



The General From America

by Richard Nelson
directed by Louis Contey

STUDY GUIDE

prepared by
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About the Play

Tony Award-winning playwright Richard Nelson's powerful drama about the early, uncertain birth of America introduces us to the new country's most notorious traitor, Gen. Benedict Arnold. Betraying his reputation as a Revolutionary War hero, Arnold makes an uncharacteristic decision to defect to the British and surrender West Point, a plot that threatens to derail the war. What caused this military leader to betray his fellow Colonists? *The General from America* delves into the complex story of one man's life, his honor and the stunning choice that would make him infamous.

Time named *The General From America* as one of the 10 best plays of 2002, calling it "politically savvy, morally complex and theatrically cunning." The Spectator praised the play and its author as "a rich, rare and remarkable triumph on the stage. ... In play after play, Nelson has established himself as that contemporary stage rarity, a civilized, urbane, literate, acidic ironist in an age of urban thuggery."

The *General From America*, commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, debuted in 1996 at the Swan Theatre in Stratford Upon Avon. The American premiere was in 1998 at Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

About the Playwright

Richard Nelson was born in Chicago in 1950. He graduated from Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., and worked as an associate director at The Goodman Theatre and a dramaturg at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

His earliest plays include *The Killing of Yablonski: Scenes of Involvement In A Current Event* (1975), *Conjuring An Event* (1976) and *The Vienna Notes* (1978, OBIE Award). He received a second OBIE for his contributions as literary manager at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's theater company during the 1979-80 season.

He began a long association with the Royal Shakespeare Company with *Principia Scriptoriae* (1986) and *Some Americans Abroad* (1989, Olivier Award nomination). His ongoing collaboration with the RSC has included *Columbus and the Discovery of Japan* (1992), *Misha's Party* (1993, co-written with Alexander Gelman for the RSC and the Moscow Art Theatre), *New England* (1995) and *Goodnight Children Everywhere* (1999, Olivier Award for Best Play).

Nelson adapted his play *Sensibility and Sense* for PBS' "American Playhouse" (1990). He also scripted *The End of a Sentence for "American Playhouse"* (1991).

He earned his first Tony Award nomination for Best Play for *Two Shakespearean Actors* (1992).

Recent plays include *Left* (2002), *Franny's Way* (2001-02 Drama Desk Award nomination for Best Play), *Madame Melville* (2000), and his adaptation of James Joyce's *The Dead* (1999, Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical, Tony Award nominations for Best Score and Best Musical, Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical, New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical).

His latest play, *Frank's Home*, will have its world premiere at The Goodman Theatre in November.

Setting the Stage

The General From America opens in 1779 with the Colonists already deeply embroiled in the war with Great Britain. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress signed and confirmed the Declaration of Independence, but in the years following the Colonists are not certain of success against the British.

Gen. Benedict Arnold has garnered a reputation as a war hero for his role in the Battle of Fort Ticonderoga and the Battle of Saratoga. Multiple injuries to his left leg have left him unable to sit comfortably in a saddle and command troops in battle. He is given the military command of Philadelphia while he continues to recuperate.

The abrasive Arnold finds himself frequently at odds with the town's politicians, particularly Joseph Reed. Further irritating Arnold are the slights he has received at the hands of fellow generals. Worst of all is Congress' failure to recognize his achievements with a promotion, pay his back salary and reimburse personal expenses. He also has just married a beautiful woman half his age who has expensive tastes and whose family has Loyalist sympathies.

THE ARNOLDS

A Man Divided: Benedict Arnold

“The heart which is conscious of its own rectitude, cannot attempt to palliate a step which the world may censure as wrong; I have ever acted upon the principle of love to my country, since the commencement of the present unhappy conflict between Great Britain and the colonies. The same principle of love to my country actuates my present conduct, however it may appear inconsistent to the world, who very seldom judge right of a man's actions.”

—*Benedict Arnold in a Sept. 25, 1780, letter to George Washington, written after his escape to the British warship The Vulture*

Benedict Arnold was the son of an alcoholic. He had to withdraw from school when he was fourteen because his family could no longer afford the tuition. He ran away from home twice to join the army to fight in the French and Indian War—his mother did not seek to have him sent home the second time. Arnold seemed destined for a military career.

In 1779, Arnold was a well-known war hero and respected general who had served his country and, in doing so, lost full use of his left leg. His dramatic rise in the military began in 1775. As head of the Connecticut Militia, Arnold led them to Fort Ticonderoga and, with Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, succeeded in capturing the fort. When the Continental Congress put Col. Benjamin Hinman in control of the fort, Arnold resigned his commission.

Later, when Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler planned to invade Canada, Arnold proposed a second force join him. Congress approved, and Arnold was commissioned as a colonel. The offensive failed, and Arnold was wounded in the leg at the Battle of Quebec. He was promoted to brigadier general for his service.

When Maj. Gen. Thomas Mifflin was given control of the troops in Philadelphia, Arnold resigned his commission again—until Washington persuaded him to return.

He fought in the Saratoga Campaign to prevent the British from capturing the Hudson River; a loss would have separated New England from the rest of the Colonies.

Although Arnold played a decisive role in that victory, he disobeyed the command structure set by Gates, creating an open animosity between the two. During this campaign, at the Battle of Bemis Heights, Arnold again injured his left leg; he

refused to let military surgeons amputate. Although the leg healed, he never regained full use of it.

