



Education Guide

# BLACK PATRIOTS

HEROES OF THE REVOLUTION™





***Black Patriots: Heroes of the Revolution*** is a one-hour documentary on HISTORY® featuring NBA legend, best-selling author and esteemed activist Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. From the initial sparks of revolution in Boston to the climactic Siege of Yorktown and beyond, the documentary paints a picture of the African-American experience during the Revolutionary War and shares the story of the war through the eyes of some of the most significant African American figures of our country's founding, including Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem, Phillis Wheatley and James Armistead Lafayette. This documentary presents an excellent opportunity for students to learn more about the role of African Americans during the Revolutionary era, the lives of enslaved people, and the legacy of African American service.

### **Curriculum Links:**

***Black Patriots: Heroes of the Revolution*** would be useful for American History, African American History, and Political Science courses. It is appropriate for middle school, high school and college students. Learn more about this series here:  
[www.history.com/specials/black-patriots-heroes-of-the-revolution](http://www.history.com/specials/black-patriots-heroes-of-the-revolution)

### **Pre-Viewing Activity:**

Ask students to read this article before viewing to learn about the context for the documentary:  
[history.com/news/black-heroes-american-revolution](http://history.com/news/black-heroes-american-revolution)



## Terms to Define:

Students can think about the meaning of these terms before and after watching the documentary.

- Patriots
- Loyalists
- Revolution
- Regiment
- Emancipation
- Freedom
- Segregation

## Discussion Questions:

*These questions can prompt group discussions, essays or special projects related to the topics covered in this documentary.*

1. What were some of the conditions that led to the Boston Massacre? In what ways did African Americans and whites in America experience these conditions similarly? In what ways did their experiences differ?
2. Did you find it surprising that Crispus Attucks was at the center of the Boston Massacre? Why or why not?
3. What were some of the reasons people of African descent fought in the Revolutionary War?
4. Do you think the American Revolution created opportunities for black people in America?
5. In what ways was the American Revolution a civil war?
6. Why did George Washington initially decide not to employ enslaved men as soldiers?
7. Do you agree with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar that America is a place of optimism? Why or why not?
8. What do you think freedom meant to blacks during the Revolutionary era and how did that differ from what freedom meant to white people who joined the Revolutionary cause?
9. Why do you think the stories of the ways people of African descent participated in the American Revolution aren't more well-known?





## Primary Source Activity: Phyllis Wheatley's Letter

On March 30, 1776, the Virginia Gazette published poet Phyllis Wheatley's letter and poem to George Washington on its front page. On the last page of that same issue, as was customary at the time, it printed advertisements, including those for the sale of enslaved people and the return of self-liberated enslaved people. View this source online here:

[research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=76.DH.14&page=1&res=LO](http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=76.DH.14&page=1&res=LO) and here: [www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Enclosure\\_Poem\\_by\\_Phyllis\\_Wheatley\\_October\\_26\\_1775](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Enclosure_Poem_by_Phyllis_Wheatley_October_26_1775)

Ask students to read Phyllis Wheatley's letter and poem (located in the middle of the center column of the first page of the newspaper). Then, ask students to locate and read the advertisements relating to enslaved people on the last page of the newspaper.



## Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about Phyllis Wheatley from reading her letter and poem?
2. What does her poem and/or letter tell you about her feelings about the American Revolution?
3. What might have been her motivation for writing these words?
4. What do the advertisements relating to enslaved people tell you about attitudes toward Black people in 18th-century America?
5. What do the advertisements tell you about the people referenced within them?
6. Why do you think the publishers of the Virginia Gazette chose to print Phyllis Wheatley's poem and letter? What does the placement of the poem tell you about their thoughts and motivations?
7. What is unusual or surprising about Wheatley's work being published in the same newspaper as the advertisements regarding enslaved people?





## More Related Activity:

**Defining Freedom.** In *Black Patriots*, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar defines freedom as “the ability of every individual to seek their dream.” Ask each student to write their own definition of freedom. Have students share their definitions, and, as a class, come up with one definition the students agree on. Teacher prompts could include questions about individual vs. public good and potential limits to freedom. Then, discuss: What groups of people in American enjoyed freedom before, during and after the Revolutionary War? Do all Americans have freedom today? What kinds of freedom are essential? Should there ever be limits on freedom?

