The American Revolution (1775-1783) was a rebellion of 13 of Great Britain's North American colonies. The colonies won their independence from the British crown and went on to form the United States of America.

The American colonies thought it was unfair that they should be forced to pay taxes to a government that they had no representation in. They called this "taxation without representation." When Britain decided to raise taxes to fund the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the Americans finally decided to fight for their independence, once and for all.

The success of the colonial army against the British owed much to the leadership of George Washington (1732-1799) and to the help of France. In June 1775 the delegates to the Second Continental Congress unanimously approved Washington's appointment. The colonialists had only a ragtag collection of national volunteers ("Continentials") and inexperienced state militias that served for only months at a time. To make matters worse, there was no legitimate and effective national government that might improve these perilous conditions.

The heady first encounters with the Redcoats at Bunker and Breed’s Hill in Massachusetts, and then the British evacuation of Boston under American pressure in March 1776, were great successes for the Continental Army. These initial wins, however, were followed quickly by a series of defeats such as the Battle of Brooklyn, where British troops landed on Long Island in an attempt to take New York City. Washington turned the seemingly endless and demoralizing retreat from New York and through New Jersey into victory in late 1776 when he forded the partly frozen Delaware River and defeated superior British and mercenary forces at Trenton (December 1776) and Princeton (January 1777). These bold and unexpected victories energized the American army and public.

Despite these successes, the future still appeared bleak. Washington and the main American forces settled into winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, after suffering important (and humiliating) defeats at Brandywine (September 1777) and Germantown (October 1777). Many died from starvation or hypothermia. The army was further destroyed by desertions and a widespread failure to re-enlist. Nevertheless, the Continental Army emerged rejuvenated in the spring of 1778. Under Washington’s supervision, the military officer Baron Friedrich von Steuben transformed what remained of Washington’s force into a disciplined and effective fighting weapon.

Equally important, the resistance and survival of American troops (especially the American victory at Saratoga in New York State) convinced the French in May 1778 that the colonial forces had a good chance of winning the war. This led them to lend necessary support to Americans in their struggle. In October 1781, while commanding the combined American and French forces, Washington brilliantly maneuvered to surround Yorktown, Virginia, by land and by sea, trapping British General Lord Cornwallis and forcing him to surrender. The independence of the colonies was now guaranteed.
Document 1 - Plan of the Battle of Brooklyn. Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.
1. When do the events illustrated by this map take place? Be specific.

2. What was the position of the British Army from August 22\textsuperscript{nd} to 26\textsuperscript{th}?

3. Where did the British march on August 26\textsuperscript{th} and 27\textsuperscript{th}?

4. What names on the map are still names of places in Brooklyn? Do you see any that have changed?
Lord Stirling Orders His Men to Retreat Across the Gowanus Swamp. With the tide rising, the soldiers began making their way to safety. While crossing, a number of them were killed by British marksmen while others who could not swim were drowned. Nevertheless, they managed to take 30 British prisoners with them (reprinted from “The Battle of Long Island” by John W. Chadwick, Harpers Magazine, August 1876, page 345).

1. Who is Lord Stirling? Locate him in this picture and give two pieces of evidence to support your claim.

2. Where are the soldiers in this picture? Locate them on the map in Document 1

3. Once you've identified the troops on Document 1, find 2 locations near the Gowanus Swamp where the American troops could have retreated to safety and explain why they are safe.

4. What year was this image originally published? Why is this date significant?
1. Make three observations about the Old Stone House in Document 3:

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2. Find two differences between the photographs in Document 3:

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3. The Old Stone House was used as a temporary headquarters for British officers. It was also the scene of a tense battle where American troops from Maryland charged into an overwhelming group of British soldiers and mercenaries. Though most of the American troops died in battle, their sacrifice helped delay the British and let Washington escape to Manhattan. Imagine you’re a soldier with the Maryland 400. Describe how you’re feeling right before battle:

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4. What time of year does it appear to be in the photographs? List three pieces of evidence to support your claim.

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[Washington also wrote to Gen. Schuyler, on the 24th, an account of the skirmish at Flatbush, with some additional particulars.]