It was when Arnold became military commander of Philadelphia that his troubles began. The successful— if unorthodox and headstrong—general was not a conciliatory politician. He was accused of numerous counts of profiteering and abuse of power and ultimately was called before a court martial. Though given a light reprimand, Arnold was deeply embittered.

He already had been communicating with British Maj. John André. As his plans for switching sides in the conflict developed, Arnold learned he would be more valuable to the British if he could turn over a military outpost. He asked Washington for the command at West Point and moved forward with his plans to trade control of the fort to the British. When the plan failed, Arnold had received only £6,000 of the potential £20,000 he hoped to claim.

After defecting, he was commissioned as a brigadier general in the British army. In September 1781, he captured Fort Griswold, Conn., for the British before being ordered to England.

The remainder of Arnold's life was fraught with thwarted successes. He did not win the hearts of the British public and had few friends there to help advance his career. After failed ventures in Canada, he and his wife settled in London. He died June 14, 1801, in London, never having achieved the success or wealth he felt he deserved.

Peggy Shippen Arnold: Partner in Infidelity

Margaret "Peggy" Shippen was the youngest of four daughters of Judge Edward Shippen. He was known as a Loyalist, although other members of the family supported the Colonies.

When British troops occupied Philadelphia, a young British major named John André courted Peggy. The courtship was not serious, and André continued to correspond with her after the regiment moved on.

Peggy met Arnold July 4, 1778, at a party he hosted as the new military commander of Philadelphia. Arnold was taken with the beautiful 18-year-old and courted her aggressively.

The Shippen family had concerns about the couple's age difference—Arnold was almost twice as old—as well as Peggy's changing affections. After Arnold's flowery proposal on Sept. 25, 1778, her father insisted they wait until the next spring. Peggy was steadfast, and the couple married April 8, 1779. Peggy never knew that her proposal letter was nearly identical to one Arnold wrote when he had courted Elizabeth Deblois in 1776. Elizabeth rejected his proposal.

Peggy was known as a coquette among the troops, and after Arnold's transfer to West Point his aide and his sister, Hannah, wrote letters of concern about her friendships with other men.

After Arnold's plan to turn over West Point was discovered, he wrote a letter to Washington asking for Peggy's protection and proclaiming her ignorant of the plot. Most historians, however, believe she was aware of his plans and aided his correspondence with André. It also is likely that while Arnold nursed the wounds of his conflicts with Congress, the Philadelphia politicians and the rebuke of his court martial, Peggy encouraged him to believe he would receive better treatment from the British.

After Arnold's defection, Peggy feigned madness, wandering the halls of her home at West Point in her undergarments and also claiming someone was trying to kill her infant son. She was returned to her family in Philadelphia, but the public was unsympathetic. She was mocked and hounded until she left to join her husband in London. She and Arnold had five children, four sons and a daughter. She died Aug. 24, 1804, in London.

Hannah Arnold: The Loyal Sister

Hannah Arnold was the only one of Arnold's five siblings to survive to adulthood. Her brother disapproved of the French suitor courting her and warned him to stay away. When he caught him visiting Hannah again, the unfortunate Frenchman was forced to dive out the window to avoid being shot. Years later, Arnold encountered this would-be suitor in Honduras and challenged him to a duel, during which he severely wounded the Frenchman. Hannah never married.

Arnold's first wife, Margaret, died June 19, 1775, when she was 30. They had been married eight years and had three sons. Hannah then took over the care of her young nephews, Benedict, Richard and Henry. Although frequently away with his military duties, Hannah provided the only home Arnold had until his marriage to Peggy Shippen.

After he and Peggy married, Arnold sent for Hannah and his sons so they could join his household. Later, the boys Hannah had raised were sent to boarding school when the pregnant Peggy said they irritated her nerves. Ultimately Hannah would settle in Canada with Henry, Arnold's youngest son from his first marriage.

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The Patriots: Founding Fathers and Minor Players

"Even the shadow of a fault tarnishes the luster of our finest achievements. I reprimand you for having forgotten that, in proportion as you have rendered yourself formidable to our enemies you should have been guarded and temperate in your deportment towards your fellow citizens."

—George Washington, in a letter of rebuke he sent to Benedict Arnold after Arnold's court martial was concluded. His language is much stronger than the public rebuke, which praised Arnold's heroism. His words deeply wounded Arnold.

General George Washington

George Washington is a legendary figure in America. In 1779, when America was still a loose band of rebellious Colonies, he already was a national hero. But he also was a general embattled. Washington gained distinction during his service in the French and Indian War. On June 15, 1775, he became commander in chief of the Continental Army, the creation of which had been adopted by the Continental Congress the day before. It was believed that, as a southerner, he could unite the Colonies behind the war effort.

After some initial success, Washington lost several battles in New York and steadily retreated to New Jersey. In spite of his famed crossing of the Delaware River and surprise attack on the British army's Hessian (German) mercenaries stationed at

Trenton on Dec. 25, 1776, he had few successes in New Jersey. His failures led many Colonists to doubt the Continental Army's chances of success against England.

Soon Gen. Charles Lee, upset at not being named commander in chief, was criticizing Washington's skills. Fellow generals Horatio Gates and Thomas Conway lobbied members of the Continental Congress to replace Washington with Gates. This plan, known as the Conway Cabal, failed. Conway resigned, and Gates sent an official apology to Washington. These intrigues among his fellow generals showed how tenuous Washington's position was.

Washington felt deeply betrayed when Benedict Arnold's plan to turn over West Point to the British was revealed. Adding to the sting of the betrayal was the fact that he had supported the often-unpopular Arnold and given him the command at West Point.

