

#1121 DEBORAH SAMPSON: A WOMAN IN THE REVOLUTION



BFA EDUCATIONAL MEDIA, 1976
COLOR
LEVELS: INTERMEDIATE, ADVANCED
SUBJECT AREAS: SOCIAL STUDIES,
GUIDANCE/VALUES
15 MINUTES
2 INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHICS

SYNOPSIS

This program is a biography of Deborah Sampson, focusing on her military role as a soldier in the American Revolutionary War. The program depicts her reasons for enlisting, the extent of her military service, and what happens to her when it is discovered that she is a woman.

PURPOSE

General Objectives

1. To show a major event in the life of one woman who fought in the Revolutionary War.
2. To examine Deborah Sampson's reasons for wanting to be a soldier.
3. To illustrate the reaction and response of her commander when he discovers she is a woman.
4. To present insight into the events and history of the Revolutionary War period by following Deborah Sampson's life.

Behavioral Objectives

After viewing the media, the student will:

1. Match the following four dates/places with the events in Deborah Sampson's life:
 - a. C Massachusetts, 1765
 - b. B Worcester, Massachusetts, April 1, 1781
 - c. D New York, June, 1781

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- d. A Philadelphia (Sumner), 1782
 - a. Deborah becomes sick with fever and her true identity is discovered.
 - b. Deborah enlists in the Colonial Army.
 - c. Deborah's father died and she is indentured in the home of friends.
 - d. Deborah is wounded in the leg.
2. Answer the following "True/False" questions:
 - a. George Washington was the commander of the Continental Army. True.
 - b. Deborah liked to read philosophy about equality and independence. True.
 - c. Lexington and Concord are where the first shots of the Revolutionary War were fired. True.
 - d. Deborah fought at Lexington and Concord. False.
 - e. Deborah's false name when she enlisted was "Robert Shurtlieff." True.
 - f. Everybody knew she was a woman as soon as she enlisted. False.
 - g. Deborah dressed and looked like a man. This is called a "masquerade." True.
 - h. Deborah died from the fever. True.
 - i. Deborah's commander, Colonel Jackson, would not let her stay in the army when he found out she was a woman. False.
 - j. Deborah was given a pension and a piece of land for her service in the war. True.
3. Check two ways that Deborah Sampson helped the colonists fight the British before she became a soldier.
 - a. She made bandages. (X)
 - b. She made bullets.
 - c. She smuggled weapons.
 - d. She helped get food and clothing for people in Boston when the British closed the harbor. (X)
 - e. She worked in a hospital.
 - f. She was a cook.



RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. The media stated "Deborah was 17 when the British closed Boston Harbor." Find out:
 - a. The year the British closed Boston Harbor.
 - b. The year Deborah was born.
 - c. How old she was when she enlisted in 1781.
2. Research and determine if any other women fought in the war.

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3. Research how the awarding of land grants to Revolutionary War veterans contributed to the expansion and growth of the United States of America.
4. Discuss whether women should be allowed to serve in combat with men.
5. Study the events leading up to the admission of women to the various military academies in the United States in the late 1970s.
6. Research/study about the Revolutionary War with particular emphasis on the hardships and problems endured by the common soldier, such as Deborah Sampson.
7. View related captioned media:
 - [*An American Revolution: Women Take Their Place #8430*](#)
 - [*Joan of Arc #10953*](#)
 - [*Women First and Foremost: Volume Two: "Touching the Clouds With Pen and Plane" #9488*](#)

INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHICS

- CITIES OF DEBORAH SAMPSON'S MILITARY SERVICE
- THE THIRTEEN COLONIES

SCRIPT

(Officer) Left wheel, march!

(Narrator) The war for American independence was fought for many reasons by different people. Young, old, rich, poor. Washington's army included businessmen, statesmen, and farmers. Among this group of colonists one soldier truly differed from the rest. That soldier was a woman named Deborah Sampson.

(Colonel Jackson) Shoulder firelocks! To the left, face! To the front, march!

(Narrator) From her youngest days in Massachusetts, Deborah lived with British rule. Her family was poor. English taxes added to their financial burden. In 1765, Deborah's father died. Penniless, her mother dissolved the family. She indentured her daughter into the home of friends. Deborah worked hard, but found time to read philosophy. Concepts of equality for common people made her interested in independence. When Deborah was seventeen, the British closed Boston Harbor. Thousands of people were destitute. Citizens volunteered food and clothing. It was for the colonists in Boston. One volunteer was Deborah Sampson. England and her colonies tried resolving their differences. They talked peace, but prepared for battle. Finally, at Lexington and Concord, the first shots of war were fired.

