

CONSOURCE



The Constitutional Sources Project

Revolutionary War Unit

Retribution and a Civil War in the South: Thomas Brown

TIME AND GRADE LEVEL

One 45 or 50 minute class period in a **Grade 4-8**. The lesson can be expanded into two or more class periods by exploring any of the Extended Activities. It can also be followed by the ConSource lesson “**General Washington and Charles Asgill: Retribution at the Highest Level.**”

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, students follow the Revolutionary War experience of Thomas Brown, a Loyalist in Georgia. Brown’s actions anger Patriots, who pressure him to switch sides. Students first play the role of Brown: will he submit to a crowd? When he doesn’t, they become Patriots: how will they react to Brown’s refusal? That is where the story turns violent, and with each act of violence, students play the role of aggrieved parties: will they seek revenge? As the cycle continues, they experience by examining their own responses the deep and destructive role of retribution in human conflicts, from personal feuds to wars.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

* Students will be able to explain the competing interests of southern Patriots and southern Loyalists.

* Students will be able to take the Patriot side, securing support for the Association (boycott of British goods), and also the Loyalist side, for those who benefitted by British rule.

* Students will be able to demonstrate, through the story of Thomas Brown, how the Revolutionary War in the South was also a civil war, with Americans fighting Americans.

* Students will be able to understand, although not necessarily endorse, the coercive techniques used by Patriots in the American Revolution.

* Students will be able to empathize with individuals who faced pressure from crowds, including threats of violence, to change sides.

* Students will be able to explain the cycle of retribution, in which violent acts trigger violent responses, which in turn trigger additional violent responses, in a feedback loop that is difficult to break.

* Students will be able to demonstrate how this cycle played out in the case of Thomas Brown.

* Students will be alerted to look for other examples through history, and in their personal lives as well, in which retribution creates a feedback loop.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

Prefatory homework:

Handout A: Thomas Brown's Big Decision.

In class:

1. Homework review and discussion: 10-15 minutes
2. The Patriots' Big Decision: 5-10
3. Thomas Brown's Ordeal -- 10 minutes
4. Thomas Brown's Revenge: 10 minutes
5. Historical Outcome: 10-15 minutes

Summary Homework / Extended Activities

MATERIALS (Each "handout" can be presented in any manner teacher sees fit—silent reading, oral reading, or teacher presentation.)

Background Handout:

- A. Thomas Brown's Big Decision (Students read.)

Classroom Handouts (Because there are so many components to this lesson, teacher is advised to present the material in these sheets rather than have students read them.)

- B. The Patriots' Big Decision
- C. Thomas Brown's Ordeal
- D. Thomas Brown's Revenge
- E. Historical Outcome

Vocabulary List

PREFATORY HOMEWORK

Distribute **Handout A: Thomas Brown’s Big Decision**. Go over instructions on that sheet. Observe that there will be four points of decision, each one leading to the next. This handout closes by posing **issue #1: Should Thomas Brown give in to the crowd?**

CLASS ACTIVITIES: 45-50 MINUTES

1. HOMEWORK REVIEWS AND DISCUSSION: 10-15 minutes

Review Thomas Brown’s background. Ask: *When did Brown arrive in Georgia? Was he poor or rich? What is a “magistrate”? Why do you think he sided with the British?*

Review the situation in America shortly after Browns’ arrival. Note the short interval between his arrival (November 1774) and Lexington and Concord (April 1775). Then ask: *Why were some people in Georgia upset with British rule? Note that this differed from the reasons for discontent in New England.*

If students have studied the non-importation movement, reference that in connection with the Association. If they haven’t, explain briefly how colonials used a boycott of British goods to get Parliament to alter its policies. (You might mention that the term “boycott” was not used then. That word came into usage in the early 19th century, named after a man in Ireland when his countryman refused to buy anything from him.) Then ask: *Why is it important to get lots of people to go along with a boycott, in this case, the Association?*

Review the confrontation between Brown and the Patriot crowd, and then ask students to share their responses to **Issue #1: Brown’s response to the demands of the Patriot crowd.**

2. THE PATRIOTS’ BIG DECISION: 5-10 minutes

Present the material in **Handout B: The Patriots’ Big Decision**. Make sure students understand the outcome of Issue #1, why Brown refused to go along. Then instruct: *Now imagine that you are the Patriots who are confronting Thomas Brown. What should you do once Brown has refused to sign the Association? This is the **second** decision you will make in this lesson.*

OPTIONAL: After the class discusses the options for a few minutes, introduce these questions, if they have not yet come up:

Instead of physical violence, could you join together to hurt Brown economically in some way? That was how Patriots resisted British authority—they refused to buy British goods. Could something like this work with Thomas Brown? If all Patriots refused to sell him what he needed, might he just get what he needed from his fellow Loyalists?

Or could you join together to hurt Brown socially or psychologically? In New England, Patriots sometimes “ostracized” Loyalists, meaning that they gave them the “cold shoulder.” Nobody would even talk to a person who was being ostracized. Sometimes people would just leave the room when an ostracized person came in.

Note that these non-violent techniques only work when nearly everybody in the community agrees with you. In the South, there were almost as many Loyalists like Thomas Brown as there were Patriots—so boycotts and ostracism probably wouldn't work.

3. THOMAS BROWN'S ORDEAL: 10 minutes

Present the material in **Handout C: Thomas Brown's Ordeal**. After reading or hearing the gory details, students discuss **Issue #3: Thomas Brown's possible responses**. Introduce the discussion: *Consider how Brown must have felt – but would it be wise to seek revenge? Could he ever get back at the **actual** people who harmed him? If not, should he go after others in order to defeat the cause that his torturers espoused?* One approach is to review the options before discussing them.

Alternately, teacher can present the material in the first section of Handout C orally, without listing any options. This would allow students to work from a blank slate, with no prompting.

4. THOMAS BROWN'S REVENGE: 10 minutes

Present the material in **Handout D: Thomas Brown's Revenge**. After reading or hearing about Brown's battles against Patriots—and of his eventual capture—students place themselves in the roll of a relative to one of Brown's victims. This is **Issue #4: whether to exact personal revenge on a subject already in captivity**.

5. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE HISTORICAL OUTCOME: 10-15 minutes

Present the material in **Handout D: Historical Outcome**. Teacher might note that seeking personal revenge on a captive, rather than leaving it in the hands of the law, is what vigilantes and lynch mobs do. This can trigger a discussion on what can happen when a crowd takes the law into its own hands.

Conclude with a class discussion of revenge as a feedback loop: each round of violence sparks resentment and an urge for revenge. Note that another word for seeking revenge is "*retribution*." When one harmful act spurs another, and this goes on and on, we say there is a "*cycle of retribution*." Discuss how cycles of retribution make it very difficult to end conflicts, whether wars or feuds between people. This can lead to a wide range of issues dealing with conflict and violence. Consult the related items below, in Extended Activities.

SUMMARY HOMEWORK / EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

(Several of these activities are the same as those for the ConSource lesson on retribution, which features George Washington and Charles Asgill. These two lessons can be done individually or in tandem.)

1. Think of an example in your own experience when you or others sought revenge. This can be a small thing, not necessarily hurting people physically. Person A feels that she or he has

been harmed and wants to get back at person B. If person A *does* get back at Person B, is it more likely that Person B will want to do something bad to Person A in return?

2. Sometimes the pattern mentioned in Question #1 goes on and on. If person B does try to get back at person A, person A might then do something *else* to get back at person B, and so on. In the example you used, how difficult would it be to *end* this “cycle of retribution”?

3. After World War I, the victorious side sought “reparations” (payment) from the defeated side. This hurt the losers economically and made them extra mad. Many historians say that this was one of the main causes of World War II. Research the causes of World War II. Does forcing the losers to pay extra money make people in those countries more likely to seek revenge—and perhaps even start a new war against the winners?

4. Research any conflict between Euro-Americans and Native Americans. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of these. Can you see a cycle of retribution? (To the teacher: Often, students studying the Revolutionary War will recently have been exposed to some earlier conflicts between Euro-Americans and Native Americans. They can also return to this theme when they study 19th Century conflicts in the West.)

5. Talk with somebody who fought in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Vietnam. Explain the cycle of retribution. Then ask this person whether she or he experienced something like that. If so, listen to the story and share it!

6. Consider terrorism. How does an act of terror feed a cycle of retribution? Do you think terrorists *want* to create more violence?

