

# CONSOURCE



*The Constitutional Sources Project*

## Revolutionary War Unit

### A Farm Wife's Struggles: Sarah Hodgkins

#### TIME AND GRADE LEVEL

One 45 or 50 minute class period in a **Grade 4-8**.

#### PURPOSE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

History is the chronicle of choices made by actors/agents/protagonists who, in very specific contexts, unearth opportunities and inevitably encounter impediments. During the Revolutionary War people of every stripe navigated turbulent waters. As individuals and groups struggled for their own survival, they also shaped the course of the nation. Whether a general or a private, male or female, free or enslaved, each became a player in a sweeping drama. The instructive sessions outlined here are tailored for upper elementary and middle school students, who encounter history most readily through the lives of individual historical players. Here, students actually *become* those players, confronted with tough and often heart-wrenching choices that have significant consequences. History in all its complexity comes alive. It is a convoluted, thorny business, far more so than streamlined timelines suggest, yet still accessible on a personal level to students at this level.

In this simulation, elementary or middle school students assume the role of Sarah Hodgkins, a farmwife whose minuteman husband, Joseph, has answered the Lexington Alarm. When Joseph decides to remain in the army for the remainder of the year, Sarah is left to tend the farm and their three small children on her own. She does so without complaint, but then Joseph tells her he wants to enlist for another year. How will Sarah respond? And how will she respond when Joseph then decides to reenlist for an additional three years? Like other Revolutionary Americans, she needs to weigh her personal needs against the needs of the country. The lesson alerts students to the essential role farmwives played during the war and to the many sacrifices they had to make. Students will also experience a hard truth: women did not have an equal say in Revolutionary times, not only in the political world, but also in their personal lives.

#### LESSON OBJECTIVES

- \* Students will be able to list contributions made by Revolution farmwives.
- \* Students will be able to explain “term of enlistment” and how the duration of a term impacted both men and women.

\* Students will be able to demonstrate, by narrating this story, how wartime struggles could affect family relationships.

\* Students will be able to demonstrate through this example that married women in Revolutionary times could and did make their wishes known, but their husbands had the final say when interfacing with the world beyond their families.

## OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

### Prefatory homework:

Handout A: “What was done, was done by myself.”

### In class:

1. Homework review and discussion: 15-20 minutes
2. Presentation of Sarah’s response and Joseph’s second enlistment: 5 minutes
3. Students respond to Joseph’s desire to enlist a third time: 15 minutes
4. Presentation of historical outcome and wrap up discussion: 10-20 minutes

Summary Homework / Extended Activities

## MATERIALS

*Background Handout* (Students read.)

- A. “What was done, was done by myself.”

*Classroom Handouts* (Teacher presents or students read this material.)

- B. “I want to have you come home & see us.”
- C. Historical Outcome: “You may think I am too free in expressing my mind.”

*Vocabulary List*

## PREFATORY HOMEWORK

Distribute **Handout A: “What was done, was done by myself.”** Go over instructions on that sheet.

## CLASS ACTIVITIES: 45-50 MINUTES

### 1. HOMEWORK REVIEW AND DISCUSSION: 15-20 minutes

Review the minutemen's response to the Lexington Alarm. Note that most minutemen, like most colonists at that time, were farmers. Then note ask: *What did this mean for wives and mothers who were left on farms?*

Move on to Joseph's intent to reenlist: define enlistment, reenlistment, tour (or term) of duty. Then translate Joseph's letter:

*"If we Due not Exarte our selves in this gloris Cause our all is gon and we made slaves of for Ever" = "If we do not exert ourselves in the glorious cause, our all [everything we are fighting for] is gone and we will be slaves forever."*

Ask students: Did Joseph mean they would be "slaves" like African-Americans who had been forced into slavery? Discuss the rhetorical use of the concept of "slavery" in the build-up to the Revolutionary War: Americans would be "slaves" in the sense that the people could not make their own laws and govern themselves.

Finally, students might share responses to Joseph.