"Arnold is a traitor, and has fled to the British! Whom can we trust now?"
—*George Washington*

Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton was born in the West Indies. He was the illegitimate child of a Scottish father and a French Huguenot mother, who was still married. His father abandoned him and his brother around 1765, and their mother raised them. She died of yellow fever in 1768. Hamilton was always aware of the taint surrounding his birth.

Hamilton's leadership skills and hard work impressed those around him, and a fund was raised to send him to school. He attended King's College (now Columbia University) in New York, where he became involved with the revolution. In 1776, Hamilton attracted the notice of Colonial generals when he raised his own artillery unit from among his classmates and led them in an engagement with the British Army near New York City.

In 1777, he joined Gen. Washington's staff as a lieutenant colonel, serving as his aide de camp for the next four years.

A delegate to the Constitutional Convention, he also was one of the authors of the Federalist Papers, a series of letters sent to New York newspapers with the aim of convincing New Yorkers to ratify the Constitution.

He was Secretary of the Treasury between 1789 and 1795, resigning under a cloud of suspicion because of his admitted affair with Maria Reynolds, the wife of a counterfeiter.

He died on July 12, 1804, after receiving a fatal wound in a duel with then Vice President Aaron Burr over a disparaging comment about Burr that was attributed to him in a newspaper.

Joseph Reed

Joseph Reed served on Washington's staff in 1776. During this time, Reed wrote a letter to Lee criticizing Washington. Lee's response miscarried and was opened by Washington, who, in a display of magnanimity, returned the letter to Reed and apologized for opening it. Reed resigned in embarrassment, but later reconciled with Washington.

Arnold, aware of this event, added it to the list of resentments he held against Reed.

In December 1778, Reed became president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. It was in this position that he would clash with Arnold, who had been named military commander of Philadelphia. The enmity between the two deepened as tensions between military and political rule in the city escalated.

Timothy Matlack

Timothy Matlack was a Quaker merchant living in Philadelphia. He left the Society of Friends during the Revolution because he believed in the necessity of armed combat.

Matlack clashed with Arnold over an incident involving his son, Sgt. William Matlack:

The sergeant was standing guard at Arnold's Philadelphia military residence when Maj. David Franks, who was visiting, ordered him to fetch a barber. When Matlack asked Arnold's servants if it was usual for the sergeant standing guard to run errands for Arnold and his guests, he was told it was. He told Franks he would fetch the barber if it was a direct order, but would lodge a complaint. Franks cursed him and returned to the house. When he complained to Arnold, the general casually said he would look into the matter.

Timothy Matlack wrote an angry letter to Arnold, saying he would withdraw his son from the militia if he was to be subject to such debasing and inappropriate orders.

The incident made its way into the newspaper *The Pennsylvania Packet* in an editorial that was extremely unfavorable to Arnold and Franks.

The Matlack issue would be raised at Arnold's court martial.

The British: An Intractable King, Career Soldiers and a Soldier Spy

"The History of the Present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations. ... In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People."

—*The Declaration of Independence*

King George III

King George III ascended to the throne when he was 22, after the death of his grandfather, George II, on Oct. 25, 1760.

The first of the Hanoverian line of British kings who was raised speaking English, George felt a strong imperative to increase the power of the throne. He was deeply influenced by his mother, Princess Augusta, and John Stuart, the Earl of Bute, who would later serve as his prime minister. George's moves to increase his power were not popular with the public. Many political cartoons depicted him as merely carrying out the will of his mother and Stuart, who was alleged to be her lover.

Whatever its source, this strong sense of himself as king and his need to rule prompted his harsh responses to early Colonial rebellions. The acts of sabotage were viewed as disloyal and an affront to his royal position. This led to harsh legislation from Parliament, under Lord Frederick North, the prime minister—and provoked still more bitterness in the Colonies.

The Declaration of Independence blamed George for abuses of power, but it failed to also indict Parliament for passing the legislation. The Colonists viewed George as a tyrant. Yet George III was regarded more moderately in England.

George III remains a figure of contrasts. He was not given to extravagant expenditures and was deeply interested in agriculture, earning him the nickname "Farmer George." The madness for which he was famous was not evident during the American Revolution. This mental illness occurred later in his life and is believed to be

porphyry, an enzyme disorder that can cause hallucinations and paranoia. Others, though, believe his psychological symptoms may have been the result of ingesting too much arsenic.

Sir Henry Clinton

Henry Clinton came from a military family. His father was Adm. George Clinton, who served as governor of Newfoundland, Canada, and later New York. Henry Clinton distinguished himself during service in Germany during the Seven Years War and was promoted to major general in 1772. He was sent to the Colonies as second-in-command to Maj. Gen. William Howe, commander in chief of the British military in the Colonies.

Clinton is known for going against orders and leading an attack at the Battle of Bunker Hill, contributing to the British success in that conflict.

In May 1778, Clinton replaced Howe as commander in chief. André was a favorite of Clinton's, and he chose him as the chief correspondent with Arnold in arranging his defection.

In October 1781, Clinton failed to arrive in time to reinforce the troops of Gen. George Cornwallis at Yorktown, Pa. Cornwallis surrendered on the 19th, leading to the end of the Revolutionary War.

Many in England blamed Clinton for the loss of the Colonies. He published "Narrative of the Campaign of 1781 in North America" in an attempt to clear his name, continuing the history of deep bitterness between himself and Cornwallis, to whom he shifted much of the blame for the British failure. He died Dec. 23, 1795.

