Our troops are in general almost naked and very often in a starving condition. All my men except 13 are unfit for duty for want of shoes, stockings, and shirts. . . . Poor Jack has been necessitated to make up his blanket into a vest and breeches. If I did not fear starving with cold I should be tempted to do the same.

—adapted from A Salute to Courage

The Opposing Sides

The struggle at Valley Forge was a dark hour for the patriots. No one knew if they were strong enough to defeat the powerful British Empire. On the same day that the Continental Congress voted for independence, the British began landing troops in New York. By mid-August, they had assembled an estimated 32,000 men under the command of General William Howe. British officials did not expect the rebellion to last long. The British troops, called “redcoats” because of their uniforms, were disciplined, well trained, and well equipped.
Compared to the British troops, the Continental Army was inexperienced and poorly equipped. Throughout the war, it struggled to keep its recruits and pay their wages. Although over 230,000 men served in the Continental Army, they rarely numbered more than 20,000 at any one time. Many soldiers deserted or refused to reenlist when their term was up. Others left their posts and returned to their farms at planting or harvest time.

Paying for the war was equally difficult. Lacking the power to tax, the Continental Congress issued paper money. These “Continents” were not backed by gold or silver and became almost worthless very quickly. Fortunately Robert Morris, a wealthy Pennsylvania merchant and banker, personally pledged large amounts of money for the war effort. Morris also set up an efficient method of buying rations and uniforms, arranged for foreign loans, and convinced the Congress to create the Bank of North America to finance the military.

The Continental Army was not the only force the British had to worry about. They also had to fight the local militias. The militias were poorly trained, but they fought differently. They did not always line up for battle. They hid among trees and behind walls and ambushed British troops and supply wagons, then disappeared. This kind of fighting is called guerrilla warfare, and it is very difficult to defeat.

Another problem for the British was that they were not united at home. Many merchants and members of Parliament opposed the war. The British had to win quickly and cheaply; otherwise, opinions in Parliament would shift against the war. The United States did not have to defeat Britain—it simply had to survive until the British became tired of paying for the war.

The European balance of power also hampered the British. The French, Dutch, and Spanish were all eager to exploit Britain’s problems. As a result, Britain had to station much of its military elsewhere in the world to defend its empire. The European balance of power also meant that the Patriots might be able to find allies against the British.

Identifying What three major disadvantages did the British face in the American Revolution?

The Northern Campaign

The British knew that to end the war quickly, they not only had to win several battles but also had to convince the American people that their cause was hopeless. At the same time, the British had to make it safe to surrender. If the Patriots thought they would be hanged for treason, they would never surrender.

General Howe’s strategy had two parts. The first part was military. He began a massive buildup in New York, hoping to intimidate the Americans and capture New York City. This would separate New
Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Edward Rutledge. Howe told them that anyone who put down their arms and swore loyalty to the king would be pardoned. The Americans quickly realized that Howe had no authority to negotiate a compromise and was only interested in talking them into surrendering. They refused to talk further, and the stage was set for the first major battle.

Opening Moves Despite the size of the British forces preparing to seize New York City, the Continental Congress asked Washington to defend the city. Congressional leaders feared that if New York fell without a fight, it would hurt American morale. Washington agreed with this assessment, and he moved much of his army to Long Island and Manhattan Island.

The inexperience of Washington’s troops became obvious when British troops landed on Long Island in the summer of 1776. Many American soldiers fled, and another 1,500 became casualties. Fortunately, the British did not move quickly after their victory, and the surviving American troops escaped to Manhattan Island where they joined the remainder of Washington’s army defending New York City.

Using their ships, the British could have landed troops north of New York City and surrounded the American positions, but again, they moved too slowly. Washington abandoned the city and headed to the northern end of Manhattan. The British then captured New York and used it as their headquarters for the rest of the war.