### 2. PRESENTATION OF SARAH'S RESPONSE AND JOSEPH'S SECOND ENLISTMENT: 5 minutes

Teacher presents or students read **Handout B. "I want to have you come home & see us."**

### 3. STUDENTS RESPOND TO JOSEPH'S DESIRE TO ENLIST A THIRD TIME: 15 minutes

Teacher instructs: *How would you feel about Joseph's plan to reenlist yet again, this time for three years? What would you say to him now?* For homework, students have expressed themselves in writing; this time they talk with each other. Breakout groups should be small, allowing each student to have a say. Note that there is no *group* decision to be made (unlike several other lessons in this unit). Each farmwife had to relate her own feelings and intentions to her husband, an audience of one. These were personal matters that deeply affected relationships.

### 4. PRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL OUTCOME AND WRAP UP DISCUSSION: 10-15 minutes

Teacher presents or students read **Handout C. Historical Outcome: "You may think I am too free in expressing my mind."** Class discussion on how women coped with personal hardships caused by the Revolutionary War. Teacher can introduce any of the topics listed in "Extended Activities."

## SUMMARY HOMEWORK / EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Read more of Sarah's letters to Joseph. They are compiled in the book *This Glorious Cause: The Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army*, edited by Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively. Several of the letters are now on the Net. You can access some of the letters by copying into your search engine about ten words, within quotation marks, from a selection in this lesson. Make sure you copy the words exactly.

2. Many of the soldiers in the Revolutionary War were poor. They did not own their own farms, so they worked for other people instead. When they joined the army, their wives sometimes had no choice but to go with them. Traveling with the army, these women did hard work, such as laundering clothes, cooking over open fires, or nursing soldiers who were sick and/or wounded. During battles, they hauled wooden buckets of water that were needed to cool off cannons, which heated up when fired. They rarely received any pay for their work; they did receive food, but not as much as men. They were called "camp followers" because they lived wherever soldiers camped. Read about these women, online or in books. (Much has been written about these hard-working women—Walter H. Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers in the American Revolution*; Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution*; or Ray Raphael, *A People's History of the American Revolution*, chapter 3, section on "Women and the Army.") Then imagine yourself in their position, and write about what life would be like for you.

3. Much has changed since the Revolutionary War. Women in the army today take on all the jobs that men do. If you know a woman who has served in the army, interview her about her experiences.

4. Many women who lived during the Revolutionary War felt little control over what would happen to them and their families. They were very religious, and when there was nothing else they could do, they prayed to a God for help with their troubles. They believed that God was all-wise, that whatever happened was meant to happen, and that things would somehow work out in the end. They called this "Divine Providence." Wives and mothers, when writing to their husbands or sons in the army, commonly referred to God or Providence. Sarah Hodgkins was no exception. She wrote:

"What will be the event of it God only knows. O that we may be prepared for all events. I am distressed [distressed] about you my Dear but I desire to commit you to God who alone is able to preserve us through all the deficulty [difficulty] we have to pass through. may he Strengthen [strengthen] your hands & incorage [encourage] your heart to carry you through all you may be called in the way of your duty & that you may be enabled to put your trust in him at all times."

Why do you think this helped women get through such difficult times?

5. Many women who stayed home found themselves trapped in a war zone. Should they stay at home, hoping that a battle would not be fought right there? Or, to avoid a battle, should they flee? And if so, to which side? Mary Gould Almy lived in Newport, Rhode Island, which at the time was controlled by the British Army. She was a Quaker, a pacifist group that did not believe in fighting wars. (For more on pacifists in the Revolutionary War, see ConSource lesson plan **Wartime Pacifists: Quakers**.) Her husband Benjamin, however, left home to join the Americans, who were surrounding Newport and getting ready to attack the

city. When the Almy's children heard that the Americans were about to attack where they lived, they became very scared. Mary tried to comfort them. Here is part of a letter she wrote to Benjamin:

“Neither sleep to my eyes, nor slumber to my eyelids, this night; six children hanging around me, the little girls crying out, ‘Mamma, will they kill us!’ The boys endeavor to put on an air of manliness, and strive to assist, but step up to the girls, in a whisper, ‘Who do you think will hurt you! Arn’t your pappa coming with them?’”

What could Mary and her children do? What was it like for Benjamin, who would soon attack a city where his wife and children lived? To hear more of their story, and learn how things turned out, read Mary's amazing letter to Benjamin, reprinted in Elizabeth Evans, *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution*.