* * * On Wednesday night and Thursday morning a considerable body of the enemy, said to be eight or nine thousand, landed at Gravesend Bay, on Long-Island. They have approached within three miles of our lines; and yesterday there was some skirmishing between a detachment of them, and a party from our troops. Their detachments were obliged to give ground, and were pursued as far as where they had a post at a Judge Lefferts’s. His house and outhouses served as quarters for them, and were burned by our people. We sustained no loss in this affair, that I have heard of, except having two men slightly wounded. Our people say the enemy met with more; they found one dead body, in the habit of a soldier, with a good deal of money in his pocket, and got three hangers and a fusee. They fired a shell from a howitz, which fell on and burst in a house where some of the enemy were; but whether they were injured by it, I have not learned. A firing has been heard this morning, but know nothing of the event.

Go. WASHINGTON.

[Ibid., 1142.]

1. What happened on Wednesday night and Thursday morning? Be specific.

2. Washington describes “some skirmishing” between two groups. Who are the two groups?

3. Which group had a post at Judge Lefferts' house?

4. Describe what happened at Judge Lefferts’ House. Who do you think “won” the fight?
1. Where was The Suydam House located and when was it built?

2. Who occupied the house during the Revolution? Do you think this group was on the side of the British or the Americans? Explain your answer.

3. List three interesting details about the house. Make two claims about life during the 1700’s from these observations.

4. Analyze the citation for this drawing. Why do you think this house was featured in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle in 1946?

Document 6 - (Top 6A) Print of the Fulton Ferry. No Date. The Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.  
1. Observe the scene in Document 6A. Describe what life was like for the people in this image.

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2. Identify Two Similarities and Two Differences Between Document 6A and Document 6B:

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3. The caption in Document 6B reads “Washington saves his army at Brooklyn.” How did he save his army? (What are the soldiers doing?) Use evidence from the image to support your answer.

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4. What kind of document is Document 6B? What is the significance of having the image in that form?

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The prison ship Jersey was one of 16 prison ships anchored in Wallabout Bay, now known as NY’s East River. By the end of 1776, Americans captured numbered 5,000 and New York, controlled by the British received these prisoners. With inadequate building space, the British ships were converted to prisons. The first ship anchored was the Whitby, to be followed by 15 more. By 1779 the ships Prince of Wales and Good Hope joined. Following destruction by fire, the Prince of Wales was then joined by the Stomboli, the Scorpion and the Hunter. Many older hulks were also converted: the Jersey, the John, the Falmouth, the Chatham, the Kitty, the Frederick, the Glasgow, the Woodlands, the Scheldt and the Clyde. The most notorious was the Jersey, or “Hell” as she was christened by her prisoners. The Jersey, anchored 300 yards from the shore in Wallabout Bay, was an old 64-gun British warship. Her port holes were nailed closed. Four holes, twenty inches square were cut for ventilation, secured by iron cross-bars. The conditions were deplorable. Originally, a 400-man ship, the Jersey was crammed with over 1,000 prisoners at a time. Medical care, proper food, basic sanitary conditions and adequate breathable air were almost nonexistent. British guards would yell out: “Rebels, turn out your dead” as nearly 10 deaths a day occurred. It has been estimated that nearly 11,000 prisoners died on the Jersey alone. After the end of the war in 1783, the remaining prisoners were freed. Only 1400 remained alive when the prisoners were freed in 1783. For years, after the war, bones of the dead prisoners would be exposed, along the shifting tides of the Wallabout Bay. Nothing happened until 1808 when, through Tammany Hall, a vault was built to hold the bones collected by John Jackson, owner of the property that held the graves. The vault was eventually bought by Benjamin Romaine, a survivor of the Sugar House prison and treasure of the fund of 1808. In 1873, the martyrs' bones were removed from their now dilapidated vault and placed in another structure constructed on a hill in Fort Greene. But a monument still was not built.
1. What is the Wallabout Bay called today?

2. What was the HMS Jersey's nickname? Who came up with the name?

3. What can we learn from Document 7 about what life was like on the Jersey prison ship?

4. Why do you think the British held their American prisoners on sea rather than on land? List two possible reasons:

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[Document 7 - “The Hell.” Courtesy of the Daughters of the American Revolution.]
1. Is the person who wrote Document 8 American or British? How do you know?

2. What event is the officer describing in his letter?

3. Describe the officer’s reaction to the situation. How does he seem to feel about the event? Give two examples to support your claim.