Stephen Kemble

Stephen Kemble was born in 1740 in New Brunswick, N.J., to a staunch Loyalist family. He accepted a commission in the British Army when he was seventeen and began working his way up the ranks.

While his brother-in-law Thomas Gage was commander in chief of the British armies in North America, Kemble enjoyed much success, becoming a major and deputy adjutant general. However, when Gen. Howe replaced Gage, Kemble's fortunes changed, and a new deputy adjutant general was appointed. Kemble endured the demotion, hoping for promotion at a later time. But when Clinton became commander in chief, the desired promotion was again thwarted. Clinton was not fond of Kemble and placed his favorite André, in the coveted position.

The slight was too much for Kemble, who ultimately resigned his position and sought his fortune with forays into Nicaragua and Grenada. He returned to his childhood home in New Brunswick in 1805 and died there in 1822.

Maj. John André

"He was more unfortunate than criminal: an accomplished man and a gallant officer"

—*Inscription attributed to George Washington on the memorial for Maj. John André in Tappan, N.Y.*

John André was known for his beauty, charm and talents. He was a gifted artist, singer and actor and praised for his eloquence and poetic language.

André enjoyed a meteoric rise in the British army. He joined in 1770 when he was 20, and by age 29 he was a major and held the title of deputy adjutant general.

He also oversaw British intelligence in the Colonies. He began his clandestine correspondence with Arnold in 1780.

André had been stationed in Philadelphia, where he had been a frequent visitor at the Shippen home. He had courted the beautiful youngest daughter, Peggy, who subsequently married Arnold and likely acted as a go-between André and her husband.

After André was captured and turned over to the American military for his involvement in the Arnold plot, much attention was given to whether he was acting as a soldier or a spy. If he was acting a soldier, he would be treated as a prisoner of war; if he had employed secrecy of a spy, he could be hanged. He was brought to trial before a panel of senior military officials and found guilty of spying.

Washington offered a trade with the British—André for Arnold—but Clinton refused. He didn't want to discourage the potential defection of the other American generals.

André moved easily in all sorts of society, had no trouble winning over his American captors. He carefully managed his image even up to the moment of his death. After meeting André in prison, Alexander Hamilton, confided in a letter to his wife, "I wished myself possessed of André's accomplishments."

André was hanged Oct. 2, 1780.

Perspectives on the Revolution: British, Colonial & Soldierly

The British Perspective

Great Britain signed the Peace of Paris agreement ending the Seven Years War Feb. 10, 1763. Winston Churchill called it the first world war because it drew in most European countries as well as the Colonies. In North America, the colonial wars between Great Britain and France were called the French and Indian War, and at stake were the Colonies as well as Canada, the American West and the West Indies.

The years of war left the nation with a massive debt of £133 million. Many in the country felt King George III gave too many territories back to the French and the Spanish as part of the treaty, ignoring how dearly these territories had been won by British and colonial armies. He had to pay £25,000 in bribes to get the treaty ratified in the House of Commons.

Corruption was rampant in the British Parliament in the 18th Century—votes were commonly sold to the highest bidder. In addition, the parliamentary system allowed only a very small and wealthy part of the population to vote: In a country with eight million people, only 215,000 males could vote.

As England struggled under the weight of bribery and debt, the population grew angry at the measures used to raise money. There were almost 160 riots between 1740 and 1775 because of public anger against political dishonesty and the high price of necessities such as bread.

Parliament viewed the lucrative Colonies as a possible solution to the country's financial woes. The Colonies were lax in enforcing tariffs, and many in England perceived the Colonists as growing wealthy under their British protectors.

"No people in the world live more comfortably than the people of America. They are the happiest farmers. The climate is good and hitherto the taxes have been easy. The provisions are under half the value of England. I thought it very happy the tenants of this country don't know it, it would soon depopulate England."

—Richard Oswald, *testifying before Parliament in 1766*

Not all the British were supportive of the war in the Colonies. The Evening Post newspaper called the war "unnatural, unconstitutional, unnecessary, unjust, dangerous, hazardous, and unprofitable."

The Colonial Perspective

“Those who give up essential liberty, to preserve a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.”
—*Benjamin Franklin*

The British Parliament passed a series of acts to raise taxes or enforce existing tariffs. This would provide the funds necessary to maintain a standing army in the Colonies and pay for the Crown’s officials there.

The Colonists were confronted by a series of acts designed to raise money for the British Government. The Stamp Act (1765), Townshend Acts (1767) and the Coercive Acts (1767)—the Colonists called the Coercive Acts the Intolerable Acts—were followed by the Tea Act (1773), which was designed to enforce collection of the tea tariff.

Colonists resented the high-handed way in which Parliament passed legislation affecting them without the approval of their Colonial legislatures. Colonial militias also felt they were capable of maintaining their security and mistrusted the British motive in stationing troops close to their homes.

Tax collectors were tarred and feathered, and Colonists resorted to acts of sabotage, such as the Boston Tea Party. This angered the British and prompted stricter sanctions by Parliament and even more British troops.

As it became apparent the Colonies would not have representation in Parliament and skirmishes with British troops increased, some Colonists began advocating separation with the mother country.

There was no single Colonial perspective on war with England. Many governors, judges and other officials were in positions appointed by the British government and did not want to lose their incomes. Others, while unhappy with the taxes, did not want to form a new nation separate from England. Colonies that were not occupied by the British were not as anxious to enter the war. The Quakers were pacifists and did not support violence.

