CROSSING THE DELAWARE

Title: Crossing of the Delaware and the Battle of Trenton
Author: Linda Driscoll (Adapted from a lesson by Dr. Donald Roberts, Explore PA History)
Grade Level: Middle School
Estimated Time: 2 days (50 minute periods)

Overview:
In this lesson, students will read primary documents and study a painting to understand the importance of the crossing of the Delaware and the Battle of Trenton to the Revolutionary cause. This lesson plan works well as part of a unit on the Revolutionary War. Students need to have a background on the causes of the war before beginning the lesson. They should know about the discouraging defeats of General Washington and his soldiers in New York, and the poorly trained and equipped troops at his command.

Historical Background:
Washington’s crossing of the Delaware on December 25, 1776, resulted in a stunning American victory. Continental forces crossed the icy river and captured nearly 1,000 surprised Hessians at the Trenton outpost. The daring strike came during a low point in the conflict for the Americans. They had suffered a series of losses on the battlefield and faced the real prospect of a total collapse of their army. This victory and a second success at Princeton allowed Washington to reestablish an American presence in New Jersey, which had been completely under British control, and rally at least some degree of public support for the patriot cause, encourage re-enlistments, and restore confidence in Washington’s leadership.

Two excellent sources on these events are a book by David Hackett Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing* and a report on the painting, “George Washington Crossing the Delaware” given by Ina Jaffe on National Public Radio, Morning Edition (http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/pate/georgewashington/index.html). Fischer writes a detailed account of the crossing of the Delaware River and the Battles of Trenton and Princeton. He also offers an in-depth analysis of the painting. Jaffe discusses the historical inaccuracies represented in the painting.

Major Understanding:
It is important for students to recognize the importance of primary documents to learn about our past and the power of art to present ideas and express emotional and symbolic meaning. Using the autobiography of a Revolutionary War veteran and a painting of Washington crossing the Delaware River, students will understand that despite poorly trained and equipped troops and terrible weather conditions, the Continental Army won a stunning victory at Trenton. It is important for students to know that this victory of Washington and the Continental Army, despite insurmountable obstacles, raised patriot morale in the face of the disastrous New York campaign, encouraged re-enlistments, and restored confidence in the leadership of Washington.
Objectives:
Students will:
1. Interpret and analyze primary documents.
2. Apply knowledge from primary documents to describe the crossing of the Delaware and the Battle of Trenton
3. Analyze a work of art from a historical and cultural perspective
4. Recognize the leadership qualities of George Washington
5. Understand the importance of the Battle of Trenton to the Revolutionary cause
6. Write a textbook account about the crossing of the Delaware and the Battle of Trenton.

Standards of Learning: (Virginia and United States History to 1877)
Skills USI.1 Students will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to
a) identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history to 1877;
d) interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives;
e) evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing.

Content USI.6 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the causes and results of the American Revolution by
c) describing key events and the roles of key individuals in the American Revolution, with emphasis on George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry.