890—present).
- 4.4.1 Analyzes how an understanding of United States history can help us prevent problems today.
- Skills 5.1.1 Analyzes the underlying assumptions of positions on an issue or event.

12 Grade Social Studies

EALR GLE GLE Description

- History 4.2.1 Evaluates how individuals and movements have shaped contemporary world issues.
- 4.2.2 Analyzes how cultural identity can promote unity and division.

Common Core State Standards:

Build Social Studies Literacy through Reading and Writing Common Core State Standard for ELA & Literacy in Social Studies Grades 9-10

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/9-10/>

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Build Social Studies Literacy through Reading and Writing Common Core State Standard for ELA & Literacy in Social Studies Grades 11-12

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/>

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

NCSS C3 Framework (College, Career, and Civic Life)

Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

Dimension 3: Argument Writing

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action