Fighting the War

“Perseverance and spirit have done wonders in all ages.”
—*George Washington*

Fighting the war were the British regulars, or enlisted troops. The British also hired Hessian (German) mercenaries.

So-called “cow boys” were Loyalists who patrolled the countryside. Often their behavior was more like highwaymen than militiamen. Their patriot counterparts were called “skinnners.” While neither group had specific military orders, they could participate in conflicts or apprehend those they felt were loyal to the opposing side.

The Colonial army was a combination of men who had enlisted in the Continental Army and various local militias.

Long months of service and harsh weather and living conditions contributed to many in the Continental Army or militias returning to their homes. Some Colonists deserted; others tended to the needs of their families and farms, returning to the militias when their farms were stable. In addition, attrition occurred when the soldiers’ term of service expired.

Living conditions in the camps were deplorable. Latrines were dug too close to the camps, and the soldiers’ basic hygiene was minimal. A deadly combination of dysentery, typhus, malaria and other communicable diseases swept through the camps under the catchall name of “camp fever.” In addition, supplies were often disrupted or unavailable, causing periods of starvation.

Further disheartening the enlisted men was the fact that many had not been paid, while inflation was rampant. At its worst, Continental currency was worth thousands of dollars against one gold or silver dollar, provoking the phrase “not worth a Continental.”

“Our poor soldiers are reduced to the very edge of famine, their patience is exhausted by complicated sufferings and their spirits are almost broken.”

— *A Colonial camp doctor, commenting on the state of the soldiers*

The Plot Unravels: Treachery and Consequences

There were many missteps and fortuitous circumstances that led to the discovery of Arnold’s plot to turn over West Point to the British. During the Revolutionary period many believed these fortunate accidents were the work of Providence, reassuring the Colonists that God was on their side.

Arnold became commander of West Point Aug. 5, 1780. He had been in communication with the British through André for more than a year, and the plans to seize West Point were well under way.

However, his appointment also isolated Arnold from the lines of communication, as the British did not want to act until they had had a face-to-face meeting. By the time he received a coded letter from André on August 24, Arnold was very anxious. In the month-late letter, the British agreed to pay £20,000 for the capture of West Point and its 3,000 soldiers. There were no guarantees of payment if the plan failed.

Arnold sent a letter to André through a merchant named William Heron, who found the coded letter suspicious and gave it to a Colonial officer rather than delivering it—this was odd because Heron was spying for the British. The letter was filed, and no one followed up on it.

On Sept. 3, Arnold sent another letter to André through a woman named Mary McCarthy, who had asked for a pass to New York. British spymaster Colonel Elisha Sheldon received this letter and sent an immediate reply, recommending a meeting with André the 11th, at Dobb’s Ferry, N.Y.

Arnold would have preferred another location however knew another letter would not reach André in time. He had a crew of eight row him to Dobb’s Ferry on the 11th, but when he got close a British gunboat fired on them and the boat was forced to return to shore. André had failed to alert the British troops of his meeting with Arnold, and the opportunity was lost.

Arnold then sent a message to André, suggesting they meet at Dobb’s Ferry Sept. 20. At the same time, André attempted to arrange a meeting with Arnold through Col. Beverly Robinson, the Loyalist whose home Arnold was occupying. Robinson sent a letter to Arnold asking that some of his possessions be delivered to him. The letter also contained a coded message from André informing Arnold he was on *The Vulture*, a British warship anchored in Haverstraw Bay.

In the meantime, Washington informed Arnold that he planned to inspect West Point Sept. 23. Arnold knew he needed to act swiftly.

Arnold sent a letter to André through Robinson, repeating his desire to meet Sept. 20 at Dobb’s Ferry. Arnold sent Joshua Hett Smith to meet André on *The Vulture*, but Smith was slow getting the boat Arnold had set aside for him. Thus, Samuel and Joseph Cahoon, the men hired to take him, refused to row out at such a late hour. André was waiting on the ship — and a second opportunity to meet had vanished.

On Sept. 21, Arnold received another coded message from André, who was still prepared to meet. The Cahoon brothers rowed Smith to the *Vulture*. When André boarded the boat under the pseudonym “John Anderson,” he disguised his uniform with a long coat. It was midnight when they pushed off with André. The Cahoon brothers struggled with the large boat against the tides that affect the Hudson River.

When they landed at Dobb's Ferry, it was 2 a.m. on the 22nd. Arnold and André met, and Arnold gave André key papers. It was almost 4 a.m. when Smith reminded the pair that it was close to daybreak. The Cahoons realized the tide was against them and, citing how soon it would be dawn, refused to row André back to his ship.

Arnold and André then rode to Smith's cabin, planning to wait until darkness to return André to his ship. However, circumstances were against them yet again. Lt. Col. James Livingston fired on the *Vulture*. André and Arnold could only watch as the ship pulled away to avoid the canon fire.

Arnold wrote passes for André, using the name John Anderson, for travel by land and water. He urged André to abandon his uniform and then returned to West Point to prepare for Washington's visit.

Not knowing how far away *The Vulture* had withdrawn, André and Smith decided it was safest to return by land. Smith escorted André to within fifteen miles of British territory and left him, assuming that he would travel safely, thanks to Arnold's pass. However, David Williams, Isaac Van Wart and John Paulding, who was wearing a Hessian coat, apprehended him.

André falsely assumed the men were British supporters and identified himself as a British officer. When he discovered they were skinners, or Colonial supporters, he showed them the pass from Arnold. The men were suspicious and searched him. Finding the incriminating papers in his boot, they took him to Lt. Col. John Jameson.

