

DUNMORE'S DECLARATION



This lesson will ask students to practice historical empathy while considering the difficult decisions enslaved people needed to make at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.

This activity is excerpted from Unit 5 of the *Through Their Eyes: Major Causes and Events of the American Revolution* Teacher Resource Guide. To see the full lesson and all supporting materials, visit: www.amrevmuseum.org/teacher-resource-guides

CONTEXT

Understanding people's decision-making in the past requires us to remember that they did not know what would happen next. What seems like an easy choice looking back from the present often involved weighing many factors to come to what seemed to be the best decision for them at the time. Remembering this allows us to better understand the people of the past, though we can never fully truly know them.

AIMS/OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Use historical empathy to analyze the perspectives of enslaved people from the Revolutionary Era

Identify and describe the impact of factors that might influence an enslaved person's decision-making on Dunmore's Declaration and the Revolution

MATERIALS

Resources:

MoAR Virtual Museum "War in the South" and "Sometimes Freedom Wore a Red Coat" Galleries:
<https://noasarai.com/MoAR/vt/>

Population Profile: People of African Descent

PROCEDURES

- First, ask students to read the following prompt: In 1775, Virginia's royal governor, John Murray, Lord Dunmore, issued a proclamation in response to information that rebellious colonists had begun forming armies and attacking British troops. This announcement, known as Dunmore's Proclamation, offered freedom to any person enslaved by rebels who could bear arms for the King. Though the Proclamation was a call to arms, women and children as well as men flocked to Dunmore's location.
- Next, instruct students to read the Population Profile about people of African Descent living in 18th century America to learn additional context about the lives of Black Americans during the Revolutionary Era. Afterward, they can explore the galleries entitled "War in the South" and "Sometimes Freedom Wore a Red Coat" in the Museum's \, recording information they learn about the experiences of enslaved people in the American South during the Revolution.
- Then, ask students to imagine what an enslaved person would have needed to consider before deciding to go fight for King George III. How might things like family connections, distance to Dunmore's meeting point, age, risk of capture and consequences, etc., have impacted his or her decision?
- Finally, ask students to consider what they might do in that situation and explain their reasoning.

RESEARCH EXTENSIONS

Have students use the [Virtual Tour](#) to search other galleries in the Museum for examples of free and enslaved people of African descent from the Revolutionary Era. Ask them to extend the above lesson to compare and contrast the different experiences of people of African descent throughout the colonies and use historical empathy to discuss what their perspectives on the Revolution might have been.