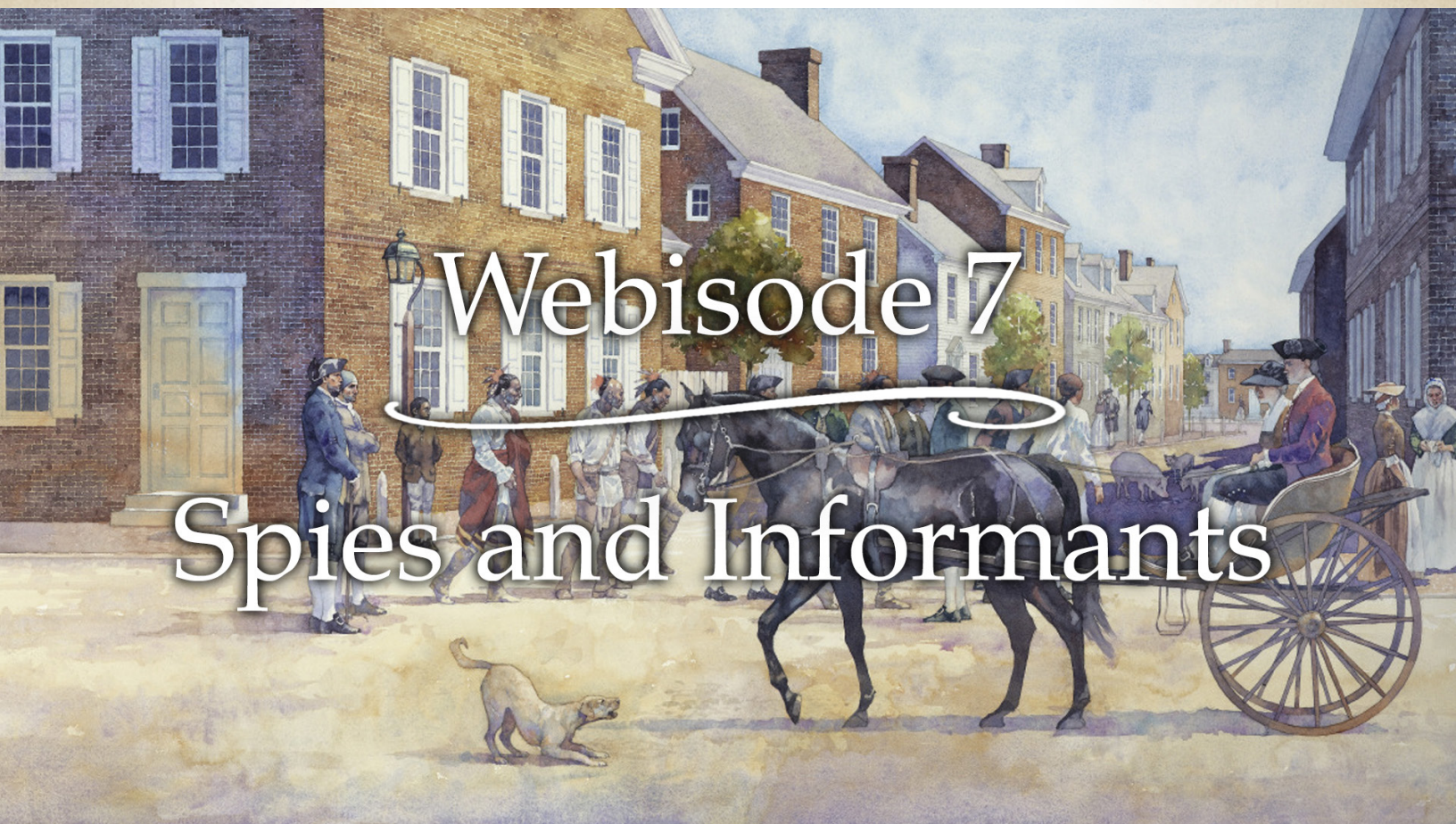




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Webisode 7

Spies and Informants

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:

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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 7 – SPIES AND INFORMANTS TEACHER’S GUIDE

NATIONAL HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Webisode 7 fulfills several National History Standards and Social Studies Themes including: NCSS Themes 2: Time, Continuity, and Change; 3: People, Places, and Environments; 5: Individuals, Groups and Institutions; and 6: Power, Authority, and Governance; United States History Content Standards for Grades 5 -12 – 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 7 SUMMARY: SPIES AND INFORMANTS

When General George Washington took command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775, he needed to establish a network of spies, a crucial element to help him learn about the British Ministerial Army’s locations and troop movements, which would enable him to effectively deploy his own troops. This took time to establish and some early attempts to infiltrate the British Ministerial Army proved to be costly because both Washington and the British Commander-in-Chief, General William Howe, were able to use their spies as double agents to plant misinformation. For instance, one of Howe’s spies, who Washington thought was a Patriot spy, planted misinformation that Howe had only landed 9,000 British troops on Long Island in August 1776, when he had actually landed over 22,000 troops. This impacted Washington’s decision to divide his troops between Manhattan and Brooklyn Heights in case Howe intended to launch his main attack on Manhattan. Near the end of 1776, Washington turned the tables on Howe when one of his spies infiltrated Trenton and planted misinformation about the demoralized condition of Washington’s army. Aside from spies serving in both armies, civilians, including women whose homes were often taken over by officers from both armies, may have overheard something from the opposing side and would pass this information on to the authorities belonging to the side they supported. These informants risked harsh consequences if they were caught.

HOW TO USE EACH WEBISODE AND TEACHER’S GUIDE

Webisode 7 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 7 – SPIES AND INFORMANTS

(Total Lesson Plan Times – combine Webisode with #1 + #2 = 57:50 or #3 = 57:19.)

(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 7 – *Spies and Informants*. **(Running Time: 5:50)**

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO COMPREHEND

- What is the difference between a spy and an informant?
- Why did both sides use spies and informants in the American Revolution?
- Did espionage change the outcome of battles in the American Revolution?
- How do ordinary people change the course of history through extraordinary risks?

SUGGESTED STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. (10 minutes) Discussion Following the screening of the webisode, a discussion is opened and the students are asked to define the difference between spies and informants based on the notes they took. As a follow up, students are asked if they think espionage was an essential element that the Generals on both sides required in order to make decisions about troop movements and battle plans? The discussion is enhanced by the teacher explaining that even though espionage was used on both sides, sometimes the information received wasn't always reliable because the spy was actually a double agent who provided misinformation. Students are asked to point out examples of misinformation and how these impacted two battles as described in the webisode.

2. a) (25 minutes) Research George Washington's Spy Network Following the Student Activity 1 discussion, the teacher explains that from the time Washington took command of the Continental Army in July 1775, he valued espionage as an important tool to combat the might of the British military and immediately recruited spies to infiltrate Boston and bring back information on the British strengths and any plans they had to try to break the siege. As spies must work in secret, the only evidence of this is a page from Washington's 1775 Financial Accounts (see Online Resources) that the teacher displays, which shows payments to unnamed spies. The class is divided into four groups. Each group is assigned to research one of the following spies or the Culper Ring in Washington's network:

Group 1 – Nathan Hale

Group 2 – Hercules Mulligan

Group 3 – John Honeyman

Group 4 – Benjamin Tallmadge and The Culper Ring

Using a list of Online Resources (see below), the four groups examine the biographies, accomplishments, and failures experienced by the spies or the Culper Ring that they are representing. Groups choose a member to write down the answers to the following questions that they will use when they present their group's findings to the class:

- 1) What was your role in the espionage activities for George Washington?
- 2) Did any of the information you acquired provide good intelligence to Washington that he was able to act on and/or escape from?
- 3) What method or methods did you use to successfully pass messages to him?
- 4) Did you work alone or work with others?
- 5) What cover story did you use to be accepted as a Loyalist in a British stronghold?
- 6) Did you ever face any danger or get caught?
- 7) What are some of the rules a spy should follow to avoid detection by the enemy?
- 8) What happened to you at the end of the war that prevented Patriots from attacking you as a Loyalist and running you out of town?

b) (10 minutes) Presentations One member representing each group brings their notes to the front of the room and makes a presentation to the class that describes their Patriot spy or spy ring and the rules they followed that made them successful (in the case of young Nathan Hale, the mistakes he made that led to his capture); how they avoided detection; and the methods they used to get important messages to General Washington.

c) (2 minutes) Homework Assignment For the students' homework assignment, the teacher asks them to read two articles in the Online Resources – one making the case that **John Honeyman** was **not** one of Washington's trusted spies and the other defending John Honeyman as one of Washington's **single-operative spies** instrumental in providing information about the Hessian garrison in Trenton that enabled Washington to plan an attack before the end of the year – a major turning point of the American Revolution. Based on the evidence after reading the two articles, the students will write a one-page response stating whether they think Honeyman **was** or **was not** a spy, and their reasons for coming to their verdict, which they will hand in at the next class for the teacher's assessment.

3. a) (5 minutes) Discussion – Washington's Network of Spies After screening Webisode 7, students are asked to define the difference between "spies" and "informants." The teacher informs them that today's lesson will focus on the importance General George Washington placed on building a network of spies from the moment he took command of the Continental Army in July 1775. An original document is shown (see Online Resources) providing evidence that Washington paid an unnamed spy to infiltrate Boston during the siege and report on the British strengths. Students have learned from Webisode 7 that Washington experienced some setbacks like receiving misinformation from a British double agent that led to his making mistakes as he planned to defend Manhattan against a British attack, which culminated in a devastating defeat at the Battle of Brooklyn on August 27, 1776. In September, young Captain Nathan Hale, who had volunteered to serve as one

of Washington's spies, even though he'd never been a spy, made some novice mistakes when he landed behind British lines on Long Island to gather information on British troop strengths that led to his capture, interrogation, and execution. Washington understood the enormous risks he placed on his spies but continued to build his network of civilians who lived under British occupation and were able to observe and make reports that enabled Washington to stay one step ahead of British troop movements and battle plans.

b) (6:29 minutes) Screen Spymaster Video Students are introduced to an additional video and asked to take notes that will help them to better understand why Washington is known as *America's First Spymaster*. (Link to video: [George Washington, Spymaster | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#))

c) (20 minutes) Research Spycraft Techniques The class is divided into four groups. Each group is assigned to research one of the following Spycraft Techniques used during the war and receives a list of Online Resources to help the students with their research:

Group 1: General George Washington, Spymaster Research and list the reasons why Washington believed it was imperative to build a spy network to gather intelligence about the enemy's troop movements and battle plans if he wanted to win the war against the might of the British Crown. As the war progressed, list some of the ways Washington used counterintelligence with a focus on **Intercepted Letters** and **Black Chamber Operations** that both sides used to spread false information.

Group 2: Captain Nathan Hale Research his background as a Patriot soldier in 1775 to 1776 and make a list of the reasons why he volunteered to become a spy for Washington even though he had never spied before. Through using the Online Resources, research and make a list of **the mistakes** he made by not knowing **the rules**, which led to his capture.

Group 3: Hercules Mulligan Research his biography and list some of the attributes he possessed that made him a successful spy. Washington had met Mulligan in Manhattan in the spring and summer of 1776, and when the British occupied Manhattan in mid-September, Mulligan became one of Washington's trusted spies. Describe how Mulligan used his enslaved servant, Cato, to carry his messages to Washington. Research and describe how spies used **Hidden Letters** and **Masked Letters** to deliver reports. At the end of the war, what happened to Mulligan, who Patriots presumed was a Loyalist, because his identity as one of Washington's spies was top secret? What happened to Cato?