Jameson, puzzled by the evidence, decided to send the man identifying himself as Anderson to Arnold while taking the precaution of sending the papers to Washington. After an armed guard had departed with André, Maj. Benjamin Tallmadge, the Colonial spymaster, learned of the evidence and urged Jameson to bring André back. Tallmadge suspected Arnold's involvement. Jameson sent a man to intercept André and return him to the camp. However, unwilling to believe the evidence against Arnold, Jameson sent a message apprising him of the events.

A rainstorm delayed Jameson's letter to Arnold, who received it the morning of Washington's visit on the 23rd. Arnold read the letter while breakfasting with two of Washington's aides. He excused himself on the pretense of making sure that West Point was ready for the general's visit.

It is not until evening that Jameson's letter and packets of information reached Washington. By that time, Arnold had escaped to the *Vulture*.

Without the advantage of a surprise attack and an inside man, Clinton called off the attack on West Point.

Peggy Arnold, who had arrived at West Point just before her husband was discovered, appeared to be mad with grief when Washington visited her during her ravings. She was returned to her family in Philadelphia thirteen days after she had arrived at West Point.

Despite claiming the privileges of a prisoner of war, André was tried as a spy and found guilty. He was hanged Oct. 2, 1780.

A Hero's Downfall

The name "Benedict Arnold" has become synonymous with "traitor" in American culture. Yet, Arnold was never tried as a traitor, even in absentia. Some historians have argued that since the Colonies were not yet a nation Arnold could not actually have been a traitor.

The man who was a war hero had become despised. Part of the vehement hatred was tied to the amount of money he had requested: £20,000 was a fortune in a world where a colonel received one pound, four shillings in daily pay and a private earned eight pence a day. Although Arnold ultimately only received £6,000 of his fee, he still had the reputation of having sold his country for money.

After the plot was revealed, effigies of Arnold were created and dragged through the streets and burned.

Arnold never recovered from the loss of his honor in the Colonies. He failed to gain the esteem of the British, who resented his early Colonial victories against them. Arnold wanted to be remembered as a hero. He attempted to justify his behavior in an open letter to the American public, "To the Inhabitants of America." Although he never visited America again, Arnold requested to be buried in his Colonial uniform.

However, evidence of Arnold's heroism has been erased. Today, in memorials at Saratoga and the U.S. Military Academy, Arnold is not mentioned by name—only as major general.

Rebellion and Betrayal: Benedict Arnold's War and a Nation's Revolution

A Timeline

Jan. 14, 1741 Benedict Arnold is born in Norwich, Conn.

1756 The 15-year-old Arnold runs away to join the militia during the French and Indian War. His parents trace him, and he returns home; in a few months he runs away again and enlists in the provincial army.

Feb. 10, 1763 The Peace of Paris ends the Seven Years War, known in the Colonies as the French and Indian War. Great Britain is left with substantial debts after years of war.

April 5, 1764 The British Parliament amends the Sugar and Molasses Act to enforce the collection of taxes in the Colonies and prevent Colonists from buying cheaper French sugar for making rum.

March 22, 1765 Parliament passes the Stamp Act, taxing every piece of printed material including newspapers, legal documents and playing cards. Although the amount raised by the act is minimal, Colonists resent Parliament's attempt to raise money without consulting the Colonial legislatures. This prompts the formation of a Stamp Act Congress, which meets in New York with delegates from nine Colonies.

Feb. 22, 1767 Benedict Arnold marries Margaret Mansfield. They have three sons, Benedict, Richard and Henry.

June 1767 Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, which were new import taxes on glass, lead, paints, paper and tea. The acts were repealed in March 1770—except for the tax on tea.

1768 Great Britain dissolves the Massachusetts Assembly for refusing to assist in the collection of taxes.

March 5, 1770 The Boston Massacre. Tensions between Colonial civilians and British army officers reach a boiling point when British soldiers fire on an angry crowd, killing five civilians and injuring six.

1772 The Boston Assembly demands rights for its Colonies and threatens secession.

Dec. 16, 1773 Colonists dressed as Indians dump tea into Boston Harbor to protest the Tea Act (May 10, 1773), which allowed the British East India Company to sell tea in the Colonies, undercutting the prices of Colonial merchants. It comes to be known as the Boston Tea Party.

March 1774 Parliament passes the first of a series of Coercive Acts (called Intolerable Acts by the Colonists) in response to the resistance and sabotage throughout Massachusetts. The British close the port of Boston.

Sept. 5 – Oct. 26, 1774 The First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia with representatives from every Colony except Georgia and decides not to import British goods.

June 15, 1775 George Washington is named commander in chief of the newly created Continental Army.

1775 Britain hires 29,000 German mercenaries (Hessians) for the pending war in the Colonies.

April 18, 1775 Paul Revere rides from Charleston to Lexington.

April 19, 1775 The British are defeated at the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

May 10, 1775 Arnold leads the Connecticut Militia and joins Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys to conquer Fort Ticonderoga. Arnold expects to be given command of the fort but the Continental Congress places Col. Benjamin Hinman in his place and Arnold resigns his commission.

May 10, 1775 The Second Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia.

June 17, 1775 The British army is victorious at the Battle of Bunker Hill during the Siege of Boston. It suffers more than 1,000 casualties in the three assaults before the Continental Army is forced back. The losses associated with their victory are demoralizing to the British, despite the victory. This, the first major fight between British and Colonial troops, is when the Colonial troops are ordered not to fire until they can see “the whites of their eyes.”

