

CONSOURCE



The Constitutional Sources Project

Revolutionary War Unit

Wartime Pacifists: Quakers

TIME AND GRADE LEVEL

One 45 or 50 minute class period in a **Grade 4-8**. This lesson can be used in conjunction with the ConSource lesson “**Oaths of Allegiance: Moravians and Andrew Giering**.” Alternately, either lesson can be used on its own.

PURPOSE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

History is the chronicle of choices made by actors/agents/protagonists who, in very specific contexts, unearth opportunities and inevitably encounter impediments. During the Revolutionary War people of every stripe navigated turbulent waters. As individuals and groups struggled for their own survival, they also shaped the course of the nation. Whether a general or a private, male or female, free or enslaved, each became a player in a sweeping drama. The instructive sessions outlined here are tailored for upper elementary and middle school students, who encounter history most readily through the lives of individual historical players. Here, students actually *become* those players, confronted with tough and often heart-wrenching choices that have significant consequences. History in all its complexity comes alive. It is a convoluted, thorny business, far more so than streamlined timelines suggest, yet still accessible on a personal level to students at this level.

In this simulation, elementary or middle school students imagine they are Quakers who have been drafted to serve in the Continental Army. They learn that Quakers were among several pacifistic religious communities at that time, and they learn that in the Revolutionary War, a person who was drafted could either join the army or pay for a substitute to serve in his place. This presents a quandary: Will a Quaker be violating his religious beliefs if he pays for a substitute? Students confront this on multiple levels. First, what would they do as individuals? Next, what would the communities decide? And finally, what does an individual do if his decision conflicts with that of his religious community?

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- *Students will be able to explain the meaning of “pacifist.”
- *Students will be able to list some of the religious communities at the time of the Revolutionary War that held pacifistic beliefs.
- *Students will be able to explain a military draft and the particular twist during the Revolutionary War: a person who was drafted could pay for a substitute.

*Students will be able to list practical reasons a draftee would have for hiring a substitute, thereby complying with the law, as well as religious reasons for not complying at all.

*Students will be able to explain that communities as well as individuals confronted the conflict between religious beliefs and the demands of Revolutionary state governments.

*Having examined pacifism in the Revolutionary War, students will be better able to view the problems pacifists faced in other wars, as well as the problems that pacifists presented to wartime governments. In this context, students will be able to define “conscientious objector.”

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

Prefatory homework:

Handout A: Religious Pacifists during the Revolutionary War

In class:

1. Homework review and discussion: 10-15 minutes
2. Students, as Quakers who have been drafted, consider whether to pay for substitutes: 15-20
3. Presentation of historical outcome and follow-up discussion—who paid and who did not: 15-20 minutes
4. OPTIONAL Continued discussion on religious pacifism.

Summary Homework / Extended Activities

MATERIALS

IN TIMES OF WAR

Background Handouts (Students read.)

- A. Religious Pacifists during the Revolutionary War

Classroom Handout (Teacher presents or students read this material.)

- B. Who Paid and Who Did Not

Vocabulary List

PREFATORY HOMEWORK

Distribute **Handout A: Religious Pacifists during the Revolutionary War**. Go over instructions on that sheet.

CLASS ACTIVITIES: 45-50 MINUTES

1. HOMEWORK REVIEW AND DISCUSSION: 10-15 minutes

Review “both sides” arguments.

2: STUDENTS, AS QUAKERS WHO HAVE BEEN DRAFTED, CONSIDER WHETHER TO PAY FOR SUBSTITUTES: 15-20 minutes.

Students discuss the issue in breakout groups. At the end, each student makes his or her own decision.

3. PRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION—WHO PAID AND WHO DID NOT: 15-20 minutes.

Students share their personal decisions with the class. Teacher presents or students read **Handout B. Who Paid and Who Did Not**. Students discuss the varying historical responses.

Emphasize that even within a specific community, members differed. Then raise a follow-up question: *What would **you** do if your personal decision turned out to be different from that of your religious community? For instance, if you were a Quaker who decided to pay, but your Quaker community determined that you should not, would you go against your community?*

Students respond to this question either with the full class or in breakout groups.

OPTIONAL: 4. CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON RELIGIOUS PACIFISM

Introduce and discuss any of the questions in Extended Activities.

SUMMARY HOMEWORK / EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

(Some of these topics also appear in the ConSource lesson “Oaths of Allegiance: Moravians Andrew Giering.”)

1. Pacifists during the Revolutionary War were Christians, and according to the Bible, Jesus said, “Render [give] unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God that things that are God’s.” Caesar was a famous Roman emperor who enforced laws and made people pay taxes.

Some people say this meant that Christians should obey the law, even if they don’t believe in it. Other people think this means that you should obey a country’s laws *except* if that means breaking God’s law. God’s law is higher, they say, so you must obey it first.

What you think?

