Worksheet: Crossing the Delaware

Directions: Today you will work in pairs to analyze a painting and a primary source, the recollections of a Revolutionary War veteran. Your goal is to develop an understanding of the conditions faced by Washington and the soldiers as they crossed the Delaware.

1. Describe the scene illustrated by the artist. What are the conditions?
2. Who are the people?
3. How do the people shown react to those conditions? (3 points)
4. Why is Washington placed in the center of the painting? What does his appearance tell you? What is the artist trying to say about Washington based on how he is depicted? (3 points)
5. What questions do you have about this painting?


1. Give specific quotes from Greenwood’s recollections that describe the conditions of the crossing.

2. In what ways are the images shown in the painting and the facts recounted in Greenwood’s recollections similar? Different?

4. If you were Washington, what actions would you have taken based on the conditions shown in the painting and in Greenwood’s recollections? Why?

5. How do you think the Battle of Trenton will affect the outcome of the Revolutionary War? (3 points)
...A day or two after reaching Newton we were paraded one afternoon to march and attack Trenton. If I recollect aright the sun was about half an hour high and shining brightly, but it had no sooner set than it began to drizzle or grow wet, and when we came to the river it rained. Every man had sixty rounds of cartridges served out to him, and as I then had a gun, as indeed every officer had, I put the number which I received, some in my pockets and some in my little cartridge-box. Over the river we then went in a flat-bottomed scow, and as I was with first that crossed, we had to wait for the rest and so began to pull down the fences and make fires to warm ourselves, for the storm was increasing rapidly. After a while it rained, hailed, snowed, and froze, and at the same time blew a perfect hurricane; so much so that I perfectly recollect, after putting the rails on to burn, the wind and the fire would cut them in two in a moment, and when I turned my face toward the fire my back would be freezing. However, as my usual acuteness had not forsaken me, by turning round and round I kept myself from perishing before the large bonfire.

The noise of the soldiers coming over and clearing away the ice, the rattling of the cannon wheels on the frozen ground, and the cheerfulness of my fellow-comrades as I acknowledge myself to be, I felt great pleasure, more that I now do in writing about it. After our men had all crossed and there not, as I could see, more 200 of us we began an apparent circuitous march, not advancing faster than a child ten years old could walk, and stopping frequently, though for what purpose I know not. During the whole night it alternately hailed, rained, snowed, and blew tremendously. I recollect very well that at one time, when we halted on the road, I sat down on the stump of a tree and was so benumbed with cold that I wanted to go to sleep; had I been passed unnoticed I should have frozen to death without knowing it; but as good luck always attended me, Sergeant Madden came and, rousing me up, made me walk about. We then began to march again, just in the old slow way, until the dawn of day, about half-past seven in the morning.
Secondary Sources: Two different versions on the state of the Hessians when George Washington and his troops captured Trenton

Version 1

• “By 8 o’clock the morning, the men had marched nine miles through sleet and snow to the objective—Trenton, New Jersey, held by a garrison of Hessians. Lulled into confidence by the storm, most of the Hessians had drunk too much rum the night before and were still sleeping it off.”

[This excerpt is from an American history textbook: Gerald A. Danzer, et. al. The Americans]

Version 2

• “While the (American) officers talked, the army found forty hogsheads of rum in Trenton. When Washington found out about it, he ordered the rum destroyed, but the commander- in-chief may have been the last to know. Before his officers could act, more than a few hogsheads had been emptied in another way. The adjutant of the army reported that ‘the soldiers drank too freely to admit of discipline or Defence.’ In a word, some of the American victors celebrated their own success by getting gloriously drunk and even more disorderly than usual.”

[A detailed account of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton in David Hackett Fischer, Washington’s Crossing, p. 256]

Source 2: The Wartime Services of John Greenwood: A Young Patriot in the American Revolution

I have heard that we surprised the enemy; if we did, they must have been a lazy, indolent set of rascals, which is nothing to the credit of a regular army, as the English called themselves. But anyone who would even suppose such a thing must indeed be ignorant, when it is well known our whole country was filled with timid, designing Tories and informers of all descriptions, and our march so slow that it was impossible but that they should be apprised of it. It was likewise asserted at the same time that the enemy were all drunk; if they were, it shows there was no good discipline among those brave, regular troops. If they were drunk, I can swear we were all sober to a man; not only sober, but nearly half dead with cold for the want of clothing, as, putting the storm to one side, many of our soldiers had not a shoe to their feet and their clothes were ragged as those of a beggar. I am certain not a drop of liquor was drunk during the whole night, nor, as I could see, even a piece of bread eaten, and I am willing to go upon oath that I did not see even a solitary drunken soldier belonging to the enemy, _and you will find, as I shall show, that I had an opportunity to be as good a judge as any person there._
THOSE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right (not only to TAX) but "to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER" and if being bound in that manner, is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious; for so unlimited a power can belong only to God. (….)

As I was with the troops at Fort Lee, and marched with them to the edge of Pennsylvania, I am well acquainted with many circumstances, which those who live at a distance know but little or nothing of. Our situation there was exceedingly cramped, the place being a narrow neck of land between the North River and the Hackensack. Our force was inconsiderable, being not one-fourth so great as Howe could bring against us. We had no army at hand to have relieved the garrison, had we shut ourselves up and stood on our defence. Our ammunition, light artillery, and the best part of our stores, had been removed, on the apprehension that Howe would endeavor to penetrate the Jerseys, in which case Fort Lee could be of no use to us; for it must occur to every thinking man, whether in the army or not, that these kind of field forts are only for temporary purposes, and last in use no longer than the enemy directs his force against the particular object which such forts are raised to defend. Such was our situation and condition at Fort Lee on the morning of the 20th of November, when an officer arrived with information that the enemy with 200 boats had landed about seven miles above; Major General [Nathaniel] Green, who commanded the garrison, immediately ordered them under arms, and sent express to General Washington at the town of Hackensack, distant by the way of the ferry = six miles. Our first object was to secure the bridge over the Hackensack, which laid up the river between the enemy and us, about six miles from us, and three from them. General Washington arrived in about three-quarters of an hour, and marched at the head of the troops towards the bridge, which place I expected we should have a brush for; however, they did not choose to dispute it with us, and the greatest part of our troops went over the bridge, the rest over the ferry, except some which passed at a mill on a small creek, between the bridge and the ferry, and made their way through some marshy grounds up to the town of Hackensack, and there passed the river. We brought off as much baggage as the wagons could contain, the rest was lost. The simple object was to bring off the garrison, and march them on till they could be strengthened by the Jersey or Pennsylvania militia, so as to be enabled to make a stand. We staid four days at Newark, collected our out-posts with some of the Jersey militia, and marched out twice to meet the enemy, on being informed that they were advancing, though our numbers were greatly inferior to theirs. Howe, in my little opinion, committed a great error in generalship in not throwing a body of forces off from Staten Island through Amboy, by which means he might have seized all our stores at Brunswick, and intercepted our march into
Pennsylvania; but if we believe the power of hell to be limited, we must likewise believe that their agents are under some providential control. (….)