4. Imagine a letter written from the point of view of his opponent in the battle. Write three sentences of that letter here:
On this the sixth day of June, one thousand eight hundred and twenty. Personally appeared in open court, being a court of record called the Court of Common... for the said County of Queens and State of New York aforesaid, Benjamin Starking, in the fifty sixty year of his age; who first being duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to obtain the Provision made by the acts of Congress on the 18th day of March 1818 and the first day of May 1820. That he the said Benjamin Starking enlisted on board of the Privateer Ship Jolly Tar, Commanded by Captain John Smith of Baltimore about the first of September 1781 for the term of one voyage... that the said ship mounted twenty guns and sailed on a cruise from Baltimore in the State of Maryland in the (?) of September 1781. That he continued on board of said ship in the capacity of common seaman until some time in the same month of the same year when she was taken by the British frigate Jason mounting thirty six guns. Commanders name not recollected... from when this [man] was carried into the City of New York and immediately housed on board of the British Prison Ship called the Old Jersey which lay at the Wallabout near Brooklyn on Long Island where he was kept in close confinement in the hold of the said ship Jersey among the dead and the dying and in a state of starvation for about three months or until some time in the month of December 1782 at which time by the interception... of his friends on Long Island this [man] was liberated on Parole and was not exchanged during the revolution...

Document 9 - Benjamin Starking Deposition. 1820. The Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library. Transcription.
1. Document 9 is a deposition. What is a deposition? Use two pieces of evidence from the document to support your claim

2. When did this deposition take place, and where?

3. What happened to Benjamin Starking while he was on the ship called Jolly Tar?

4. How did Starking escape the Jersey, and when?
Caption: “The monument, a stately granite shaft ... was constructed in 1908, from plans by architect Stanford White, as a memorial to more than 1,200 Revolutionary patriots who died on board the British prison ships anchored in Wallabout Bay and whose bones are now preserved in a vault at its base.”

MARTYRS.

The Men who Died in the Prison Ships.

A Memorial to Congress Asking for an Appropriation of Fifty Thousand Dollars to Pay for a Monument on Fort Greene.

IGNORANT AND THOUGHTLESS DESECRATION, when at length the authorities of Brooklyn, in June, 1873, caused the remains to be removed to a neighboring spot on the beautiful slopes of Fort Greene, appropriated and maintained as a public park and overlooking the waters of the bay, a scene of so much horror and suffering, and where so many lives were offered up on the altar of their country, No monument marks this last resting place. That, it is conceived, is the duty of the nation to erect. The wrongs of those martyrs were the nation's wrongs. These patriots belonged to every State, the North and the sunny South equally contributing their sons to the sacrifice. They died side by side. The story of their devotion to the cause of freedom and of their cruel death has been often told, and though a century has elapsed since they met their fate, it is still familiar to all. It is spread upon the records of the proceedings of your Honorable Body; it has been the theme of historians and orators; it cannot be effaced from memory or gainsayed. The overcrowding of the prison ship by the British, with American prisoners, became the subject of consideration by the Continental Congress, on the 3d of August, 1781, and General Washington was instructed to remonstrate to the proper officers, within the enemy's lines, on their unjustifiable treatment of our men. The Commander in Chief promptly did so, but could affect no change in the proceeding.
1. Make three observations about the monument in Document 10A. Why do you think it was designed to look this way?

2. Explain why the American prisoners who died on the prison ships are being remembered as “martyrs” in Document 10B.

3. What is the author of Document 10B arguing for in Congress? Give two examples of the author’s position on the subject here:

4. On what date was this article written? Why is this date significant? (Hint: how long is a century?).
GLOSSARY

Demoralize: to cause someone to lose hope or spirit
Desertion: to abandon or leave
Evacuation: to leave; to remove
Ford: to cross, usually at a more shallow place
Heady: having a strong or exhilarating effect
Inference: a guess backed up by fact and knowledge
Legitimate: following established laws or rules
Maneuver: move skillfully or carefully
Martyr: someone who sacrifices everything for a cause or belief
Mercenary: a solider hired to serve in a foreign army
Pacific: peaceful; calm
Perilous: dangerous
Post: a position from which to look out for enemies or seek safety
Rejuvenate: to give new energy or confidence
Retreat: to move back; to withdraw
Skirmish: a fight or battle
Subordination: the act of placing in a lower rank or position
Unanimous: with the agreement of all people involved