(Officer) Fire!

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(Narrator) Deborah was in conflict too. She wanted to do more then females were allowed.

(Deborah) (Thinking) I'm a woman. My contribution to the war is limited. I rip bandages for the wounded. It's not enough. I want to fight for liberty. General Washington needs nurses. But he needs soldiers more. I have the heart of the soldier. It may be a strangeness in me or wrong in the eyes of others. Still I must. Let other women care for the fallen. I'll exchange my sex and identify for a musket. I'll defend this land which I love so dearly.

(Sound Effects) (Flute playing)

(Narrator) Deborah left family and friends. She cut her hair and enlisted. She used the name Robert Shurtleiff. Her masquerade was very complete. Comrades recognized her only as a courageous soldier. This disguise proved valuable throughout the months of fighting.

(Sound Effects) (Musket shots)

(Deborah) British!

(Colonel Jackson) All of you, come! Halt!

(Sound Effects) (Confused shouting)

(British Officer) Aim and load! Hold ranks! Make ready! Take aim! Give fire!

(Colonel Jackson) All right, lads! Make ready! Take aim! Give fire! Fix bayonets! To the right, march!

(British Officer) Withdraw gentlemen! Fire at will!

(Colonel Jackson) Easy . . . careful.

(Soldier) Should I get the doctor, sir?

(Deborah) No doctor!

(Colonel Jackson) You're bleeding!

(Deborah) Just leave me be.

(Colonel Jackson) I don't understand. You've been wounded. Why do you insist on refusing medical help?

(Deborah) I'm just tired, sir. Just let me sleep. The wine has made me dizzy.

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(Colonel Jackson) Keep the bottle, you'll need it. Tomorrow the doctor will see you. I cannot afford to lose good soldiers. Goodnight, Shurtleiff.

(Deborah) Goodnight, sir.

(Narrator) Deborah never did see the doctor. To preserve her masquerade, she cleaned and treated the wound herself.

(Sound Effect) (Voice) Hey quick step! To the front, march!

(Narrator) America's revolution was drawing to a conclusion. Cornwallis had surrendered at Yorktown. The enemy was stalled in New York. Colonists celebrated. But these last months of conflict didn't end suffering. Supplies and morale were lower than ever. Soldiers demanded back pay. A malignant fever spread throughout the ranks.

(Dr. Binney) I'll need my coat. Allow nobody in to see her. Shurtleiff is a woman.

(Colonel Jackson) There's a word when people imagine things.

(Dr. Binney) Why don't you come see for yourself?

(Colonel Jackson) Only thing I'm seeing is my bedroll! I don't know about this uniform. Shurtleiff's been with me for years. We fought at Yorktown. He was wounded twice at Tarrytown.

(Dr. Binney) He is a she.

(Colonel Jackson) Have you been drinking?

(Dr. Binney) Don't put me off!

(Colonel Jackson) I'll take a look in the morning. If there's nothing further.

(Dr. Binney) There's one thing.

(Colonel Jackson) What?

(Dr. Binney) I need a dress.

(Narrator) When she awoke, her masquerade was over.

(Colonel Jackson) Who are you?

(Deborah) There's no use in denying what's fully known. You knew me as Robert Shurtleiff. My real name is Deborah Sampson.

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(Colonel Jackson) Can it be so? Why?

(Deborah) I saw my country being strangled in infancy . . . her lands destroyed, people massacred. I couldn't watch that happen. My conscience left me no choice.

(Colonel Jackson) But a woman's place . . .

(Deborah) . . . is where her heart lies. Nobody lightly chooses the battle line. Sometimes we do things we ordinarily wouldn't. It was my duty to act.

(Colonel Jackson) This is incredible! A woman fighting with my men. What now? What do I do? We've been through battles together. Now the war's ending. Until peace is declared I'd like to keep my uniform and rank.

(Colonel Jackson) Shurtlieff, you've been a very good soldier.

(Narrator) Three weeks later, war ended. Deborah was honorably discharged from the army. She never again saw service. Colonel Jackson granted her a pension and land on which she married, built a home, and raised her family. Some criticized her masquerade. No one questioned her motivations. Her service is remembered as a unique contribution to America's war for independence.



CITIES OF DEBORAH SAMPSON'S MILITARY SERVICE



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THE THIRTEEN COLONIES



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