7. How can any cycle of retribution that involves populations, not just individuals, be broken?

8. Research and report on the life of Thomas Brown. Sources to consult include:

Edward Cashin, *The King's Ranger: Thomas Brown and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*

Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary War*

Catherine S. Crary, editor, *The Price of Loyalty: Tory Writings from the Revolutionary War*, pages 64-66.

Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution*, volume 1, pages 260-261

Vocabulary for “Retribution and a Civil War in the South: Thomas Brown”

civil war (not just THE Civil War) — a war between people who belong to the same country but fight on opposite sides

desolation — a place where almost everything has been ruined and not much is left

enslaved — forced to become a slave

immigrants — people who move into a country from another country

indentured servants — people who pledge to work for someone for a certain number of years, but are then set free

infamous — famous for doing bad things

magistrate — a local judge

melancholy — sad, miserable, depressed

neutral — not joining either side

ordeal — a difficult experience that you really don't like

retribution or *retaliation* — revenge, getting back at someone

Handout A: Thomas Brown's Big Decision.

In November 1774, a wealthy Englishman named Thomas Brown arrived in Savannah, Georgia, with 74 indentured servants. Brown paid for these men and women to cross the Atlantic Ocean and settled them on 5,600 acres of land, which he called Brownsville. These immigrants would establish farms on his land, and after a few years they would start paying him rent. Thomas Brown was only 24-years-old at the time. His father had given him the money to start this plantation in the New World.

Five months later, war broke out between the rebellious colony in Massachusetts and the British government. That was far to the north, but many colonials in Georgia had their own reasons to oppose the British government. Britain had just signed a treaty that allowed Native Americans to remain on land in western Georgia that the colonists wanted to settle. They were mad.

But not all of Georgia's colonists were mad. Thomas Brown had no quarrel with the King. Georgia's Royal Governor had just granted him his land. He also made him a "magistrate," or judge. It was his job to uphold the law around the town of Brownsville. Obviously he supported the Crown, which made him a Loyalist. While Patriots—the Americans who supported the Revolution—protested in taverns, Thomas Brown, instead, raised toasts to King George III.

This angered those who were challenging British authority. One day in August 1775, a crowd of about 130 Patriots confronted Brown in person. They demanded that he join their "Association," which pledged not to buy British products and also pledged allegiance to the Continental Congress. Brown replied that he would not obey the Continental Congress because it was supporting an armed rebellion. When he was appointed to be a magistrate, he had agreed to *uphold* British laws—and their Association was *resisting* British laws. If people who called themselves "Patriots" really supported "liberty," he argued, they should give him the liberty to live in peace. Some of the crowd left at that point, but those who stayed got angrier and threatened him with bodily harm.

Then and there, Thomas Brown had to make a hard choice. *Place yourself in his shoes: What would you do?*

Would you join the Patriots' Association, even though you strongly disagree with it? If so, you'd be going against your conscience—but you would escape harm, at least for the moment. And if you did agree to join, would you honor your promise after the crowd had left, or would you go back to supporting the British government?

Or would you refuse to sign? If so, you would be upholding British law, as your job as a magistrate required—but what might the crowd do to you?

INSTRUCTIONS: Quickly, jot down your response and prepare to share it with the class. This is not a formal essay – just write your thoughts as they come to you. There are no right or wrong answers. *This is Issue #1, the first of four decisions you will be asked to make in this lesson.* You are doing this to experience the tough choices that people have to make when citizens argue over politics, take sides, or even go to war with each other.

Handout B: The Patriots' Big Decision

In fact, Thomas Brown refused to sign the Patriots' Association. He stayed true to his original pledge to uphold British laws. He was not willing to abandon *his* beliefs to support *theirs*. It was a hard decision, and a dangerous one.

QUESTION: If you were a Patriot in that crowd, how might you respond? Would you let Brown alone? If so, do you think he would then convince other people to oppose the Patriots?

Or would you continue to press him? Would you make good on your threat to hurt him physically? And if so, how far would you go? Can you think of any ways to punish him without inflicting bodily harm? *This is Issue #2, the second decision you will make in this lesson.*

Handout C: Thomas Brown's Ordeal

Here is what actually happened in that dramatic encounter, according to what Brown said later.