About this time, Washington sent Captain Nathan Hale to spy on the British. Although Hale was disguised as a Dutch schoolteacher, he was caught by the British and hanged. Brave until the end, Hale’s last words were: “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.” Shortly afterward, Washington moved most of his troops from Manhattan to White Plains, New York, where the British once again engaged the Americans in battle.

Crossing the Delaware At the Battle of White Plains in October 1776, the British forced Washington to retreat again. Then they surprised him. Instead of coming after the Continental Army, the British troops headed toward Philadelphia, where the Continental Congress was meeting. Washington’s troops received word of this new plan. They had to move fast, but they managed to get there ahead of the British.

While this march was taking place, Thomas Paine wrote another pamphlet to help boost American morale. In *The American Crisis*, he

England from the Southern states and demonstrate to Americans that they could not win.

The second part of Howe’s strategy was diplomatic. He invited delegates from the Continental Congress to a peace conference. The Congress sent
reminded his fellow Americans that “the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph”:

“...These 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 it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

—from The American Crisis

By the time Washington reached Pennsylvania, winter had begun. The British stopped their advance and dispersed into winter quarters in New Jersey. In the 1700s, armies did not usually fight in the winter because of the weather and scarce food supplies.

At this point, Washington tried something daring and unexpected—a winter attack. On December 25, 1776, he led approximately 2,400 men across the icy Delaware River. The army then attacked a group of Hessians at Trenton in the middle of a sleet storm. They killed or captured almost 1,000 men. Several days later, at Princeton, Washington’s forces scattered three British regiments. Having achieved two small victories, Washington headed into the hills of northern New Jersey for the winter.

Philadelphia Falls In March 1777, King George III approved a plan developed by General John Burgoyne to isolate New England from the other American states. Burgoyne proposed a three-pronged attack on New York. He would take a large force south into New York from Montreal. Another force would move from Montreal up the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario then head east into New York. A third force, led by General Howe, would march north from New York City up the Hudson River valley. The three forces would meet near Albany, then march east into New England.

Unfortunately for the British, they did not coordinate the plan. By spring 1777, General Howe had made his own plans. He loaded about 13,000 men onto ships and moved them to Maryland. From there he attacked Philadelphia from the south. Howe believed that capturing Philadelphia and the Continental Congress would cripple the Revolution.

Howe’s operation was a military success but a political failure. On September 11, 1777, he defeated Washington at the Battle of Brandywine Creek and captured Philadelphia. To Howe’s frustration, however, the Continental Congress escaped. Howe failed to destroy the Continental Army, which soon took up winter quarters at Valley Forge. There, the bitter cold and food shortages killed nearly 2,500 men.

Even amidst the harsh conditions of Valley Forge, Washington managed to secure training for his army. Joining him at Valley Forge were two European military officers, the Marquis de Lafayette from France and Baron Friedrich von Steuben from Prussia. These officers helped Washington improve discipline and boost morale among the weary troops.

France Enters the War General Burgoyne did not know Howe had gone south to attack Philadelphia. In June 1777, he and an estimated 8,000 troops marched south from Quebec into New York. From the eastern end of Lake Ontario, another 900 troops and over 1,000 Iroquois warriors headed east toward Albany. The Iroquois had allied with the British hoping to keep American settlers off Iroquois lands.

Despite some early victories, Burgoyne’s forces were not able to defeat the Americans defending upper New York. The British troops and Iroquois marching east from Lake Ontario were ambushed by militia and then driven back by American troops under General Benedict Arnold. Meanwhile, Burgoyne’s own troops could not drive off the militia. With his supplies dwindling, Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga, New York. The American victory at Saratoga was a turning point.
in the war. It improved American morale and also convinced France to commit troops to the American cause.

Both Spain and France had been secretly sending arms and supplies to the United States well before Saratoga. The Congress appreciated the supplies but wanted the French to send troops too. In September 1776, the Congress sent Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee, and Silas Deane to France to ask for troops. The French, however, were not willing to risk war until they believed the Americans could win, and the victory at Saratoga assured them. Shortly afterward, they began negotiations with the United States to create an alliance against Britain.

