



EagleVision
Productions, Inc.

Webisode 4

Militias vs Standing Army

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Authored by Joseph "Joe" Refinski

With special thanks to the following sponsors for their generous support of this education project that enables teachers and the general public to learn more about the formative years of the American Revolution:

**The S. Dillard and Adrienne Kirby
Family Philanthropic Fund**



NEW JERSEY
**HISTORIC
TRUST**





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 people.

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 4 – MILITIAS VS STANDING ARMY TEACHER’S GUIDE

NATIONAL HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Webisode 4 fulfills several National History Standards and Social Studies Themes including: NCSS Themes 2: Time, Continuity, and Change; 6: Power, Authority, and Governance; 10: Civic Ideals and Practices; United States History Content Standards for 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 for Grades 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12.

WEBISODE 4 SUMMARY: MILITIAS VS STANDING ARMY

Following the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, New England Militias, totaling 15,000 Patriot soldiers, reinforced the local militias and minute men and laid siege to the City of Boston. When news reached Philadelphia, the 2nd Continental Congress convened in May 1775 and voted to reorganize these New England Militias into the Continental Army, naming General George Washington as its Commander-in-Chief. Even though the New England Militias fought bravely at the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775 and prevented the Redcoats from breaking the siege, when General George Washington took command of the Continental Army in July 1775, he immediately informed Congress that he considered these New England Militias were not up to the task of winning the war because he viewed them as “undisciplined” and “unreliable,” with short-term enlistments. Washington spent the rest of 1775 and 1776 stating in letters to Congress that if they wanted to win the war, they needed to create a professional Continental Army – a standing army – that was well-trained, adhered to military discipline, and required long-term enlistments.

HOW TO USE EACH WEBISODE AND TEACHER’S GUIDE

Webisode 4 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 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 4 – *MILITIAS VS STANDING ARMY*

(Total Lesson Plan Times – combine Webisode with #1 + #2 = 57:02 or #3 = 57:02.)

(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 4 – *Militias vs Standing Army* (**Running Time: 7:02**):

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO COMPREHEND

- If a professional standing army, like the British Ministerial Army, is better at winning battles, why did the 2nd Continental Congress initially establish the Continental Army made up of New England Militias, consisting of citizen soldiers?
- Why did many colonists fear professional “standing armies?”
- When General George Washington took command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775 during the siege of Boston, what was his opinion of the New England Militias that he imparted in a letter to the 2nd Continental Congress on July 10, 1775?
- In his July 4, 1775 General Orders, what specific behaviors does Washington insist his soldiers obey, and what do these commands show about the state of the army?
- Why did Washington repeatedly write to Congress in 1775 and 1776 that the militias were “undisciplined” and “unreliable,” and stating that Congress needed to form a professional “standing army” with long-term enlistments if it wanted to win the war?

SUGGESTED STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. **(10 minutes) Discussion** Following the screening of the webisode, students are encouraged to discuss the New England militias and why Congress chose to use these militias, as well as reinforce them with militias from the middle colonies, to create the Continental Army (a citizens’ army with short-term enlistments), rather than a standing army. Students are asked to consider if Washington, in a letter to the 2nd Continental Congress on July 10, 1775, was too quick to judge the militias as “undisciplined” and “unreliable” and open this topic up for discussion, too.
2. **a) (15 minutes) Research Session** Students will receive copies of General George Washington’s General Orders for July 4, 1775 transcript that establishes military discipline for the Continental Army. They should read it and make a list of the disciplinary actions and comportment Washington required from his officers and soldiers in their notebooks. Individual students volunteer to approach the front of the class to write one item from his/her list on the dry erase board. When the list is complete on the board, students discuss why discipline and cleanliness are important elements that must be observed to ensure a unified and healthy army.