2. Research and report on one or more of the religious communities during the Revolutionary War: Quakers, Shakers, Moravians, Mennonites, Amish, Dunkers, Schwenkfelders.
3. One of these religious communities, the Shakers, was led by a woman: Mother Ann. At one point she was arrested for trying to “influence other persons from taking up arms.” Research and report on what happened to Mother Ann after she was arrested.
4. Research and report on conscientious objectors and pacifists in either World War I, World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War.
5. There are still many Quakers today. In most religions, one person takes charge of the service: a priest leads a Catholic service, a minister leads most Protestant services, a rabbi leads a Jewish service, an Imam leads an Islamic service, etc. But nobody leads a Quaker service, which they call a “meeting.” Find out why Quakers do it this way. You can research it, talk to a Quaker, or even go to one of their meetings.

Vocabulary for “Wartime Pacifists: Quakers”

arms — weapons that soldiers carry

brother or *sister* — in Quaker religious communities, and many other religious communities as well, another member was called a *brother* or a *sister*

conscience / *matter of conscience* — an inner voice, not someone else, tells a person if what they are doing is right or wrong

compulsion — forced to do something

draft — ordered by the government to serve in the army

pacifist — a person who does not believe it is right to kill other humans, even enemy soldiers

religious community — people who share religious beliefs and come together to worship

sinful — not obeying religious laws

“*take up arms*” or “*take up the sword*” — be willing to fight in the army

Handout A: Religious Pacifists during the Revolutionary War

Not all men wanted to “go a’soldiering” and fight for liberty during the Revolutionary War. Wars are dangerous and hard, and if a man joined the army, he couldn’t help his family with work on the farm. (Most people in those days were farmers.) Since not enough men willingly joined the army, state governments “drafted” men into the army, meaning they *had* to join, whether they wanted to or not. If they refused to join the army, they could be placed in jail. This created a problem for “pacifists,” people who did not believe in killing other humans, even enemy soldiers. About 80,000 people at that time—one in every 30 free Americans—belonged to a religious community that refused to “take up the sword”—an expression that means they would not join the army. Quakers were the largest group, but other pacifist communities were Shakers, Moravians, Mennonites, Amish, Dunkers, and Schwenkfelders.

Later, the United States would draft men (not women) to fight in other wars: the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. In each of these, except the Civil War, a religious pacifist who was drafted could be a “conscientious objector.” That meant he would have to help out in the war in some way, by driving an ambulance, for example, but he would not have to serve as a regular soldier.

But that wasn’t how it worked in the Revolutionary War. Then, a man who was drafted could *buy* his way out of the army. If he had enough money, he simply paid another man to join and take his place. He would not have to serve in any way at all.

Imagine you are a Quaker living in those times. Your religion says, “Thou shalt not kill”—that is one of the Ten Commandments in the Jewish and Christian religions. But the army has just drafted you. Because of your religious beliefs, you refuse to join the army—*but will you pay for a substitute?*

This is not an easy decision to make. If your substitute kills an enemy soldier, would that be just like you killed him *yourself*? Maybe, if you feel this way, you shouldn’t pay for a substitute—even though that would be breaking the law.

But are you really responsible for killing someone during a war? *You* are not the one who started the war, and *you* didn’t make the law that says people have to serve in the army or hire a substitute. Even though you don’t want to, maybe you should just obey the law and pay for somebody to go in your place. That way you won’t get in trouble.

But also consider this: If everybody felt the way you do and nobody went into the army, wouldn’t the enemy (in this case, British soldiers) just take over?

Pacifists might respond: If everybody on *both* sides obeyed God’s law and refused to kill other people, there would be no wars.

INSTRUCTIONS: Try to see both sides of this issue. For now, circle or highlight thoughts on this handout that you think are particularly important. You don’t have to make your decision right now. Wait until you discuss the issue with your classmates. Then, after hearing what others have to say, and after seriously considering both sides, you will come to your own decision: As a pacifist who is drafted during the Revolutionary War, would you pay for a substitute or not?

Handout B. Who Paid and Who Did Not

All of these religious communities were democratic, meaning that they decided things as a group. People debated this issue within each group, and the groups came up with different answers.

Quakers decided that anybody who paid a substitute “for carrying on war” was “no longer in religious fellowship with us.” The records of Quaker meetings show that 1,724 members were “disowned” because of this. They couldn’t be Quakers any more. Those who actually entered the army were called “fighting Quakers,” even though the Quaker community had disowned them. Most Quakers, however, played by Quaker rules and did refuse to pay for a substitute. Sometimes, a state government arrested them. More often, the government took away their property.

Dunkers, at first, decided that any member who was drafted should refuse to pay for a substitute. But after a few were put in jail, the Dunker community changed its policy: “In case a brother [member of the community] or his son should be drafted . . . and he could buy himself or his son from it, such would not be deemed so sinful, yet it should not be given voluntarily, without compulsion.” In other words, a Dunker could pay, but only if forced to do so.

Moravians let every member decide for himself: “We do not wish to pass judgment in matters of conscience.” When some members were fined for their refusal to obey the law, a new debate arose. Some argued that the *community should pay all fines*, since a man who refused to pay the fine was staying true to Moravian beliefs. Others said that each person was responsible for the consequences of his own actions, so a man who disobeyed the law should *pay his own fine*. In the end, Moravians decided that members of the community who wanted to contribute to paying someone else’s fine could do so, but nobody would be *forced* to help pay.