



# A PIVOTAL BATTLE

## INTRODUCTION

This tale describes the iconic moment in America’s War of Independence – the moment when we realized we could prevail over one of the greatest military powers on earth, reclaim the rights we’d lost, and begin the long, hard work of building a new nation. “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” and the hopes of the revolution all hinged on these battles. Though not of critical importance as military victories they were enormously important politically, coming at a time early in the war when not only Washington’s troops but all Americans were deeply discouraged after losing the critical battles in New York.

The fabled American work ethic is a prominent part of the story. It’s Christmas Eve when most people are home with their families. Instead, Washington’s army is ferrying two thousand men, horses, and cannon(!) across a river so swollen with ice that two other regiments, crossing at other locations, fail to make it across. After working all night, Washington’s army then marched nine miles. All before the fighting even starts.

The aftermath of the battle highlights another important theme. Washington’s troops are all volunteers, most of them enlisted for very short service stints of 2-6 months. Washington must continually appeal to their patriotism to get them to voluntarily re-enlist. When he issued a call for additional volunteers for the Princeton battle, they came from all around to risk their lives – an extraordinary example of the power of voluntary associations.

## BOOK

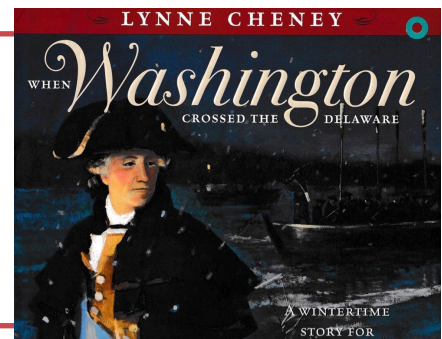
**Title:** *When Washington Crossed the Delaware*

**Author:** Lynne Cheney

**Illustrator:** Peter M. Fiore

**Year published:** 2004

**Length:** 40 pages



ACTIVITY	TIME	FREQUENCY	PREPARATION
Famous American Texts: <i>The American Crisis</i>	5-10 minutes	Daily	Minimal
Political Geography: Maps & Distances	15 minutes	Once	Minimal (if you have puzzle)
Arts & Crafts: Mixed Media, Crossing Delaware	30-40 minutes	Once	10 min. (order popsicle sticks)
Science: Soap Boat	20-30 minutes	Once	10 minutes
Re-enactment: Surprise Attack!	20 minutes	Once	10 minutes
Civic Culture: Washington’s Favorite Scripture	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Civic Culture: Encouragement	10 minutes	Daily	Minimal
Civic Culture: Volunteer Associations	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
History: Family Connections	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Art: Find Washington	5 minutes	Once	Minimal
Art: Focal Point	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Language Arts: Quotations & Fonts	5 minutes	Once	Minimal
Language Arts: Vocabulary & Idioms	10 minutes	Once	Minimal





Below is one suggestion for your week with *When Washington Crossed the Delaware*. Note that we did not include all of the activities above in the agenda below (only 10 of 13). Please experiment with what works for your family!

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Civic Culture: Encouragement	Political Geography: Maps & Distances	L.A.: Vocabulary (before reading)	Art: Find Washington (during reading)	L.A.: Quotations & Fonts (during reading)
Memorize: <i>The American Crisis</i>	Arts & Crafts: Crossing the Delaware	Science: Soap Boat	Re-enactment: Surprise Attack!	Civic Culture: Volunteer Associations
<b>Supplies:</b> N/A	<b>Supplies:</b> Popsicle sticks, cotton balls, glue, construction paper, crayons, scissors	<b>Supplies:</b> Foam paper plate, cake pan, liquid soap, ice cubes	<b>Supplies:</b> Nerf guns or other harmless projectiles	<b>Supplies:</b> N/A

## FAMOUS AMERICAN TEXTS: THE AMERICAN CRISIS

Thomas Paine is most famous for his book *Common Sense* that helped spark the revolution. However, his work *The American Crisis* contains one of the most memorable lines in American history: “These are the times that try men’s souls.” Ask your child(ren) to memorize this line and repeat it each day of the week before or after each reading. Be sure to place the line in context, explaining why Americans were so discouraged at this point in the War of Independence. Older children may want to add the second, longer line: “The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

## POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY: MAPS AND DISTANCES

*In early December the Americans made it across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Under General Washington’s orders they had taken every boat they could find with them, so they knew they were safe from the British for a while.*

Examine a map of the Delaware River (use the one on the inside of the cover). How wide was the river where Washington and his army crossed? Use fingers or string to measure the distance using the scale bar. Why did they choose to cross where they did? How far did they have to hike to Trenton once they crossed the river? Use the string to measure the distance. Now, measure the distance from Trenton to Princeton. Use a map program (e.g., Google Map, Apple Map) to show how long it would take to travel the distance by car. How long did it take Washington’s army to march to Princeton?