June 19, 1775 Margaret Arnold dies. Arnold’s sister, Hannah, takes over the care of his three sons.

June - December 1775 Arnold captures a British schooner and sails north to St. John’s in Canada; he has 1,100 volunteers and plans to take Quebec. With the onset of winter the number of volunteers dwindles to 700, and he sends aide Aaron Burr to ask Gen. Richard Montgomery for reinforcements. Montgomery arrives with 300 men, but the artillery fire from the British under Sir Guy Carleton decimates the troops. Arnold is wounded in the left leg during the battle.

1776 Benedict Arnold is cited for his bravery in Quebec and promoted to brigadier general.

Jan. 10, 1776 Thomas Paine publishes “Common Sense,” denouncing British rule and laying out the reasons for a revolution.

July 4, 1776 The Continental Congress approves and signs the Declaration of Independence.

Dec. 23, 1776 Thomas Paine writes “The American Crisis,” which contains the famous words, “These are the times that try men’s souls.” Washington orders it read to the army before crossing the Delaware.

Dec. 25, 1776 Washington leads his troops across the Delaware River at night and succeeds in surprising the Hessian troops stationed at Trenton, N.J.

June 14, 1777 The Continental Congress adopts a national flag of stars and stripes.

July - August 1777 British Gen. John Burgoyne invades from Canada, attempting to separate New England from the rest of the Colonies by securing the Hudson River. Arnold disobeys Gen. Gates and leads a final attack. He re-injures his leg during the Battle of Bemis Heights. Arnold is a hero, though Gates fails to mention his decisive role in the Saratoga Campaign.

Nov. 15, 1777 The Articles of Confederation are written.

June 1778 While recuperating from his injury, Arnold is appointed military commander of Philadelphia.

Sept. 25, 1778 Benedict Arnold proposes to 18-year-old Margaret “Peggy” Shippen. Her father, Edward Shippen, has doubts about the match and the difference in their ages and insists the couple wait to wed until the following spring.

April 8, 1779 Benedict Arnold and Peggy Shippen marry.

May 1779 Arnold, feeling his service in the war is unappreciated by Congress and also deeply in debt, makes contact with a British general, Sir Henry Clinton, through his deputy adjutant general, Maj. John André.

June 1, 1779 Arnold is court-martialed for misconduct and abuse of power while in command in Philadelphia.

July 1780 Arnold seeks the command at West Point and is appointed commander Aug. 5.

Sept. 22, 1780 Arnold and André meet to discuss plans for Arnold to secure West Point for the British.

Sept. 23, 1780 Arnold’s plot to surrender West Point to the British is revealed when André is captured. Two days later, Arnold escapes to the British aboard the British ship *The Vulture*—the same ship that brought André.

Oct. 2, 1780 After a hearing, André is hanged as a spy.

Oct. 7, 1780 Arnold attempts to justify his actions in the letter “To the Inhabitants of America.”

Sept. 6, 1781 Arnold and his British, Hessian and Tory troops capture Fort Griswold in Connecticut.

Oct. 19, 1781 British Gen. George Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown, Pa.

Sept. 3, 1783 The Treaty of Paris ends the American Revolution and Great Britain recognizes the independence of the United States.

Jan. 14, 1784 Congress ratifies the Treaty of Paris.

May 25, 1787 Delegates gather in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation—and end up drafting what would become the Constitution of the United States.

Sept. 17, 1787 The delegates approve and sign the final draft of the Constitution.

June 21, 1787 New Hampshire becomes the ninth state to ratify the Constitution. Congress had required that nine state legislatures endorse the document for it to become effective.

April 30, 1789 George Washington is elected the first president of the United States and takes office.

June 14, 1801 Benedict Arnold dies in London, England.

Aug. 24, 1804 Peggy Arnold dies in London.

Glossary of Revolutionary War Terms

Adjutant General – The principal officer through whom a commanding officer receives military communications. Adjutant comes from a Latin word meaning “to help.”

Aide de Camp – The French phrase means camp assistant. It generally refers to the personal assistant of someone of high rank.

Bayonet – A weapon shaped like a long knife that was meant to fit on the end of a rifle for use in close combat.

Brigadier – The rank above Colonel and below Major General but was often used to refer to a brigade commander.

Brigadier General – At this point in history it referred to an infantry officer who commanded a brigade.

Camp Fever – Is the name given to the dysentery, typhus, malaria and other communicable diseases that plagued the Colonial Army’s camps.

Codes –During the revolution Benedict Arnold and John André used several types of codes. One involved listing a number for the number of the word on a page and a page number in identical books. The recipient of the code could then look up the word with the numbers given and decode the message. They also employed other methods of subterfuge including invisible ink written between the lines of a real letter and a Keyhole Cipher in which the real message in an apparently innocuous letter would be revealed when a page with a cut out of a certain shape was held to the letter.

Continental Army – The Second Continental Congress created the Continental Army on June 14, 1775, when the Revolutionary War was already underway. It was created for “the purposes of common defense” as a way of unifying the various militias and organizing against the British Army. Congress often failed to adequately fund the army because of its reluctance to tax the citizens of the Colonies to pay for the army.

Continental Congress – The first Continental Congress met from September 5 1774 to October 26 1774. It was a meeting of representatives of the various Colonies to decide on a response to the so-called Intolerable Acts. The Second Continental Congress met between May 10, 1775 and March 1, 1781. It created a Continental Army and appointed George Washington commander in chief of the army. It also adopted the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation.

