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TEACHER'S GUIDE

Authored by Joseph "Joe" Refinski

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EAGLEVISION PRODUCTIONS, INC. PRESENTS TEACHER'S GUIDES FOR TEN EDUCATIONAL WEBISODES

INTRODUCTION TO TEN EDUCATIONAL WEBISODES

Welcome to the formative years of the American Revolution 1775 – 1777. Based on the documentary ***Road to Liberty Through Their Eyes***, the producers have developed Ten (10) Educational Webisodes with a Teacher's Guide for teachers to use in their History and Social Studies lesson plans designed to be **rigorous, adaptable, and fun!** Each of the webisodes has its own specific activities tied to the theme of the five to eight-minute webisodes and cover a variety of topics, including how the American Revolution impacted the lives of Colonists, enslaved and free Blacks, and Indigenous Peoples.

CURRICULUM WRITER: JOSEPH "JOE" REFINSKI

Now retired, Joe served as a history teacher for 48 years. During his tenure, Joe won numerous teaching awards, recognitions and Fellowships, as well as several Teacher of the Year Awards, including the 2023 Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and he was named the 2025 NJ Council for the Social Studies Lifetime Educator Award for contributions to the study of history, civics and professional development. Joe has participated in several Teaching American History Grants. He is a Case Method Instructor (Harvard Business School) and is listed in the *Who's Who In Education*.

WEBISODE TITLES

Webisode 1 – Integrated Continental Army

Webisode 2 – Fortifications + Addendum

Webisode 3 – Divided Country + Addendum

Webisode 4 – Militias vs Standing Army

Webisode 5 – Camp Followers

Webisode 6 – Impact of War

Webisode 7 – Spies and Informants

Webisode 8 – Washington Crossing Logistics + Addendum

Webisode 9 – Winter Encampment/Forage Wars

Webisode 10 – Living History/Reenactments + Addendum

EAGLEVISION PRODUCTIONS, INC. PRESENTS
WEBISODE 2 – FORTIFICATIONS TEACHER’S GUIDE

NATIONAL HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Webisode 2 fulfills several National History Standards and Social Studies Themes including: NCSS Themes 2: Time, Continuity, and Change; 3: People, Places, and environments; and 6: Power, Authority, and Governance; United States History Content Standards Grades 5 -12 Era 3 – Standard 1: The causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory. Era 3 – Standard 2: The impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society; and The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies Grades 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12.

WEBISODE 2 SUMMARY: FORTIFICATIONS

Initially, stone walls and trees served as protection as the local Patriot militias and minutemen forced the British Redcoats to retreat back to Boston following the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775. Reinforced by over 15,000 New England militias who raced to join up with the local militias and lay siege to Boston, they dug in and built field fortifications (redoubts and entrenchments) on Bunker Hill and Breed’s Hill to prevent the Redcoats from breaking out of the city. The siege lasted almost a year until General George Washington ordered young Colonel Henry Knox to retrieve cannon from Fort Ticonderoga in the dead of winter, which enabled Washington to have his soldiers, in one night, fortify Dorchester Heights, which overlooked the city and harbor. This forced the British Commander-in-Chief, General William Howe, to evacuate the city in March 1776 and head to Nova Scotia to await reinforcements to arrive from England. Washington knew Howe had his sights set on capturing New York City and assigned General William Alexander, AKA Lord Stirling, to oversee completion of the fortifications of lower Manhattan and Brooklyn Heights. Significant manpower was needed to accomplish this, and Lord Stirling ordered his soldiers, and all the city’s male residents and their slaves to bring “spades and pick axes” to dig redoubts and entrenchments, build permanent forts, and erect street barricades to protect the city at all costs from an invasion by the superior British army.

HOW TO USE EACH WEBISODE AND THE TEACHER’S GUIDE

Webisode 2 would be useful for middle school and high school students (K6-12) studying United States History, Military History, European History, and Colonial History. Teachers may want to use all or some of the webisodes in the series over several days of history and/or social study classes to introduce their students to a variety of topics experienced during the formative years of the American Revolution. Each webisode has an individual Teacher’s Guide that provides a lesson plan with suggested classroom activities and/or applicable homework assignments. Alternatively, teachers may choose an individual webisode from this series as an overview to highlight a particular topic that occurred in the Revolutionary era for one lesson plan as outlined in that webisode’s Teacher’s Guide.

