

Historical Fiction

Forge

Wednesday, October 8 – Friday, October 17, 1777

In those first days I did not regret enlisting. The army fed me regular, I had a blanket, boots, and a musket. Sleeping with five fellows in a small tent was a bit of a challenge on account of the snores and farts, but at least I was warm enough.

Most of the waging around the campfire centered on how long the war would last. Eben thought we'd be free of duty by November. Others said Christmas. One fellow in our tent, a fusspot old tailor with watery eyes named Silvenus, said we'd be in service for years. He was not well liked...

Monday, December 22, 1777

We woke to the sound of crashing drums, the brigade's drummer boys pounding the reveille five paces from where we lay.

"Get up! Rise! Rise!" shouted officers far and near.

We were all dusted with frost like loaves of bread sprinkled with flour. One by one, we sat up and struggled to our feet...

The sergeant looked down our line. "Where's Brown?"

"He didn't get up," called Faulkner.

The sergeant signed and pointed to the Janack twins. "Go back. If he's that poorly, take him to the hospital tent."

"What if he's dead?" asked one.

"He is not permitted to be dead!" snapped the sergeant. "The rest of you, shut yer gawps and stand proper."

I'd never stood rool in such a large and bedraggled company. Ancient blankets were wrapped round the shoulders of a lucky few. Many more stood in torn shirts with neither waistcoat nor greatcoat to keep out the cold. The sight of soldiers standing barefooted in the snow gave me a right shock. My own toes, warm and dry in my British boots, curled in horror. I blew on my stiff fingers and stuck them in my armpits to warm them up. How many days could a fellow go shoeless in the snow before the cold killed his toes and the doctors had to cut them off?

Historical Fiction: Primary Sources

Source: Dr. Albigeance Waldo, "Diary," December 14, 1777.

Prisoners & Deserters are continually coming in. The Army which has been surprisingly healthy hitherto, now begins to grow sickly from the continued fatigues they have suffered this Campaign. Yet they still show a spirit of Alacrity & Contentment not to be expected from so young Troops. I am Sick — discontented — and out of humour. Poor food — hard lodging — Cold Weather — fatigue — Nasty Cloaths — nasty Cookery — Vomit half my time — smother'd out of my senses — the Devil's in't — I can't Endure it — Why are we sent here to starve and Freeze — What sweet Felicities have I left at home; A charming Wife — pretty Children — Good Beds — good food — good Cookery — all agreeable — all harmonious. Here all Confusion — smoke & Cold — hunger & filthiness... See the poor Soldier, when in health — with what cheerfulness he meets his foes and encounters every hardship — if barefoot, he labours thro' the Mud & Cold with a Song in his mouth extolling War & Washington — if his food be bad, he eats it notwithstanding with seeming content — blesses God for a good Stomach and Whistles it into digestion. But patience, a moment — There comes a Soldier, his bare feet are seen thro' his worn out Shoes, his legs nearly naked from the tatter'd remains of an only pair of stockings, his Breeches not sufficient to cover his nakedness, his Shirt hanging in Strings, his hair dishevel'd, his face meagre; his whole appearance pictures a person forsaken & discouraged. He comes, and cries with an air of wretchedness & despair, I am Sick, my feet lame, my legs are sore, my body cover'd with this tormenting Itch — my Cloaths are worn out, my Constitution is broken, my former Activity is exhausted by fatigue, hunger & Cold, I fail fast I shall soon be no more ! and all the reward I shall get will be — "Poor Will is dead." People who live at home in Luxury and Ease, quietly possessing their habitations, Enjoying their Wives & families in peace, have but a very faint Idea of the displeasing sensations, and continual Anxiety the Man endures who is in a Camp, and is the husband and parent of an agreeable family. These same People are willing we should suffer every thing for their Benefit & advantage, and yet are the first to Condemn us for not doing more!!

Source: Alexander Hamilton, "To George Clinton," February 13, 1778

By injudicious changes and arrangements in the Commissary's department, in the middle of a campaign, they have exposed the army frequently to temporary want, and to the danger of a dissolution, from absolute famine. At this very day there are complaints from the whole line, of having been three or four days without provisions; desertions have been immense, and strong features of mutiny begin to show themselves. It is indeed to be wondered at, that the soldiery have manifested so unparalleled a degree of patience, as they have. If effectual measures are not speedily adopted, I know not how we shall keep the army together or make another campaign.