## ARTS & CRAFTS: COLORING AND MIXED-MEDIA ART PROJECT

*On Christmas night, 1776, General Washington led twenty-four hundred men, the main body of his army,  
to a crossing point about nine miles upstream from Trenton.*

One of the most iconic images in American history is that of Washington crossing the Delaware. You can expose younger children to this image by downloading and printing a sheet that they can color with their crayons. You can find a couple of examples on the internet [here](#) or [here](#). Older kids might enjoy this mixed-media art project:

### Supplies:

- Popsicle (craft) sticks
- Construction paper (black, dark blue, white)
- Cotton balls
- Glue stick or Elmer's Glue
- Crayons (or markers)
- Scissors
- Cardboard (optional)
- Washington coloring sheet (optional; see links above)
- Free hand outline of flag (for kids to color in)

### Instructions:

1. Glue a sheet of black construction paper to a piece of cardboard. This is optional but will provide more stability as the craft sticks will be heavy if it is only paper.
2. Cut a strip of dark blue construction paper and glue it to the bottom of the black construction paper. This is the Delaware river.
3. Design a boat out of craft sticks. Optionally, color the craft sticks with crayons or markers. Glue craft sticks in the form of a boat to the construction. Leave one craft stick for a flagpole and glue it so it is sticking out of the top of the boat.
4. Color in the flag and glue it to the flagpole.
5. Add cotton balls to represent the chunks of ice.
6. Optionally, cut out Washington and/or soldiers from coloring sheets and add them to the boat.

Depending on the age of the child they may need help with cutting and/or gluing. My three year old loved coloring craft sticks and sticking cotton balls onto the sheet. Both the five-year-old and three-year-old liked adding the coloring sheet of Washington to the picture (which made it more exciting).





## SCIENCE: CROSSING THE DELAWARE IN A SOAP-POWERED BOAT

*The night was cold, and the men faced a difficult crossing. They had to break through ice to get the boats into the river. They had to fend off large chunks of floating ice once they were underway.*

There are several videos on the internet that show you how to build a miniature boat powered by a bit of soap ([here's one](#) and [here's another](#)). For this activity you will want to work with your child(ren) on the following steps:

### Supplies:

- Cut out your boat from a likely material (in the videos above, one uses cardboard the other uses a foam paper plate -- we favor the foam). Don't forget the notch! Decorate it with an American flag (only 13 stars!).
- Set up your Delaware River using something like a rectangular cake pan. Label one end Pennsylvania and the other end New Jersey (you can also label the water the Delaware River).
- Launch your boat near the Pennsylvania "shore" and apply the soap (or liquid detergent) to the notch in the stern to see it jet across to New Jersey.
- Put enough ice cubes into the middle of the cake pan to block your boat to simulate the conditions Washington and his army encountered.
- Repeat step 3. Did your boat successfully cross the Delaware?

### Discuss with your young scientist(s):

- Does everything float in water? Why do you think the ice floats? (It's less dense)



- Besides getting in the way, is there any other danger associated with ice? Could it damage the boats?
- What powered the soap boat? (The soap reduced the surface tension, pushing the boat forward). Illustrate surface tension by filling a glass with water just past the lip.
- If water turns to solid ice when it gets cold, what happens to it when it gets hot? Describe the three states of water: solid (ice), liquid (water), gas (steam).



*Crossing the "Delaware"*

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## **HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT: CREATE YOUR OWN SURPRISE ATTACK**

*When the Americans encountered the first Hessians, it was clear the surprise had worked.  
The startled Hessians retreated.*

There are many creative ways to simulate Washington's surprise attack on the Hessians. Ours was a multi-generational affair. Parents told the kids that the grandparents were planning a surprise attack. They barricaded the front door and kept a lookout through the front window. Text messages apprised them of progress ("Washington is crossing the Delaware." "Washington's army is on the march.") while the parents kept anticipation high. Grandparents entered through the back door, approached from the rear, and surprised the kids by shouting "The Hessians!" and "Attack! Attack!" Nerf weaponry was involved (but rubber bands can also be fun). Stocking (or bare) feet and blue cloaks/coats were worn to remind us of Washington's army.

Surprise was total. After the shock wore off (and they had surrendered), everyone retired to the living room for target practice with the nerf guns (and their first lesson in range safety). At the end of the evening, the five-year-old, with a big smile, said "You really surprised us!" The three-year-old? "I liked the attack."





Don't be surprised when your kids ask for another Surprise Attack or reverse the Surprise Attack a little later...

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## CIVIC CULTURE: WASHINGTON'S FAVORITE SCRIPTURE

*Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree;  
and no one will make them afraid: for the Lord Almighty has spoken. (Micah 4:4)*

The Bible was so universally known in Washington's time that many times it would be quoted without attribution. People assumed you knew they were quoting the Bible.

Washington's writings contain hundreds of biblical references, quotations, proverbs and allusions. His favorite scripture, based on the number of times he referenced it in his writings, was Micah 4:4. Washington referenced this verse almost 50 times in his writings. Ask your child(ren) why this might be the favorite verse of the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army for seven long years?