On February 6, 1778, the United States signed its first two treaties. In the first treaty, France became the first country to recognize the United States as an independent nation. The second treaty was an alliance between the United States and France. By June 1778, Britain and France were at war. In 1779 the Spanish entered the war as well, as an ally of France but not of the United States.

The War in the West

Not all of the fighting in the Revolutionary War took place in the East. In 1778, Patriot George Rogers Clark took 175 troops down the Ohio River and captured several towns. By February 1779, the British had surrendered, giving the Americans control of the region.

While Clark fought the British in the West, Chief Joseph Brant, also known as Thayendanegea, convinced four Iroquois nations to join the British. In July 1778, British troops and Iroquois warriors attacked western Pennsylvania, burning towns and killing over 200 militia. The following summer, American troops defeated the British and Iroquois in western New York. These battles destroyed the power of the Iroquois people.

Farther south, the Cherokee people suffered a similar fate. After the Revolution began, a delegation of Shawnee, Delaware, and Mohawk convinced the Cherokee that the time had come to drive American settlers off Cherokee lands. The Cherokee attacked settlers in Virginia and North Carolina, but the American militia units were too strong. By 1780 militia units had burned down hundreds of Cherokee towns.

The War at Sea

Americans fought the British at sea as well as on land. Instead of attacking the British fleet directly, American warships attacked British merchant ships. To further disrupt British trade, the Congress began issuing letters of marque, or licenses, to private ship owners, authorizing them to attack British merchant ships. By the end of the war, millions of dollars of cargo had been seized, seriously harming Britain’s trade and economy.

Perhaps the most famous naval battle of the war involved the American naval officer, John Paul Jones.
Jones commanded a ship named the *Bonhomme Richard*. While sailing near Britain in September 1779, Jones encountered a group of British merchant ships protected by the warships *Serapis* and *Countess of Scarborough*. Jones attacked the *Serapis*, but the heavier guns of the British ship nearly sank the *Bonhomme Richard*. With the American ship in distress, the British commander called on Jones to surrender. Jones replied, “I have not yet begun to fight.” He lashed his ship to the *Serapis* so it could not sink, then boarded the British ship. The battle lasted more than three hours before the British surrendered.

**Reading Check**  Summarizing

What was the American strategy for attacking the British at sea?

**The Southern Campaign**

After the British defeat at Saratoga, General Howe resigned and was replaced by Sir Henry Clinton. British officials told Clinton to begin a campaign in the southern states where the British believed they had the strongest Loyalist support. The southern states were also valuable because they produced tobacco and rice. The British hoped they could keep the South, even if they lost the northern states.

**The Fall of Savannah and Charles Town** In December 1778, 3,500 British troops captured Savannah, Georgia. They seized control of Georgia’s backcountry and returned the British royal governor to power.

After defeating the American and French troops trying to take Savannah, General Clinton attacked Charles Town, South Carolina. Nearly 14,000 British troops surrounded the city, trapping the American forces. On May 12, 1780, the Americans surrendered. Nearly 5,500 American troops were taken prisoner, the greatest American defeat in the war. Clinton returned to New York, leaving General Charles Cornwallis in command. The Continental Congress then sent General Horatio Gates, the hero of Saratoga, to defend the South Carolina backcountry. Gates attempted to destroy a British supply base at Camden, South Carolina, but failed.

**TURNING POINT**

**The Patriots Rally** After the battle of Camden, the British began subduing the Carolina backcountry. At first, everything went well for them. Many of the settlers were Loyalists and agreed to fight for Britain. Two British cavalry officers, Banastre Tarleton and Patrick Ferguson, led many of the Loyalist forces in the region. These troops became known for their brutality.

