

Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 5, WEBISODE 1

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide




Segment
Overview

Who or what determines the actual minute when a war begins? In the American Revolutionary War, no one knows who determined that minute by firing the first shot, probably in panic. The seventy or so patriots faced what looked like a thousand British soldiers. Captain John Parker had decided to let them pass, feeling sure from past experience that they would not fire.

But now a line of thirty British regulars charged towards the patriots with bayonets set. Hostile orders warned the patriots to surrender. As the Minutemen began to disperse, a shot cracked through the morning air. When the firing stopped eight patriots were dead and ten lay wounded. The British then marched on to Concord, destroyed some colonial supplies, and fought another battle. On their return march to Boston, colonists shot at them from behind fences and bushes, and at every opportunity. By day's end, the British suffered 273 casualties, the Americans 93. The Revolutionary War had begun.

Teacher Directions

1. Discuss with the students.
 - Why were the British so interested in Concord?
 - Who were the Minutemen? How did they get that name?
 - Who do you think was most ready for the war? Why?
2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

The British knew that the patriots had stockpiled munitions at Concord and wanted to seize them. The Minutemen were the colonial militia who got their name because they could be ready at a minute's notice. Both sides had advantages and disadvantages to overcome at the beginning of the war. The British army had professionally trained soldiers, while the Minutemen were farmers and craftsmen with no military experience. The British also had an established government and were of one mind concerning the colonies: they must be made to obey the mother country.


Let's Discuss

The colonies, however, had an infant government in the First and Second Continental Congresses. They had never thought of being a united nation before, and many colonists remained loyal to Britain. While Britain had a more ready war machine, it had to send all troops and supplies across the ocean. The colonists had the advantage of fighting on their own ground and the fierce determination that comes with defending their own homes.

Teacher Directions

1. Discuss with the students.

Every American knows that Paul Revere rode through the night on April 18, 1775, to warn the patriots, “The British are coming!” But did he? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” certainly keeps that myth alive. But what really happened? Three patriots rode that night to warn of the approaching British troops; only one completed the ride, and it wasn’t Paul Revere.

2. Distribute the Student Sheet: *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* to read Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem and a more factual version of what really happened that night. Be ready for some differences of opinion. After you have read the different accounts, become an historian who is dedicated to the facts and write a letter to Mr. Longfellow telling him where he went wrong.

Teacher Directions

1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following situation.

Captain Issac Davis, commanding the Acton militia, led his men to the Concord Bridge. He did not expect the British soldiers to fire, and at first they backed off the bridge. But as the Minutemen advanced across the bridge, the British soldiers shot at them. A bullet in the heart killed Captain Davis instantly. What do you suppose his wife thought of the patriot’s cause when her husband’s body was carried home? How do you think the men of the Acton militia felt?



History Sleuth



What do you
Think?



Moving Toward Freedom



Connections

Teacher Directions

1. Discuss with the students.

Without the events of April 19, 1775, would we be a free nation today? Would the war that won our freedom have just begun at another time in another place? No one chose that day to take the giant step towards independence. The British regulars and the colonial militia had faced off before, but always the British had backed down. At Lexington, however, they fired into the colonial ranks. And they fired not powder to frighten but ball to kill.

Africans, believing that the fight for freedom was theirs as well, joined in the battle: Cuff Whitemore, Peter Salem, and nearly a dozen others. The battles of Lexington and Concord began eight years of armed conflict between the colonies and the mother country that led to our country's freedom. Freedom for African Americans came more slowly, but the events of April 19, 1775 was a first step for them as well.

2. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Lexington and Concord* to read more about these battles.
3. Students compose their own poems about Lexington and Concord patterned after Longfellow's "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere." Students may work with a team partner.

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Geography — Students make a map of the events of April 18-19, 1775. How far did the midnight riders travel? How far did the British troops travel?

Language Arts — Students read "Concord Hymn" by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower, as a signal light,
One, if by land, and two, if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country-folk to be up and to arm."

Then he said "Good-night!" and with muffled oar
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
The Somerset, British man-of-war;
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
Across the moon like a prison-bar,
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
By its own reflection in the tide.

Meanwhile, his friend, through alley and street
Wanders and watches with eager ears,
Till in the silence around him he hears
The muster of men at the barrack door,
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,
Marching down to their boats on the shore.

Then he climbed the tower of the Old North Church,
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
To the belfry-chamber overhead,
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the somber rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade, --
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
To the highest window in the wall,
Where he paused to listen and look down
A moment on the roofs of the town,
And the moonlight flowing over all.

Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
In their night-encampment on the hill,
Wrapped in silence so deep and still
That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
The watchful night-wind, as it went
Creeping along from tent to tent,
And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"
A moment only he feels the spell
Of the place and the hour, the secret dread
Of the lonely belfry and the dead;
For suddenly all his thoughts are bent
On a shadowy something far away,
Where the river widens to meet the bay, --
A line of black, that bends and floats
On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride
On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
Now he patted his horse's side,
Now gazed on the landscape far and near,
Then, impetuous, stamped the earth,
And turned and tightened his saddle-girth;
But mostly he watched with eager search
The belfry-tower of the Old North Church,
As it rose above the graves on the hill,

Lonely and spectral and somber and still.
And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height
A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
A second lamp in the belfry burns!