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## CIVIC CULTURE: ENCOURAGEMENT

*George Washington was discouraged. How could the Americans, who were mostly new to fighting,  
ever hope to defeat the well-trained redcoats?*


As above, discuss with your child(ren) why Washington's troops and all Americans were discouraged. What raised the spirits of the soldiers (and the country)? Where did they find encouragement? You might ask your child(ren) if they remember a time when they were cold, tired, and hungry.

As an activity, ask your child(ren) to encourage a family member or friend at least once a day for the rest of the week (perhaps set up a checklist or star chart to mark each occasion). Work on developing the habit of encouraging one another, especially within your family. You might want to link this exercise with the previous one by memorizing the Bible verse "Encourage one another and build one another up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

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## CIVIC CULTURE: VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATIONS

*Drums rolled. A few of the men stepped forward, then more, and then more.  
Many of Washington's battle-tested soldiers resolved to stay at his side.*





Washington's army consisted of men who had voluntarily enlisted to fight for their country's freedom. Most of the enlistments were for very short terms, two to six months. Ask your child(ren) what they would like to do to help the family. Have a list of tasks around the house they could help with that are age appropriate (e.g., pick up their room, set the table, put their toys away, fold their clean clothes). Perhaps make it a "short-term enlistment" for just a week. Construct a checklist or star chart so they can check off each day they perform their volunteer activity. Perhaps ask them to extend their voluntary enlistment at the end of the period now that they are a "battle-tested veteran" just as Washington asked his volunteer army to extend their commitments.

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## HISTORY: FAMILY CONNECTIONS

*Most of Washington's men had the right to go home at the end of the year, but Washington needed them to stay.*

History comes alive when you can make a personal connection to historical events. Did any of your ancestors serve in the Continental Army during the War of Independence? Or were they Loyalists, supporting the British? It's not unusual to have ancestors on both sides of a conflict. If your family immigrated to America after the War of Independence, where were they living during this time period? When and why did they decide to come to America? Share their stories with your children.

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## ART: FIND WASHINGTON

*Even when the struggle seemed hopeless,  
George Washington did not give up.*

This activity can be fun for younger kids. Ask them if they can find George Washington in each picture (he is not in every one of them).

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## ART: FOCAL POINT

*He called a meeting of his generals and worked out a plan.*

The [focal point](#) of a painting is the area that the artist wants the viewer to pay the most attention. [A variety of techniques](#) are used by artists to draw the viewer's eye naturally to the area the artist considers most important or most interesting. These techniques include composition, converging lines, detail focus vs. blurring, color contrast. Select some of your or your child(ren)'s favorite paintings in the story

In the bottom right corner, there is a colorful illustration of a hand holding a paintbrush. The hand is rendered in shades of orange and red, and the paintbrush has a silver ferrule and a wooden handle. The brush is positioned as if it has just finished painting a yellow star. The background around the hand features several large, stylized stars in various colors like purple, pink, and blue.



and ask them to find the main focal point. Then see if you can tell what technique the artist used to draw your eye to the focal point.

Younger children may just enjoy comparing the red professional coats of the British army to the blue ragtags of Washington's Continental army as they page through the story.

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## LANGUAGE ARTS: QUOTATIONS AND FONTS

*"The force of the current, the sharpness of the frost ..., the ice which made during the operation ... rendered the passage of the river extremely difficult."*

JAMES WILKINSON  
MAJOR, CONTINENTAL ARMY


As you read through the story, notice that each page has a sentence in "quotation marks." The words between the quotation marks are the actual words that historical people spoke or wrote. Notice how each quotation is attributed to a specific person, and some include additional information about the speaker, in case the reader is unfamiliar with the person being quoted. Notice also the use of fonts: *italics* for the quotation, **small capitals** for the speaker (and even a smaller size font for the description of the person).

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## LANGUAGE ARTS: VOCABULARY AND IDIOMS

*But Washington had seafarers with him that night who knew how to navigate treacherous waters.*

The author uses some words associated with armies and battles that your child(ren) may not be familiar with: rebels, patriots, treacherous, ammunition, artillery, regiment, musket, rally. Try introducing a couple of the new words each day. Before you start reading, introduce the words you've selected for the day, define them, and then point them out during the reading.

- **Rebels:** men and women fighting against a government
  - **Patriots:** men and women who love their country
  - **Treacherous:** untrustworthy, unreliable
  - **Ammunition:** objects that can be shot from a weapon, like bullets or cannon balls
  - **Artillery:** very large guns moved on wheels, like cannons
  - **Regiment:** a large group of soldiers
  - **Musket:** gun with a long barrel, like a rifle
  - **Rally:** join together in a shared effort
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The author also includes idioms that may be worth pointing out to older children who wonder what the author means by “summer soldier” and “sunshine patriot.” Idioms are words, or a group of words, that have a figurative meaning that is not obvious from its literal definition. Authors use these figures of speech because their descriptive imagery conveys a more vivid meaning to the reader. Idioms are metaphorical and because the metaphors are often localized, people from different regions may not immediately grasp their meaning. Foreigners learning a new language are often baffled by idioms. What did Thomas Paine mean when he referred to some people as “summer soldiers” and “sunshine patriots”?