b) (15 minutes) Pros and Cons Students are provided a handout listing two excerpts from General Washington's letters to John Hancock dated September 2, 1776, following the defeat at the Battle of Brooklyn, and the other dated September 25, 1776, following the Battle of Kip's Bay and capture of lower Manhattan by the British. Once again, Washington urges Congress to create a professional standing army with long-term enlistments. The handout also includes an excerpt from Washington's letter to his cousin, Lund Washington, dated September 30, 1776, where he unburdens his true frustrations with Congress and wishing he could resign. The class is divided into two groups and using online resources and their notes from the webisode, the teacher assigns one group to list the pros and cons of a standing army, and the other group to list the pros and cons of militias who serve in both the Continental Army, as well as state militias who protect their local communities. Once completed, one student from each group shares their group's pros and cons.

c) (5 minutes) Homework Assignment and Assessment For a homework assignment and the teacher's assessment, students will receive a list of online resources (see below) to research and write a two-page essay describing what happened after the British captured Manhattan that culminated in a devastating defeat at the Battle of Fort Mifflin and Washington's retreat across the Jerseys, which caused officers and soldiers to voice their concern about his leadership skills. His second-in-command, General Charles Lee, who wanted to be commander-in-chief, refused to bring his division to join up with Washington in December 1776. To complete the essay, students are tasked with researching and writing about what happened to Lee that enabled Washington to implement an audacious plan to attack the Hessian Garrison in Trenton. (Note: This victory led to Congress granting Washington full dictatorial powers that enabled him to recruit the 3rd Establishment Continental Army in early 1777 with new long-term enlistment requirements.)

3. **a) (5 minutes) Discussion** Following the screening of the webisode, students are asked to refer to their notes and provide their perspectives on the reasons why Washington wanted a professional standing army not a citizens' army.

b) (5 minutes) Hexagonal Thinking – The Militias vs Standing Army Debate

This lesson uses Hexagonal Thinking to explore George Washington's frustrations with the militia and his push for a professional Continental Army during the formative years of the American Revolution. Class is divided into four groups to explore the reasons why Congress incorporated the New England militias with short-term enlistments into the Continental Army following the Battle of Bunker Hill, naming General George Washington its Commander-in-Chief. Washington took command of the Army on July 3, 1775 and judged these citizen soldiers as "undisciplined" and "unreliable." He immediately petitioned Congress to create a professional standing army with long-term enlistments, which Congress feared to do because of the tyranny the colonists were subjected to when the British Ministerial Army occupied Boston.

c) (20 minutes) Hexagonal Thinking Exercise Students in each group receive Hexagonal Thinking Card Sets with the following suggested terms associated with this issue: *Liberty, Washington, Militias, Military Training, Continental Army, British Ministerial Army, Tyranny, Citizens' Army, Discipline, Cleanliness, Disease, Obedience, Brooklyn (1776), Kip's Bay (1776), Routs, Fort Washington (1776), Defeats, Retreats, Fear, Short-term Enlistments, Standing Army, 2nd Continental Congress, Long-term Enlistments...* and any other the teacher may deem useful and connected, plus a few blank cards for the students to create their own terms. Students are informed that the objective of this lesson is for the students to connect key concepts, people, and events during 1775 and 1776 in order to analyze Washington's concerns about the state militias and the need for a professional standing army. The student groups begin to lay out their cards, placing hexagons next to each other to show a connection (e.g., placing *Militia* next to *Short-term Enlistments* next to *Rout* etc.), emphasizing that for every connection, the group must discuss and come up with a rationale of why those two or more cards belong together. While observing, insight is gained by the teacher into the students' thinking and is able to immediately correct any misconceptions a group may have made, when applicable.

d) (15 minutes) Assessment and Formal Advice Report Upon completion of the task, each group will offer their assessment in two or three sentences by drafting a formal advice report to the 2nd Continental Congress regarding the structure of the new U.S. Army based on their Hexagon connections, and their rationale and analysis of the evidence they explored with a focus on the *Militias vs Standing Army, Discipline and Training*, and the *Danger of Standing Armies*. Each group will select a student to have their draft read orally to the class. The lesson concludes with the student groups working together to combine the best ideas presented in these drafts and have a selected student write the final formal advice report on the dry erase board. (Students' report may be similar or different from the following example: "*To the 2nd Continental Congress, based on our investigation of the war, we advise that a well-trained professional Continental Army is essential to national security. However, to satisfy concerns regarding tyranny and preserving liberty, this army must be under strict civilian control and subordinate to the state militias in times of peace.*")

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 level.

