

BENEDICT ARNOLD

BETRAYS A TRUST

From Ft. Ticonderoga on, Benedict Arnold's name was listed among the most outstanding American officers, and he had earned the trust of General Washington. But pride and a desire for wealth eventually won over loyalty.

Arnold's father was the town drunk, and his mother was a stern woman. Tired of taking orders from her, he joined the militia during the French and Indian War. At twenty-one, he went to New Haven, Connecticut, and became a book salesman and pharmacist. When he learned of the Battle at Lexington, he got a colonel's commission, and together with Ethan Allen's Green Mountain Boys, took Ft. Ticonderoga and its guns. When he returned, he learned that his wife had died and that Congress would pay only a fraction of his expenses.

He joined General Richard Montgomery's unsuccessful expedition to capture Quebec and received a bad leg wound during the attempt. When General Guy Carleton's English troops tried to move down Lake Champlain in 1776, Arnold blocked them. He was given the rank of brigadier general, but Congress criticized the fact that his books were not in order. The next February, five brigadiers were raised to major generals, but he was passed over. Washington demanded an explanation, and was told that Connecticut already had two major generals.

Washington persuaded him to stay. After Arnold played a major role in stopping St. Leger's drive down the Mohawk Valley, he joined Gates' army at Saratoga. In the battle, Arnold led charges against Burgoyne's lines and received a thigh wound. Envious of Arnold's standing with Washington, Gates did not mention Arnold in his official report of the battle.

While Arnold was recovering from his wounds, Washington put him in charge at Philadelphia, where he fell in love with and married an English sympathizer, Peggy Shippen. Peggy had more expensive tastes than he could afford, and he fell heavily into debt. In addition, Pennsylvania officials charged that he was using their militia as his personal servants. It was not hard for Arnold to excuse what he and Peggy now planned.

Secret discussions were held with British agents. Arnold was to persuade Washington to give him command at West Point, an important position on the Hudson river. Then he would turn it over to the British. Washington was surprised when Arnold asked for West Point, but gave in to his friend's request. Once at West Point, contact was made with a British spy, Major John Andre. They agreed that if Arnold could deliver West Point, he would receive £20,000 and a brigadier general's commission. On his way south after the meeting, Andre was captured, and the secret papers were found inside his shoe. Arnold made a quick getaway, just before Washington arrived on an inspection tour.



Benedict Arnold

Name: _____

Class: _____

RESULTS: When Washington was given evidence of what Arnold had done, he could hardly believe it at first, but sent his men out to find him. Arnold was next seen leading loyalist troops, and he escaped to England when the British army surrendered. His reputation was ruined; the British, like the Americans, saw him only as a traitor.

Activities:

1. The term "Benedict Arnold" is used today to describe a traitor. Discuss whether the class thinks that is fair, in light of all he did for the Revolution.
2. When the Constitution was written, the only crime it specifically stressed was treason and the punishment for treason (Art. III, Section 3). Ask the class why they think treason is regarded as such a terrible crime.

Essay:

1. You are Benedict Arnold, and you write a former army friend after the war. How would you explain your actions?
2. Do you think that Arnold was a hero, a coward, a confused man, or something else? Why?
3. Washington considered the betrayal by Arnold his worst experience of the war. Write what you think the general might have said in his diary after he learned what had happened.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____