## Vocabulary for “A Farm Wife’s Struggles: Sarah Hodgkins”

*despair* — give up hope

*engage* (Sarah spells it “ingage”) — agree to do something. This does not have to mean “engage to be married.” You can “engage” to do anything.

*enlist/enlistment* — sign up to serve for a specific amount of time in an army (or, later, in the navy, marines, or air force)

*minuteman* — someone who is not professional soldiers but who has military training and who promises to fight at moment’s notice

*reenlist* — at the end of the time a soldier said he would serve, he signs up to serve again

*term of enlistment* — the time a soldier agrees to stay in the army. The most common terms of enlistment in the Revolutionary War were one year and three years.

### **Handout A: “What was done, was done by myself.”**

Most Americans in the 1770s made their living by farming, so when husbands went off to war, their wives had to take on extra tasks. “What was done, was done by myself,” wrote Azubah Norton of Connecticut, whose husband left the farm to fight. When Joseph Hodgkins, a minuteman from Massachusetts, answered the Lexington Alarm in April of 1775, he left his wife Sarah at home with a six-week-old infant and two other small children. Joseph did not return after Lexington and Concord but enlisted in the newly formed army. He and his fellow Patriots surrounded Boston to trap the British soldiers who were stationed there. All summer and into the fall they kept the Redcoats from going out into the Massachusetts countryside to gather supplies. They hoped the British would eventually just sail back to Great Britain.

In her husband’s absence, Sarah tended the children, did extra work on the farm, and even mended the clothes that Joseph sent home. She hoped this would not last. At the beginning, Joseph told her he would not reenlist [join the army again] once his term was over at the end of 1775. But when that time neared, he thought about staying in the army for another year. “If we Due not Exarte our selves in this gloris Cause our all is gon and we made slaves of for Ever,” he wrote on November 28. [NOTE: the spelling is incorrect because Joseph had little education. Try to figure out what he meant.]

**INSTRUCTIONS:** If you were Sarah Hodgkins, how would you respond? Would you try to convince Joseph to come home? Or would you continue to tend the farm without him, so that he could fight in the army?

Of course this was not an easy decision. Consider both sides. Then write a short letter to Joseph explaining what you want. Be ready to share this letter in class.

### Handout B: “I want to have you come home & see us.”

Here is Sarah’s response: “I want to have you come home & see us. I look for you almost every day but I dont allow myself to depend on any thing for I find there is nothing to be depended upon but troble and disapointments.” But beyond that, she did not *insist* that Joseph come home.

Joseph decided to reenlist for another year—1776—and that year proved harder yet for Sarah. In the summer, their sixteen-month-old son died. (He had been born shortly before Joseph and the minutemen went off to Lexington.) Sarah wrote to Joseph: “I think the time you ingaged for is now half out & if you Should live to See that out I hope you will Let Some body else take your Place.”

Despite Sarah’s pleas, Joseph reenlisted yet again—this time for *three* years. If you were Sarah Hodgkins, what would you say to Joseph *now*?

### **Handout C. Historical Outcome: “You may think I am too free in expressing my mind.”**

Sarah again pleaded with Joseph “to come home to your family” rather than reenlist. “It will trouble me very much if you Should engage again.” In those days, men expected women not to complain, but Sarah continued to tell him how she felt: “You may think I am too free in expressing my mind. I hope will excuse my freedom.”

With the passage of time, Sarah became more and more upset with her husband’s absence: “I have Looked for you till I know not how to Look any longer. I am very Low in Spirits almost despare [despair, or give up hope] of your coming home.” During a brief visit, she became pregnant once again, but Joseph remained in the army and could come home for the child’s birth. She closed one letter: “Sister Chapman is got to bed [giving birth] with a fine Son. I have got a Sweet Babe almost Six months old but have got no father for it.”

Joseph finally left the army the following year. We do not know the whether his decision was based on Sarah’s wishes. We do know that in 1775 Sarah Hodgkins had supported her husband in every possible way as he went off to fight for the Revolution. In 1776 she had struggled, but she continued as best she could. In the final years, she tried to convince Joseph to come home—but until the end, she continued to send him clothing and manage the household in his absence. By tending farms and raising children on their own, women like Sarah Hodgkins served their country.