The crowd continued to threaten him, and he reached for his pistol. He announced that he would shoot anybody who approached. When some Patriots drew their swords and rushed towards him, he pulled the trigger, but his gun misfired. Then he fired again, and this time his shot went through the foot of an attacker. Several Patriots managed to grab Brown, and as they did, someone hit him on the back of his head with the butt end of his rifle. His head split open. Blood poured out as Patriots took off chunks of skin and hair—partially scalping him. They next dragged their victim around in a cart so people could see him suffer. Then they applied hot tar to his feet, which were burnt so badly that he lost two of his toes. (Ever after, “Burntfoot Brown,” as he was called, wore a handkerchief around his head to cover his scars.) To save his life, Brown agreed to join the Association—but that didn’t mean he would necessarily live by the promise he had made while being tortured.

How do you think Thomas Brown must have felt after that ordeal? *Here is issue #3, the third decision you are asked to make in this lesson.* Once again, put yourself in Brown’s situation. Would you now support the Patriots, as you had promised to do while being tortured? Or would you go back on your word and support the Loyalists? Would you seek revenge? If so, and if you couldn’t get back at the *actual* people who harmed you, would you try to hurt *other* Patriots—people who had not been in that crowd—in order to defeat their cause? And would you be as violent as the Patriots had been?

Perhaps there is a third option: you might try to avoid further harm by staying out of the conflict altogether. But is that really possible? Would one side or the other go after you for trying to stay neutral?

Handout D: Thomas Brown's Revenge

Brown had no intention of supporting the Patriots. Instead, he went to live with Creek Indians and convinced many of them to join the war on the British side. He also organized southern Loyalists into a military unit call the King's Carolina Rangers. With Indians and Loyalists by his side, he attacked the Patriots. After winning one battle, his unit hanged several Patriots who had surrendered. Thomas Brown claimed that he was obeying the accepted rules of war. His prisoners had been captured before, but they were set free after promising not to fight again. When they *did* fight again, they broke that promise—and so it was okay to hang them. That was the way things were done at the time, Brown pointed out. News spread throughout the South. Thomas Brown became famous—or infamous—for hanging prisoners and for killing lots of people with his bands of Indians and Loyalists.

In 1781, after fighting for years, Thomas Brown was finally defeated and captured. Now imagine that you are the mother or father of a person that Brown and his allies have killed. You are watching the victorious Patriots march back to their headquarters with their prisoner, Thomas Brown. How does this make you feel? Would you ask permission to confront the person who had killed your son? And if the guards did let you approach him, what would you say or do? Would you want him hanged? How would you feel if Brown was exchanged for an important Patriot who had been captured by the British? (This was common, one side freeing a prisoner if the other side did the same.) *This is Issue #4, the final decision you are making in this lesson.*

Handout E. Historical Outcome

Here is a story that was told years later. We don't know whether it is true, but it shows how Patriots felt. As Thomas Brown was being marched to jail, a woman armed with a knife rushed at the prisoner and threatened to kill him. The guards grabbed her and took away her knife, but they did let her talk to Brown. She told him that he had once captured her son. She had visited Brown's camp at that time and pleaded with him to spare her son's life, but to no avail. "You hanged him, though a beardless youth, before my face," she cried. If Brown were ever set free, she promised she would "go five hundred miles" to seek revenge.

Seeking revenge was all too common. As one American officer put it: "Such scenes of desolation, bloodshed and deliberate murder I never was a witness to before! Wherever you turn the weeping widow and fatherless child pour out their melancholy tales to wound the feeling of humanity. The two opposite principles of whiggism and toryism [Patriots and Loyalists] have set the people of this country to cutting each other's throats."

Throughout the South, thousands upon thousands of people were killed as Patriots and Loyalists fought against each other. When some people were killed, their friends and families sought revenge. At some battles, Americans fought Americans; British soldiers weren't even in sight. This part of the Revolutionary War was really a "civil war"—one in which both sides are from the same country. It is very difficult to stop a war like this. Revenge is the rule.

What happened in the end to Thomas Brown? General Nathanael Greene, who commanded the Continental Army in the South, protected Thomas Brown by sending him to a secure prison. He was then exchanged for a Patriot prisoner. When the British finally lost the war, Thomas Brown moved to Florida, which was British territory at the time. Then, when Britain gave Florida to Spain in 1783, Brown moved with the 170 African-Americans he had enslaved to the Bahama Islands. The American Revolution, fought in the name of liberty, did not result in liberty for Brown's slaves. It would take another civil war to end slavery in America.