I omit saying any thing of the want of Cloathing for the army. It may be disputed whether more could have been done than has been done.



Historical Fiction: Primary Sources

Source: Joseph Plumb Martin, *A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 1830.

The army... marched for the Valley Forge in order to take up our winter quarters. We were now in a truly forlorn condition—no clothing, no provisions, and as disheartened as need be. We arrived, however, at our destination a few days before Christmas. Our prospect was indeed dreary. In our miserable condition, to go into the wild woods and build us habitations to *stay* (not to *live*) in, in such a weak, starved, and naked condition, was appalling in the highest degree, especially to New Englanders, unaccustomed to such kind of hardships at home. However, there was no remedy—no alternative but this or dispersion. But dispersion, I believe, was not thought of—at least, I did not think of it. We had engaged in the defense of our injured country and were willing, nay, we were determined to persevere as long as such hardships were not altogether intolerable.... But we were now absolutely in danger of perishing, and that too, in the midst of a plentiful country. We then had but little, and often nothing to eat for days together; but now we had nothing and saw no likelihood of any betterment of our condition. Had there fallen deep snows (and it was the time of year to expect them) or even heavy and long rainstorms, the whole army must inevitably have perished. Or had the enemy, strong and well provided as he then was, thought fit to pursue us, our poor emaciated carcasses must have “strewed the plain.”

Source: John Ward Dunsmore, “Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge,” 1907.

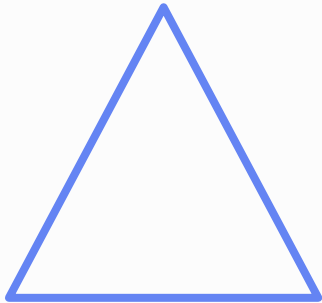


Historical Fiction: Student Worksheet

Directions: After reading the excerpt, fill in the table below.

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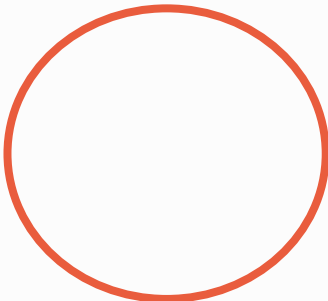
Directions: After reading the primary sources, answer the questions below.



What three important ideas or facts did you learn today?



What is something that squared with or confirmed your prior knowledge?



What is something that is still circling in your head?



Historical Fiction
Forge

Sunday, November 16 – Sunday, December 7, 1777

"Let me ask you something. We're fighting for freedom right?" I picked my words carefully. "So why is that man allowed to own Baumfree and Bett?"

"Well," he said slowly, "we're fighting for our freedom. Not theirs." He crossed his arms, uncrossed them, put his hands on his belt and crossed his arms again. "Nobody in my family owns slaves, you know."

"That's not the point. Do you think only white people can be free?"

"Of course not. There are plenty of free blacks, like you and those other fellows in Saratoga and Albany. We had a family two villages over from mine, they were all free black people."

"But the colonel's slaves are not allowed to be free."

He frowned. "They can't be free, Curzon. They're slaves. Their master decides for them."

"What if they ran away?"

"Then they'd be breaking the law."

"Bad laws deserve to be broken."

"Don't talk like that!" He kicked a rock deep into the field. "You want to get in trouble? Laws have to be followed or else you go to the jail."

"What if a king made bad laws; laws so unnatural that a country broke them by declaring its freedom?"

He threw his arms in the air. "Now you are spouting nonsense. Two sales running away from their rightful master is not the same as America wanting to be free of England. Not the same at all."

Historical Fiction: Primary Sources

Source: Prince Hall, “To the Honorable Counsel & House of [Representa]tives of the State of Massachusetts Bay in General Court assembled,” January 17, 1777.