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR *MILITIAS VS STANDING ARMY*

[Standing Armies: The Constitutional Debate - Journal of the American Revolution](#)

[The Continental Army](#) U.S. Army Center of Military History.

<https://constitutionworld.com/founding-fathers-on-standing-armies/> Excellent resource that explains why the 2nd Continental Congress was wary of establishing a standing army.

[The Militia the Founders Envisioned, and What Remains Today - Building Blocks for Liberty](#)

[Trials in Command: George Washington's Difficulties During the Siege of Boston \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)

[George Washington, July 4, 1775, General Orders | Library of Congress](#)

[II. Letter Sent, 10–11 July 1775](#) to John Hancock, President of Congress.
National Archives – Founders Online.

[Washington takes command of Continental Army in 1775 | Article | The United States Army](#)

[The Role of Militia in the Revolutionary War | TikTok](#) Pulitzer Prize winner, Rick Atkinson speaks on the militia from an excerpt in his book *The Fate of the Day*. (Note: If permissible to access TikTok in the classroom. This video by the author is very relevant to the topic.)

[Militia, Minutemen, and Continentals: The American Military Force in the American Revolution | American Battlefield Trust](#)

[From Militia and Minute Men to Continentals | American Battlefield Trust](#)

[George Washington to John Hancock, 2 September 1776](#) Following the defeat at the Battle of Brooklyn, Washington voices his need for a standing army.

[George Washington to John Hancock, 25 September 1776](#) Following the defeat at the Battle of Kip's Bay, Washington expresses his concern that reliance on the militias will prove "the ruin of our cause."

[George Washington to Lund Washington, 30 September 1776](#) National Archives – Founders Online.

[The Lee papers .. : Lee, Charles, 1731-1782. \[from old catalog\] : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#) p. 293 Letter from Colonel Joseph Reed.

[The Lee papers .. : Lee, Charles, 1731-1782. \[from old catalog\] : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#) p.305 Letter to Colonel Joseph Reed.

[George Washington to Major General Charles Lee, 1 December 1776](#) Washington requests that General Lee hastens his march to join him or it may be too late to be of use.

[The Lee papers .. : Lee, Charles, 1731-1782. \[from old catalog\] : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#) p.348 Letter to Gates.

[Insights: General Charles Lee's Capture at Widow White's Tavern in Basking Ridge & Washington's Delaware Crossing Impact - Mr. Local History Project](#)

https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/ford-the-writings-of-george-washington-vol-v-1776-1777#lf1450-05_head_046 Letter from George Washington to his brother, John Augustine Washington, December 18, 1776 where he describes General Lee's capture and thinks "the game is pretty near up" because his army's enlistments expire at the end of the year.

[George Washington to John Hancock, 20 December 1776](#) Washington requests full control of the army (dictatorial powers) and reiterates that relying on the militias has failed and Congress must create a standing army.

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR *MILITIAS VS STANDING ARMY*

McCullough, David **1776** (Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2005).

Schechter, Barnet ***The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution*** (Walker Publishing, 2002).

Higginbotham, Don ***George Washington and the American Military Tradition*** (University of Georgia Press, 1987) Covers Washington's Military career from the French and Indian War to the Revolutionary War and includes his opinion of militias over a standing army.

Galvin, John R. ***The Minute Men: The First Fight: Myths and Realities of the American Revolution*** (Potomac Books, 2006) Winner of the American Revolution Round Table Award. The true history of some of America's first soldiers – not just shopkeepers and farmers but men who regularly trained and drilled to protect their local communities.