LESSON PLAN FOR WEBISODE 2 – *FORTIFICATIONS*

(Total Lesson Plan Times – combine Webisode with #1 + #2 = 56:49 or #1 + #3 = 56:49.)

(5 minutes) Screen Webisode Students are introduced to the topic by posing the following questions to the class and asking them to take notes that address these questions as they watch Webisode 2 – *Fortifications* (**Running Time: 6:49**):

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO COMPREHEND

- How did geography and the ability to hold "high ground" and "rivers" dictate the military strategy in constructing fortifications during the Revolutionary War?
- How did the use of fortifications change from the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 through the Siege of Boston in 1775/1776 to New York in 1776?
- In 1775 and 1776 constructing fortifications to defend against British attacks is hard labor. Whose task was it to build field fortifications like entrenchments and redoubts and permanent forts and street barricades to defend towns and cities?
- Were the extensive fortifications built in and around Manhattan put to good use, or was General Charles Lee correct when he said the city couldn't be defended against the might of the British Navy because it was surrounded by water?

SUGGESTED STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. **(5 minutes) Discussion** Following the screening of the webisode, students participate in a brief discussion about what went into constructing fortifications to defend high ground in the field of battle like the Battle of Bunker Hill and what was needed to defend a town or city like Manhattan and Brooklyn Heights located on rivers and estuaries? Students are asked if General Lee was right or wrong when he surmised that all of Manhattan's fortifications wouldn't be able to stop the British.
2. **a) (30 minutes) Mapping the Permanent Forts** Divide the students into three groups. Provide each group with a rudimentary map that shows the location of 1776 Manhattan in relation to Brooklyn Heights and the surrounding region and display a large version of the map on the wall/dry erase board. The teacher explains to the students that Congress ordered Washington to defend the city at all costs and extensive fortifications were constructed starting in February through August 1776. Using the Online Resources (below), have each group research where all the permanent forts were located and as the students find them, mark and name these forts on their maps. To reinforce research skills, students are reminded to get at least two sources to confirm that the data they discover is accurate.

b) (10 minutes) Presentation Following this research session to locate the permanent forts in Manhattan and Brooklyn, each group selects a group member to present how many forts they have found and the sources they used to find them. The teacher asks the student whose group has located the highest number of forts to mark and name the forts they have found on the display map and provide the sources they used to find them as the other groups check off these forts on their maps if they have located them, too. The second group presents the forts on their map that the first group hadn't found, and the final group adds any forts on its map that have not already been named. Using the display map that the three groups have created as an example, the teacher emphasizes the importance of conducting in-depth research that enabled the students to accomplish this mapping task.

3. Set Up for "Council of War" Role-play In a previous class with these students, roles have already been assigned to students to play General George Washington, General Nathanael Greene, General William Alexander (AKA Lord Stirling), Colonel Henry Knox, Colonel Samuel Parsons, Colonel Rufus Putnum and several non-speaking officers who are attending the Council of War and were provided role cards with a brief script of what to say during the role-playing for each student with a speaking part. It can be suggested that it may be fun if students attend class in colonial costume, such as wearing a tricorne or a bonnet. Note: This is not required.

a) (5 minutes) The Scenario The role-playing students are situated around a desk at the front of the classroom and the teacher or (selected dependable student) in the role of director sets up the scene. "It's April 13th and General George Washington arrives in Manhattan and immediately takes a tour with Lord Stirling to review the fortifications that have already been constructed. He calls for a "Council of War" with his Generals and other officers to discuss whether these fortifications are enough to defend the city from a British attack, or if they need to build additional fortifications to further protect the city." Director then calls, "Action!"

b) (15 minutes) "Council of War" Role-play Students are ready to read their lines.

General George Washington with a letter in his hand opens the Council of War. "Gentlemen, as you know, I assigned General Lee to plan the fortifications for the city, but before he departed and Lord Stirling took over construction of his plans, he wrote to me saying that he doesn't think this city can be defended because we are surrounded by water. From what I've seen, there is still much to be done."

Lord Stirling "When I took over, Your Excellency, construction of Lee's plans was at a standstill because several militias' enlistments had expired, but I resolved this issue by ordering the male inhabitants of the city and their slaves to do the digging."

General George Washington "Short enlistments are a bane of my life. I keep telling Congress that militias are undisciplined and can't be relied on. Now that you have enough manpower, what else do we need to do to protect the city?"

