



*Honoring the Spirit of America*

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## **“Patriots and Traitors”**

Grades: 6-8  
Social Studies

### **Objective**

- 1 Demonstrate an understanding of patriotism as contrasted with betrayal of one's country.
- 2 Analyze, compare and make judgment regarding the actions of two historical figures known for betraying the United States.

### **Character Education Words**

- Patriotism
- Loyalty
- Honesty
- Responsibility

### **Teacher's Overview**

- 1 The goal of this lesson is to facilitate students' understanding of patriotism through the analysis of the actions of two historical figures: Benedict Arnold and Robert E. Lee. Both of these men obviously committed treason against the United States, and yet they are both viewed very differently by most Americans. Arnold is seen as an icon of treason while Lee is mostly viewed as a hero.
- 2 By examining the motives and actions of these two men, students should come to some conclusions as to their own feelings about what patriotism is and is not.

### **Materials**

- Reading Sheet: Stories of Arnold and of Lee.
- Question Sheet
- Notebook Paper

## **Introduction**

Ask what the students know about Benedict Arnold. Then see what they know about Robert E. Lee. Try to get them to come up with an opinion of these two men before reading the material.

## **Activity**

- 1 Divide class up into two groups.
- 2 Pass out the reading sheet and have groups silently read through the material, stopping as needed to ensure comprehension or to add any historical information they might have.
- 3 Students then need to act out the biographies of each man. Each student in the group must be assigned a role. Students will act out silently as one student narrates aloud to the class.
- 4 After each reading, the students will write down their thoughts on the men/what they perceived about the men's lives.
- 5 Hold a brief discussion about whether the students see both men as traitors or if they view the men differently. Probe into the reasons for these judgments.
- 6 Then pass out the question sheet and have students respond to the questions in writing. They may need to use a separate sheet of notebook paper for this part.

## **Independent Practice/Reflection**

Allow students the opportunity to share their written responses.

## **Assessment**

Question sheets and/or separate paper used

## **Enrichment**

- Mock Trial - Set up a mock trial in which Benedict Arnold faces the prosecution and has to defend his actions. Then do the same thing with Lee.
- Writing Prompt - Talk to the class about how Lee was not allowed to be a true citizen (with voting rights) after the War. Write a persuasive letter to the President either trying to get him to reestablish Lee's full citizenship or affirming the decision to revoke it.
- Class Discussion - Instead of students reading the passages and completing the questions independently, the teacher may read the passages aloud and use the questions as discussion.
- Role Play - Set up a fantasy role-play where Benedict Arnold meets Robert E. Lee and tries to tell Lee that he is a traitor just like himself. Lee defends his actions.
- Classification chart - Write the words "Patriot" and "Traitor" on the board as two headings, each with a column for Arnold and a column for Lee underneath. Students cite actions of Arnold that would place him under either heading, and then do the same for Lee. Discuss the findings.

- Research - Do research to come up with any other figures from American history that behaved similarly or faced similar choices as Arnold or Lee.

### **PATRIOTS & TRAITORS**

If a patriot is a person who is loyal to and has strong pride in his or her country, then the opposite of the patriot is the *traitor*. A traitor is a person who betrays or turns against his country. A person might betray his country to get something out of it like money or a promise of safety. Or he might do it because he has stronger feelings for something other than his country. Some traitors turn against their country simply because they are angry at their country for some reason. We will be examining two figures from America's history who turned against the United States for very different reasons: **Benedict Arnold** and **Robert E. Lee**. Read the following passages and see what you think.

#### **Benedict Arnold**

Benedict Arnold was considered at first to be one of the greatest patriots of his day. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War he set out to lead a group of men to capture the British fortress of Ticonderoga. Following that shocking success he went on to demonstrate remarkable courage and sacrifice for the sake of American independence. Unfortunately, Arnold's ambition and pride were just as remarkable as his courage. He grew bitter and angry when, time after time, he didn't get the promotion he thought he deserved. Wounded and almost broke, he was put in charge of the city of Philadelphia, but he began to take advantage of the war in order to get wealth and luxury for himself and his high-living wife. When he was corrected for this behavior, he became offended. He thought that he was not getting treated fairly after all of the things he had done for his country.

Arnold began to communicate secretly with the enemy: the British. He schemed to get himself placed in charge of a strong American fortress called West Point. Then he began the plot to turn the fortress over to the British. Fortunately for us, the plan failed. Before he could be caught, Arnold ran over to the British and was put in charge of leading redcoat soldiers against the very country he had just fought so bravely to defend. Today, when someone betrays our trust or our friendship, we call that person a *Benedict Arnold*.

#### **Robert E. Lee**

Robert E. Lee had a famous father - "Lighthouse" Harry Lee - who was a hero from the Revolutionary War. Besides his father, young Robert had another hero he greatly admired: George Washington. Lee became an officer in the U.S. Army and earned a reputation as a capable and loyal soldier during the Mexican War.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected President, seven states were so mad about his election and the things he stood for, they broke away from the United States

to start their own country, called the Confederate States of America. Lincoln decided to use military force to bring them back. Robert E. Lee was in the Army serving in Texas at the time. He was such a good soldier; he was offered the command of the Union Army. But Lee faced a very difficult decision. His home state of Virginia was one of the states that broke away. How could he go fight against his own family, friends and neighbors?

In those days, Americans didn't get around much. If you were born in a state, you most likely lived in that state all your life. If you lived in Georgia, you called yourself a Georgian as much as (or more than) you called yourself an American. Lee was a Virginian, and his state no longer considered itself to be part of the United States. When asked to go fight against the rebel states, Lee said he could not bring himself to lift his sword against his own people, and he quit the Army. Shortly after, he agreed to join the new army of Virginians who now had to face the Northern army, which was coming to force them back into the United States. Soon this fine officer, who had been as dedicated and loyal to the Union as any soldier had ever been, was ordering rebel soldiers to shoot the men he had once commanded. Lee went on to become one of the greatest generals of all time, winning battles against seemingly impossible odds. He had the love and respect of all his men, and he was equally dedicated to them, but he did not win the Civil War. And after the war was over, he was branded a traitor by the country he had chosen to turn away from. His heart was never in the rebellion, and he certainly was not fighting for slavery. He simply felt that loyalty to his people and state came first, even before loyalty to the nation as a whole. Although Robert E. Lee is probably seen by most as a great man, there are some who still regard him as someone who betrayed his country.

**PATRIOTS & TRAITORS**  
**Question Sheet**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. In what ways were Benedict Arnold and Robert E. Lee different?
  
2. In what ways were they the same?
  
3. Do you feel that Robert E. Lee was a traitor or a hero? Why or why not?

4. Some people might feel that is not right to compare Robert E. Lee with someone like Benedict Arnold. Why might they feel this way? What do you think?
  
5. How did Benedict Arnold demonstrate patriotism at first?
  
6. What did he do to show that he was not a true patriot?
  
7. How did Robert E. Lee demonstrate patriotism at first?
  
8. Do you think that Lee was not really a true patriot in his days before the Civil War? Why or why not?
  
9. If you were in Lee's place, would you have made the same choice he did? Why or why not?