

**American History Lesson 1 Overview:** Recruiting for the Continental Army

**Main Ideas:** American Revolution, Storytelling, Political Point of View and Loyalties

**Grade Level:** Fifth Grade

**Learning Objectives:** Students will expand their understanding of colonial Americans during the American Revolution by examining multiple perspectives represented in one artwork.

**Duration:** 45 minutes

### **Set Up:**

- Print **Teacher Instructions** for reference during exercise.
- Project **Object Image** onto screen
- Print five or six copies of **Vignette Image**; these can be printed in black and white as long as the color image is projected as a reference.
- Print out enough copies of the **Background Information** to hand out to the entire class.
- Print out five or six copies of the **Close Looking Questions for Students** to hand out to each group.
- (Optional) Set up enough space in front of the classroom to perform a tableau at the end of the exercise.

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**Teacher Instructions:**

1. Print out Teacher Instructions for reference during activity.
2. Instruct the students to read the **Background Information** about the painting and the artist. Print and hand out or read online.
3. Invite the students to look at the entire image, point out the different clusters of people scattered around the image. Inform the students that these groups are called vignettes.
4. Count the number of characters in each vignette; this determines the number of students needed for each group. You may include dogs as part of the group (yes, even the dogs are displayed with personality traits in this painting. Look closely.)
5. Divide the groups, hand out the **Vignette Image** and assign each group a vignette.
6. Ask the groups to examine and describe what is happening within their vignette.
7. Hand out copies of the **Close Looking Questions for Students** to each group.
8. Each group needs to decide to label their people as Patriots, Loyalists or neutral parties during the American Revolution and be prepared to explain why.
9. The class comes back together and the students share their discoveries of how the story comes together and identify each groups' loyalty.
10. Make connections to other readings you have done about the American Revolution.
11. (Optional) When investigation of the image is completed, perform a tableau. That means all groups pose together positioning themselves similar to the figures in the painting.
12. Possible extensions of this activity are adding dialog or writing scripts to act out the tableau.

### Background Information

#### **American History Lesson 1: *Recruiting for the Continental Army*, by William T. Ranney, 1857-59**

**About the Artwork:** This painting titled *Recruiting for the Continental Army* painted between 1857-59, is one of nine paintings William T. Ranney created depicting life during the American Revolution. After the Texas War of Independence in 1836 and the Mexican War (1846-48) there was renewed national pride and increased interest in depicting historical events in both literature and art. Scenes from the American Revolution were a favorite subject.

In this image, Ranney chose to illustrate the human side of war through a typical scene experienced in many colonial towns as opposed to a heroic battle scene. Considered an excellent storyteller, Ranney stages his characters each reacting to the main activity of the recruitment in the center of the image. He then leads us throughout the scene to the various sub stories all interconnected and each presenting a different aspect of life and loyalties.

The Continental Army had to do a great deal of recruiting because men would sign up to fight for periods lasting 3-6 months. These were farmers or businessmen who couldn't be gone for long periods; also there were many desertions and unfortunately deaths and wounded soldiers. Scenes like this were common. This painting has many groups of people, each reacting to what is going on; we can almost imagine a story about each group as we look at it. When an artist clusters groups of people like this, they are called vignettes.

**About the Artist:** William T. Ranney was a self taught artist. He fought as a soldier during the Texas War of Independence in 1836. The artist died from tuberculosis before this painting was finished and the artist Charles F. Blauvelt completed it in 1859 in order to sell it along with other works in an auction to raise funds to benefit the Ranney family.

**Close Looking questions for Students:**

1. What is happening in the vignette?
2. What are the people doing and what are they looking at?
3. What are the individual people wearing; are they dressed differently from other people in the painting? What objects are near them, what are they holding?
4. Who is included and who is missing (if anyone) in this particular vignette; is there a relationship between the individuals in the vignette?
5. Look at how different people are physically staged in the image. What can you determine about their mood from their body language or their facial expressions?
6. What do you imagine different individuals might be saying to one another?
7. What do you imagine some people might be thinking?
8. Decide which one of the following labels describe the people in your vignette.
  - a. Patriots – This group is willing to join up and fight for independence from English rule.
  - b. Loyalists – This group is not interested in joining the fight they are loyal to the King of England.
  - c. Neutral – This group has interests on either side of the war. They provide a service to people who are Patriots and people who are Loyalists. They are neutral.