Group 4: Benjamin Tallmadge and the Culper Ring Research Washington's appointment of Tallmadge as Director of Military Intelligence in November 1778 with the expressed task of securing more information from civilians living under British occupation in Long Island and Manhattan. Who did Tallmadge recruit as spies to fulfill this goal? Research and list the various ways they delivered their reports to Tallmadge and Washington, like using **Invisible Ink** and the **Culper Code Book** developed by Tallmadge.

d) (10 minutes) Presentations Upon completion of their research, each group will choose a student to present their findings to the class.

e) (5 minutes) Homework Assignment and Assessment For a homework assignment and the teacher's assessment, students are asked to use the Online Resources list and research the spies and spy ring's biographies to find out if any of their reports saved Washington from capture by the British or enabled him to move his troops to avoid a conflict with British troops. Citing at least three reports, write a sentence for each incident that indicates when the report was sent, by whom, and how it helped Washington avoid capture or conflict. To complete the assignment, open up the Culper Code Book and have fun using the Code numbers to write a fictitious one-sentence report conveying information overheard by a spy about British troop movements that is important to send to Washington. Below the coded report, translate the sentence back into words.

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 Level.

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR *SPIES AND INFORMANTS*

[George Washington to Major General William Heath, 23 August 1776](#) This shows Washington received false information about the number of troops Howe landed at Gravesend Bay that Washington believed was a feint to pull his troops out of Manhattan.

[9 Rules of Spying That Nathan Hale Failed to Follow - Journal of the American Revolution](#)

[Nathan Hale - Wikipedia](#)

[Hercules Mulligan - Wikipedia](#)

[John Honeyman - Wikipedia](#) Posing as a Tory, Honeyman falsely reported to Colonel Johann Rall that Washington's troops were demoralized and not fit to launch an attack on Trenton.

[The Strange Case of John Honeyman and Revolutionary War Espionage - CSI](#)

[In Defense of John Honeyman \(and George Washington\) — Central Intelligence Agency](#)

[Intelligence-in-the-War-of-Independence-web.pdf](#)

[George Washington, Spymaster | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

[Spy Techniques of the Revolutionary War | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

[Spymaster-in-Chief: George Washington's Wartime Espionage - National Archives Foundation](#) Shows copy of original document listing a payment to an unnamed spy.

[Culper Spy Ring | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

[The Culper Code Book | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

[Culper Ring - Wikipedia](#)

[How to Make Invisible Ink | George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

[The American Revolution](#) Codes and Concealment-Our American Revolution.

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR *SPIES AND INFORMANTS*

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

Misencik, Paul R. ***Original American Spies: Seven Covert Agents of the Revolutionary War*** (McFarland, 2014) Includes Nathan Hale, Hercules Mulligan, and John Honeyman.

Pennypacker, Morton ***George Washington's Spies: In Long Island and New York*** (Brooklyn: Long Island Historical Society, 1939) documents early espionage activities in the New York area, leading up to the British capture of Manhattan in September 1776.

Daigler, Kenneth A. ***Spies, Patriots, and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*** (Georgetown University Press, 2014) details early counterintelligence operations, which focuses on the New York Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies, formed in 1776 to hunt Loyalist spy cells.

Fischer, David Hackett ***Washington's Crossing*** (Oxford, 2004) analyzes the massive intelligence turnaround in December 1776, featuring John Honeyman, who posed as a Tory to provide Washington with critical spatial layout data on the Hessian garrison at Trenton and provided Colonel Rahl with misinformation on the pitiful state of Washington's troops.

Kidder, William L. ***Ten Crucial Days: Washington's Vision for Victory Unfolds*** (Knox Press, 2019) presents how Washington exploited his enemy's hubris by leading his upstart army in daring maneuvers that humiliated His Majesty's forces in just ten short days that changed the course of history.