General Nathanael Greene “Your Excellency, the fortifications that Lee started and Lord Stirling is completing are in good shape to stop the British from attacking lower Manhattan, but I believe General Howe will attack Long Island first to take control of the East River, and I need more men to help me fortify Brooklyn.

General George Washington Frankly, General, I firmly believe Manhattan is General Howe’s target. However, I will assign a couple of regiments, including yours, Colonel Parsons, to help the General construct permanent forts in Brooklyn and field fortifications on the Heights of Guan to protect the passes that lead from Long Island to Brooklyn.

Colonel Samuel Parsons My regiment is ready to build the forts and redoubts to protect Brooklyn and secure the passes, Your Excellency.

Colonel Henry Knox I agree with Your Excellency that Manhattan is their target, and unless we build permanent forts along the banks of the North and East Rivers, they can sail up these waterways and land their troops behind lower Manhattan’s fortifications, which are set up for a frontal attack of the city from the harbor.

Colonel Rufus Putnam May I suggest building a fort at the highest point of Manhattan overlooking the North River and another on the Jersey side with their cannons aimed at any British warship trying to sail up the river to cut off our supply route? It will take a lot of manpower but could serve the “glorious cause” well.

General George Washington Excellent suggestions. Bombarding their warships from the land is the only way we can stop them. I charge you, Colonel Putnam and Colonel Knox, with organizing a party to survey the land and report back to me.

- c) **(15 minutes) Discussion** The teacher or student, in the role of director, calls, “Cut! That’s a wrap” and leads the class in applause colonial-style, “Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!” Once the class is back at their desks, the teacher then opens up a discussion with the students asking what they learned about where the best locations were to build fortifications and what was needed in order to build them.
- d) **(5 minutes) Homework Assignment** For a homework assignment and the teacher’s assessment, students are asked to use the Online Resources below and research all of the types of fortifications that were used in colonial times. The student will then make a list naming each type of fortification and write a sentence or two describing how the fortification is constructed, what purpose it is used for, and whether it’s a field fortification or a permanent fortification.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS LINKS

[National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Introduction | Social Studies](#)

[United States History Content Standards | Public History Initiative](#)

[English Language Arts Standards | Common Core State Standards Initiative](#) Click on History/Social Studies for the drop down menu. Then click on the Grade levels.

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR *FORTIFICATIONS* – Activity #2 Mapping

[Map: The 1776 New York Campaign | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#) Shows most of the locations of Forts in Brooklyn, Lower Manhattan and Fort Washington and Fort Lee.

[The Battle of Brooklyn Fortifications](#)

[American Revolution Forts & Defenses of New York City – Revolutionary War Journal](#)

[Forts :: New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center](#) The groups will use this alphabetical list to find forts in New York City and Brooklyn in or before 1776.

[Redoubts – America's Forts During the Revolutionary War – Revolutionary War Journal](#)

[Forts and Fortifications in the American Revolution – Revolutionary War Journal](#)

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR *FORTIFICATIONS* – Activity #3 “Council of War”

[Battle of Fort Washington - Wikipedia](#) Part of this article describes the decision in June 1776 to construct Fort Washington and Fort Mifflin with a Chevaux de Frise underwater barrier to prevent British ships from sailing up the North (Hudson) River.

[Major General Charles Lee to George Washington, 19 February 1776](#) Lee quote in letter to Washington “What to do with the City, I own puzzles me, it is so encircle'd with deep navigable water, that whoever commands the Sea must command the Town.”

[The American Revolution](#) Part of this article is about Lee's fortification plans for the city.

[George Washington loses the Battle of Long Island - August 27, 1776](#) Even though many of his officers thought Howe would attack Long Island, Washington disagreed as he believed Manhattan was Howe's target.

[The Brooklyn Campaign: The Battle of Long Island - Warfare History Network](#) Covers the work done to fortify Manhattan and Brooklyn and Washington making the mistake of thinking Howe's landing on Long Island was a feint to draw him out of Manhattan.

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR *FORTIFICATIONS*

McCullough, David **1776** (Simon & Schuster, 2007).

Schechter, Barnet ***The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution*** (Walker Publishing, 2002). An in-depth researched account detailing the troop movements and exact topography of Brooklyn.

HANDOUT FOR STUDENTS TO MAP PERMANENT FORTS IN 1776