The petition of a great number of blacks detained in a state of slavery in the bowels of a free and Christian country humbly shows that your petitioners apprehend that they have in common with all other men a natural and unalienable right to that freedom which the Great Parent of the Universe has bestowed equally on all mankind and which they have never forfeited by any compact or agreement whatever—but they were unjustly dragged by the hand of cruel power from their dearest friends and some of them even torn from the embraces of their tender parents—from a populous, pleasant, and plentiful country, and in violation of laws of nature and of nations and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity brought here to be sold like beasts of burden and like them condemned to slavery for life—among a people professing the mild religion of Jesus, a people not insensible of the secrets of rational being nor without spirit to resent the unjust endeavors of others to reduce them to a state of bondage and subjection. Your honors need not be informed that a life of slavery like that of your petitioners, deprived of every social privilege, of everything requisite to render life tolerable, is far worse than nonexistence.

Source: John Laurens, “Letter...to Henry Laurens,” January 14, 1778.

I barely hinted to you my dearest Father my desire to augment the Continental Forces from an untried Source—I wish I had any foundation to ask for an extraordinary addition to those favors which I have already received from you I would solicit you to cede me a number of your able bodied men Slaves, instead of leaving me a fortune—I would bring about a twofold good, first I would advance those who are unjustly deprived of the Rights of Mankind to a State which would be a proper Gradation between abject Slavery and perfect Liberty—and besides I would reinforce the Defenders of Liberty with a number of gallant Soldiers—Men who have the habit of Subordination almost indelibly impress’d on them, would have one very essential qualification of Soldiers—I am persuaded that if I could obtain authority for the purpose I would have a Corps of such men trained, uniformly clad, equip’d and ready in every respect to act at the opening of the next Campaign—The Ridicule that may be thrown on the Colour I despise, because I am sure of rendering essential Service to my Country—I am tired of the Languor with which so sacred a War as this, is carried on—my circumstances prevent me from writing so long a Letter as I expected and wish’d to have done on a subject which I have much at heart—I entreat you to give a favorable Answer to



Historical Fiction: Primary Sources

Source: Benjamin Banneker, "To Thomas Jefferson" August 19, 1791.

Sir I freely and Chearfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race, and in that colour which is natural to them of the deepest dye,* and it is under a Sense of the most profound gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that State of tyrannical thralldom, and inhuman captivity, to which too many of my brethren are doomed; but that I have abundantly tasted of the fruition of those blessings which proceed from that free and unequalled liberty with which you are favoured and which I hope you will willingly allow you have received from the immediate hand of that Being, from whom proceedeth every good and perfect gift.

Sir, Suffer me to recall to your mind that time in which the Arms and tyranny of the British Crown were exerted with every powerful effort in order to reduce you to a State of Servitude, look back I intreat you on the variety of dangers to which you were exposed, reflect on that time in which every human aid appeared unavailable, and in which even hope and fortitude wore the aspect of inability to the Conflict, and you cannot but be led to a Serious and grateful Sense of your miraculous and providential preservation; you cannot but acknowledge, that the present freedom and tranquility which you enjoy you have mercifully received, and that it is the peculiar blessing of Heaven.

This Sir, was a time in which you clearly saw into the injustice of a State of Slavery, and in which you had just apprehensions of the horrors of its condition, it was now Sir, that your abhorrence thereof was so excited, that you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine, which is worthy to be recorded and remember'd in all Succeeding ages. "We hold these truths to be Self evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happyness."

Source: Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger, "Soldiers in Uniform," between 1781 and 1784.

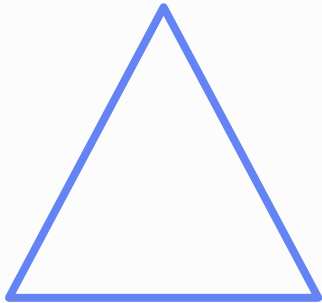


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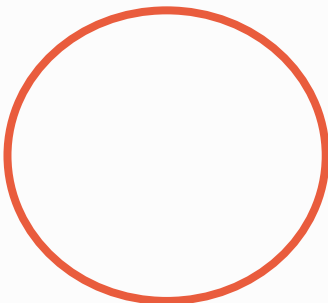
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Historical Fiction

Forge

Monday, March 23 – Saturday, April 4, 1778

March melted into April, and Valley Forge reeked of the foul stench of rotting horseflesh and the thawed privy trenches that had been filled by ten thousand soldiers. The noxious miasma caused birds to fly around the encampment instead of over it.

... General Greene wanted to watch the new drilling techniques of Baron von Steuben, the Prussian gentleman in charge of instruction...