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,
A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark
Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet:
That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,
The fate of a nation was riding that night;
And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight,
Kindled the land into flame with its heat.
He has left the village and mounted the steep,
And beneath him, tranquil and broad and deep,
Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;
And under the alders that skirt its edge,
Now soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge,
Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

It was twelve by the village clock,
When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.
He heard the crowing of the cock,
And the barking of the farmer's dog,
And felt the damp of the river fog,
That rises after the sun goes down.

It was one by the village clock,
When he galloped into Lexington.
He saw the gilded weathercock
Swim in the moonlight as he passed,
And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,
Gaze at him with a spectral glare,
As if they already stood aghast
At the bloody work they would look upon.

It was two by the village clock,
When he came to the bridge in Concord town.
He heard the bleating of the flock,
And the twitter of birds among the trees,
And felt the breath of the morning breeze
Blowing over the meadows brown.
And one was safe and asleep in his bed
Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
Who that day would be lying dead,
Pierced by a British musket-ball.

You know the rest. In the books you have read,
How the British regulars fired and fled, --
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farm-yard wall,
Chasing the red-coats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again
Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load.

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm, --
A cry of defiance and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo forevermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beat of that steed,
And the midnight-message of Paul Revere.

— *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1860*

What Really Happened



Paul Revere started his ride about ten o'clock at night. He left Boston by rowboat across the Charles River when he saw the lanterns in Boston's North Church steeple. He had arranged this signal two days earlier. In Charlestown he borrowed a horse and began his ride about 11:00 p.m. William Dawes, a second rider who did not become famous, had already started his ride by way of Boston Neck at 9:30 p.m.

Shortly after midnight, Paul Revere reached Lexington and warned Samuel Adams and John Hancock that the British regulars were on their way to arrest them. He met William Dawes in Lexington, and the two riders decided to continue to Concord. On the road to Concord at about 12:45 a.m., they met another patriot, Doctor Samuel Prescott, who joined them, and the three riders headed for Concord shouting, "the Regulars are coming out!"

In just fifteen minutes, British regulars stopped Revere, Dawes, and Prescott. Only Doctor Prescott managed to escape immediately to complete the ride to Concord. William Dawes also escaped: some say he got lost, and others say he turned back for his own safety because the British had set up numerous roadblocks to keep the colonial towns from communicating with one another. The regulars held Paul Revere until 2:00 a.m. When they released him they kept his horse.

Revere returned to Lexington. Although he did not complete his ride to Concord, he did accomplish his main goal of warning John Hancock and Samuel Adams so that they could escape arrest. And in the morning, the Minutemen at Lexington were ready for the British troops.

Lexington and Concord



Major John Pitcairn, commander of the British troops, had marched his soldiers all night to arrive at Lexington by dawn. When he saw the ranks of Minutemen, commanded by Captain John Parker, waiting on the village green, Major Pitcairn halted his troops and shouted, "Disperse, ye rebels, disperse!"

Thaddeus Bowman, a scout, had already reported to Captain Parker that the British troops numbered about a thousand. Captain Parker and his men had decided that they would let the soldiers pass; the colonists had already moved most of the munitions out of Concord and hidden them elsewhere.

Citizens of Lexington had gathered at the church, the tavern, and behind the protection of a granite wall to watch. What happened was a surprise to all. In Captain Parker's experience, the British soldiers never fired on colonists who, after all, were also British subjects. But this time, thirty British regulars rushed toward the ranks of Minutemen with their muskets aimed and their bayonets fixed.

Captain Parker ordered his men to disperse. Amidst the confusion of running and shouting, a shot cracked through the air. The British began to fire on the Minutemen, despite Major Pitcairn's orders to stop. When they heeded a drummer's cease-fire signal, eight Minutemen lay dead; nine were wounded. The battle lasted only a few minutes.

Doctor Prescott had already reached Concord with his warning at 2:30 a.m., and news of the Lexington skirmish had spread quickly to nearby towns. So when the British marched six miles to Concord, the town's two Minuteman companies and two militia companies awaited them in front of Wright's Tavern. News of the gunfire at Lexington brought another company of minutemen from the nearby village of Lincoln. Reuben Brown, an eyewitness to the battle at Lexington rushed back to Concord to report that the British had fired ball, which was meant to kill, not just powder to warn the colonists.

British Colonel Smith ordered his men to begin searching Concord for munitions as soon as they marched into the village at about eight in the morning. They burned what little they found. Colonel Barrett, commander of the Middlesex militia, had moved much of the munitions to other locations.

At the North Bridge over the Concord River, approximately 400 Minutemen confronted about 120 British regulars. Barrett felt sure the British would turn back. He ordered Captain Issac Davis and the Acton militia to cross the bridge. At first the British stood stunned. Then they fired warning shots into the river. The Minutemen kept coming. The British fired on them, killing two and wounding four.

At the end of the day, the British suffered 273 casualties. Many of them occurred during the perilous march back to Boston through a countryside swarming with furious patriots.



Concord Hymn



By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set to-day a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, or leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*