**Battle within a Battle.** As seen in *Black Patriots*, Titus Cornelius and Peter Salem were Black men who fought on different sides of the American Revolution, and against each other in 1778. If these two men had met face to face, what might they have talked about? Ask students to write a dialogue between these two men. Dialogues should include details about each man’s life and an explanation of each man’s reasons for fighting in the war, as well as why they chose to fight on the side they did. Students could also act out these dialogues for the class.

**Fitting Tribute.** After watching *Black Patriots* engage class in a discussion about the tributes they’ve seen to the leaders of and participants in the American Revolution. What forms do these tributes take? Have they ever seen a tribute to one or more of the Black Patriots? What would be a fitting tribute? Then, ask each student to create their own tribute to the Black Patriots for display in the school or classroom. The form of the tribute may vary according to the students’ talents or interests and could include: articles to supplement a textbook’s coverage of the American Revolution; artwork or sculptures; poetry; music and lyrics; or dance.

## Related Content from History.com:

Article: Remembering the Boston Massacre  
[www.history.com/news/the-boston-massacre-245-years-ago](http://www.history.com/news/the-boston-massacre-245-years-ago)

Video: Boston Massacre Sparks a Revolution  
[www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/boston-massacre-helps-spark-the-american-revolution-video](http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/boston-massacre-helps-spark-the-american-revolution-video)

This Day in History: Boston Massacre  
[www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-boston-massacre](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-boston-massacre)

Article: How a Slave-Turned-Spy Helped Secure Victory at the Battle of Yorktown  
[www.history.com/news/battle-of-yorktown-slave-spy-james-armistead](http://www.history.com/news/battle-of-yorktown-slave-spy-james-armistead)

Article: How George Washington Used Spies to Win the American Revolution  
[www.history.com/news/george-washington-general-espionage-culper-spy-ring](http://www.history.com/news/george-washington-general-espionage-culper-spy-ring)



Article: 10 Things You May Not Know about the Battle of Bunker Hill  
[www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-battle-of-bunker-hill](http://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-battle-of-bunker-hill)

Article: The Ex-Slaves Who Fought with the British  
[www.history.com/news/the-ex-slaves-who-fought-with-the-british](http://www.history.com/news/the-ex-slaves-who-fought-with-the-british)

Article: Battle of Yorktown  
[www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/siege-of-yorktown](http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/siege-of-yorktown)

Video: Revolution's Lasting Legacy  
[www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/revolutions-lasting-legacy-video](http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/revolutions-lasting-legacy-video)

### **More Related Content:**

Article: Who was Crispus Attucks? - The Crispus Attucks Museum  
[www.crispusattucksmuseum.org/crispus-attuck/](http://www.crispusattucksmuseum.org/crispus-attuck/)

Article: Crispus Attucks - American Battlefield Trust  
[www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/crispus-attucks](http://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/crispus-attucks)

Article: Crispus Attucks - Biography.com  
[www.biography.com/military-figure/crispus-attucks](http://www.biography.com/military-figure/crispus-attucks)

Article: Phyllis Wheatley: Her Life, Poetry & Legacy - National Portrait Gallery  
[npg.si.edu/blog/phyllis-wheatley-her-life-poetry-and-legacy](http://npg.si.edu/blog/phyllis-wheatley-her-life-poetry-and-legacy)

Article: Phyllis Wheatley - The Poetry Foundation  
[www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/phyllis-wheatley](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/phyllis-wheatley)

Article: Peter Salem: Patriot of Color - Freedom's Way National Heritage Area  
[freedomsway.org/peter-salem-patriot-of-color%E2%80%A8/](http://freedomsway.org/peter-salem-patriot-of-color%E2%80%A8/)

Book Excerpt: From Slaves to Soldiers: The 1st Rhode Island Regiment in the American Revolution, by Robert A. Geake - Museum of the American Revolution  
[www.amrevmuseum.org/read-the-revolution/history/slaves-soldiers-1st-rhode-island-regiment-american-revolution](http://www.amrevmuseum.org/read-the-revolution/history/slaves-soldiers-1st-rhode-island-regiment-american-revolution)

Article: James Armistead - Biography.com  
[www.biography.com/political-figure/james-armistead](http://www.biography.com/political-figure/james-armistead)

Primary Source: Lafayette's Testimonial to James Armistead Lafayette - Mount Vernon  
[www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/american-spies-of-the-revolution/lafayettes-testimonial-to-james-armistead-lafayette/](http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/american-spies-of-the-revolution/lafayettes-testimonial-to-james-armistead-lafayette/)

Article: James Armistead Lafayette - American Battlefield Trust  
[www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/james-armistead-lafayette](http://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/james-armistead-lafayette)