The baron raised his hand and the drums started beating. The soldiers struggled to straighten their ragged lines. The drum cadence changed and the soldiers stepped. Some stepped to the left. Some stepped to the right. One company at the back of the field spun halfway around.

Baron von Steuben should and the drumming stopped. A group of young men huddled around him.

"He gives his orders in French mixed with a heavy dose of German. Those chaps turn it into English," explained General Poor.

The orders were shouted and the companies re-formed their lines. The drums beat the cadence.

"Common step!" called out an officer. "Step! Step! Step! Step!"

The baron beat the rhythm with his walking stick. The lines moved as one boyd as the soldiers moved forward with the exact same strides.

"Step! Step! Step! Step!"

"That's better," murmured General Poor.

"Right wheel!" called the officer.

Disaster. The soldiers again forgot which way to turn and the field turned into a confuddled mess.

The baron snatched his hat from his head, threw it on the ground, and stomped on it with both of his boots, shouting loud enough to be heard in Philadelphia...

"Soldiers who do march together make an army of baby birds..."

"Soldiers who march together make an army of steel!"

Historical Fiction: Primary Sources

Source: Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben "To George Washington," December 6, 1777.

Honorable Sir,

The inclosed Copy of a Letter whose Original I Shall have the honor to present to your Excellency, will instruct you of the motives that brought me over to this Land. I shall add only to it that the Object of my greatest Ambition is to render your Country all the Services in my Power, and to deserve the title of a Citizen of America by fighting for the Cause of your Liberty.¹

If the distinguished Ranks I have Served in in Europe Should be an Obstacle, I had rather Serve under Your Excellency as a Volunteer, than to be a Subject of Discontent to Such deserving Officers as have already distinguished themselves amongst you.

Such being the Sentiments I always profest, I dare hope that the respectable Congress of the United States of America, will accept my Services. I could Say moreover (Were it not for the fear of offending your Modesty) that your Excellency is the only Person under whom (after having Served under the King of Prussia) I could wish to pursue an Art to which I have Wholly given up my Self.

I intend to go to Boston in a few Days where I shall present my Letters to the Honble John Hancock Esqr. Member of Congress, and there I shall wait for your Excellency's Orders, according to which I shall take convenient Measures. I have the honor to be with respect

Steuben

Source: Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, 1779.

Chapter 5.

Of the Instruction of Recruits

... Attention!

At this word, the soldier must be silent, stand firm and steady, moving neither hand nor foot, (except as ordered) but attend carefully to the words of command.

This attention of the soldier must be observed in the strictest manner, till he receives the word

Rest!

At which he may refresh himself, by moving his hands or feet; but must not then sit down or quit his place, unless permitted to do so...

The Common Step

Is two feet, and about seventy-five in a minute...

The Quick Step

Is also two feet, but about one hundred and twenty in a minute, and is performed on the same principle as the other.



Historical Fiction: Primary Sources

Source: George Washington, "To Baron Steuben," November 10, 1787.

As I do not recollect ever to have had any further information of the contract you speak of than what is therein contained, it is not in my power to speak more fully to the point; but in my letter to the Secretary I have expressed in unequivocal terms a wish that your merits and Sacrafices may be rewarded to your entire satisfaction. If they should not and it proves a means of your withdrawing from the United States, I shall be among the number of those who will regret the event, as it would give me pleasure that you should continue in a Country the liberties of which owe much to your Services. I have the honor, etc.

Source: Edwin Austin Abbey, "Baron Steuben Drilling Troops at Valley Forge," c. 1911.

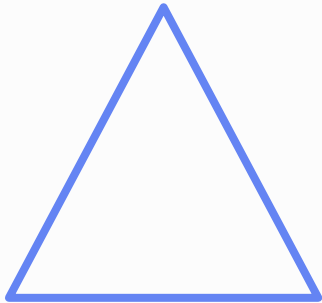


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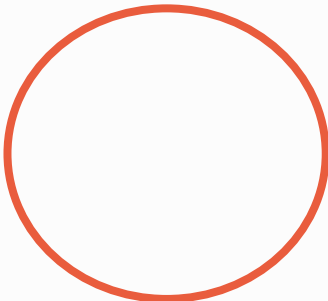
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