Ferguson finally went too far when he tried to subdue the people living in the Appalachian Mountains. Enraged at his tactics, the “overmountain” men, as they were known, put together a militia force. They intercepted Ferguson at Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780, and destroyed his army. The **Battle of Kings Mountain** was a turning point in the South. Southern farmers, furious with British treatment, began organizing their own forces.

The new American commander in the region, General Nathaniel Greene, hoped to wear down the British in battle while militia destroyed their supplies. Greene organized the militia into small units to carry out hit-and-run raids against British camps and supply wagons. Francis Marion, who was known as the “Swamp Fox,” led the most famous of these units. Greene’s strategy worked. By late 1781, the British
controlled very little territory in the South except for Savannah, Charles Town, and Wilmington.

**Reading Check** **Explaining** Why was the Battle of Kings Mountain a turning point of the war in the South?

The War Is Won

In the spring of 1781, General Cornwallis decided to invade Virginia. As long as the Americans controlled Virginia, he believed, new troops and supplies could keep coming south. With more French troops on the way to America, the British knew they had very little time left to win the war. They had to secure Virginia.

The Battle of Yorktown

In late April 1781, Cornwallis marched into Virginia, where he linked up with forces under the command of Benedict Arnold. Arnold had been an American commander early in the war but had later sold military information to the British. When his treason was discovered, Arnold fled to British-controlled New York City. There he was given command of British troops and ordered to begin raiding American positions in Virginia.
After Arnold’s forces joined those of Cornwallis, the British began to conquer Virginia. Their combined forces encountered very little resistance until June 1781, when a large American force led by General Anthony Wayne arrived in Virginia. Outnumbered and too far inland, Cornwallis retreated to the coastal town of Yorktown to protect his supplies and to maintain communications by sea.

Cornwallis’s retreat created an opportunity for the Americans and their French allies. The previous year, 6,000 French troops had arrived in New England. With this support, Washington decided to march on New York City. As the troops headed to New York, the French general Rochambeau learned that a French fleet commanded by Admiral Francois de Grasse was on its way north from the Caribbean.

When he learned of the French fleet, Washington canceled the attack on New York. Instead, he and Rochambeau led their forces to Yorktown. As the American and French troops raced south, Admiral de Grasse moved into Chesapeake Bay near Yorktown. With the French fleet nearby, Cornwallis could not escape by sea or receive supplies.

On September 28, 1781, American and French forces surrounded Yorktown and began to bombard it. On October 14, Washington’s aide, Alexander Hamilton, led an attack that captured key British defenses. Three days later, Cornwallis began negotiations to surrender, and on October 19, 1781, approximately 8,000 British troops marched out of Yorktown and laid down their weapons. During the surrender, a British military band played a popular nursery tune, “The World Turn’d Upside Down.”

The Treaty of Paris When Lord North, the British prime minister, learned of the surrender at Yorktown, he knew the war was over. In March 1782, Parliament voted to begin peace negotiations. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay conducted most of the negotiations for the United States.

The final settlement, known as the Treaty of Paris, was signed on September 3, 1783. In this treaty, Britain recognized the United States of America as a new nation with the Mississippi River as its western border. Britain also gave Florida back to Spain. France received colonies in Africa and the Caribbean that the British had seized from them in 1763. On November 24, 1783, the last British troops left New York City. The Revolutionary War was over. The creation of a new nation was about to begin.

**Sections 3 Assessment**

### Checking for Understanding

1. Define: guerrilla warfare, letters of marque.

### Reviewing Themes

3. Global Connections Why were the French at first reluctant to sign an alliance with the colonies?

### Critical Thinking

4. Evaluating How did European countries aid the Americans in the war for independence?
5. Categorizing Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the provisions of the Treaty of Paris.

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Provisions of Treaty of Paris, 1783
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### Analyzing Visuals

6. Examining Art Study the painting on page 141. How has the artist portrayed the condition of Washington’s army?

### Writing About History

7. Persuasive Writing Imagine that you are a colonist during the Revolutionary War. Write a letter to convince European nations to support the Americans in the war.