Continental Currency – The Second Continental Congress agreed to print paper money for the purposes of the war however several colonies printed their own money, there were no firm backers for the currency and inflation was rampant. At its worst thousands of continental dollars were equal to one silver or gold dollar generating the phrase, “not worth a continental.”

Cow Boys – During the Revolutionary War, the term Cow boys referred loyalists who roamed neutral territory as highwaymen. Like their counterparts the skimmers they could choose to support the British interests or their own at any given point.

Fusilier (Royal) – Originally the term for a soldier armed with a flintlock musket called a fusil, it became the larger term for a branch of a regiment John André was part of the Royal Fusiliers for a time.

Grenadiers – Like other definitions it original referred to a specialized assault troops specialized in siege warfare. It became an honorific term for certain infantry troops

Hessian – Derived from the German state of Hesse from which came over half of the German mercenaries who fought in the American Revolution on behalf of the British. Most were conscripted debtors or impressed petty criminals who did not see payment for their services. The revenue of their service was paid to the nobility who sent them.

Hot rum flip – A drink made of rum, powdered sugar dissolved in hot water, and an egg yolk shaken up and served in a warm glass with nutmeg on top. It was a very popular drink during the Revolution.

Hussars – A term for light cavalry in the military of various countries, although the origin of the word is Hungarian

Jaegers – From the German word for hunter, it is a military term for light infantry.

Loyalist – A term for a Colonist who remained loyal to George III during the American Revolution.

George Monck – George Monck was a soldier who fought first for the crown then for Cromwell during the British Civil Wars. He was handsomely rewarded by Parliament for switching sides. It is one of the code names Arnold used when contacting the British about betraying the Colonies.

Musket – A long muzzle-loaded gun that uses small lead balls as ammunition and generally fires from the shoulder.

Skinners – Loosely affiliated supporters of the American Revolution were called skinners. Many operated as highwaymen in neutral territory. Some may have been in local militias or joined in the fighting when it suited them.

Tory – In the eighteenth century it is the name applied to a supporter of the King right to direct policy in Parliament or American Colonists who were loyal to the Crown.

Whig – During the revolution was the term used to describe an American Colonist who believed in the formation of a new nation. It would develop into an American political party.

Discussion Questions

About the History

George Washington and Benedict Arnold faced similar challenges and similar choices. How do their responses to circumstances alter their places in history?

History is based on limited accounts of events that happened in an earlier time period. How can art fill in the gaps of history? How much can we understand about a time we did not live in?

About the Play

Many characters in the play have deep pride, or a need to feel important. How does their desire for recognition affect their actions?

George Washington and Alexander Hamilton are mythic figures in American history. How does the play depict them?

During the play Benedict Arnold never really explains his reasons for switching sides. What factors contributed to his decisions?

Often when attending a play we do not know how it will end. We all know what happened to Benedict Arnold. How does the playwright, Richard Nelson, build dramatic tension?

About the Production

The set design mimics a theater and the audience can see the cast making entrances, exits and set changes. How does watching the theatricality of the play reflect on the characters who are being played? Are the characters themselves “playing a part” at any point?

The characters are costumed in a very specific style. How do the wigs, corsets and coats of the 18th Century effect how you see the characters? Do their actions feel modern or a product of their time?

What clues do the lights and music offer about the mental state of the characters?

Projects for Students

Benedict Arnold and John André communicated in a variety of codes. One type of code involved listing a number for the page and a number for the word in a specific book. Since both had the same book they could code and decode messages. Another, called a keyhole code, involved a template cut to a certain shape. The message would be written in the shape and then when the template was removed a longer message was written around the existing writing to hide the message in a letter that looked ordinary. The person decoding the message needed a template to know what the real message was. Finally, codes were sometimes written in invisible ink, the juice of onions, lemons and milk were all possibilities. When the message was held up to a flame the invisible writing would appear. Break students into groups and have them send and decode messages using the various methods above.

There were many opinions about what was best for the colonies during the Revolutionary War. Break Students into groups of loyalists, British, revolutionaries who wanted to form a new nation, and Quakers. Have students debate the merits of the war from these perspectives.

The General from America Recommended Reading

Cumming, William P. and Hugh F. Rankin. *The Fate of A Nation: The American Revolution Through Contemporary Eyes*. New York: Phaidon Press, 1975.

Desjardin, Thomas A. *Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775*. New York: St. Martin Press, 2006.

Fleming, Thomas. *Liberty*. New York: Viking, 1997.

Gragg, Rod. *Declaration of Independence*. Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 2005.

Hatch, Robert McConnell. *John André: A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986.

Martin, James Kirby. *Benedict Arnold Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1997.

McCullough, David. *1776*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

Palmer, Dave R. *George Washington and Benedict Arnold: A Tale of Two Patriots*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2006.

Thompson, Ray. *Benedict Arnold in Philadelphia*. Fort Washington, PA: Bicentennial Press, 1975.

Van Doren, Carl. *Secret History of the American Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1941.

Walsh, John Evangelist. *The Execution of Major André*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

The General From America Internet Resources

George Washington's Papers

<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/>

Materials on Early America, Biographies, Images, Documents

www.earlyamerica.com

Information on the coding techniques employed by André, Clinton and Arnold

<http://www.si.umich.edu/spies/index-people.html>

Documentation of early continental currency and military pay

www.nps.gov/sara/money_activity_key.pdf

Historical events of the 1700s

<http://www.history1700s.com/page1008.shtml>

Early American Images

<http://www.earlyamericanimages.com/>

A Popular Ballad Written about the capture of Major André

<http://www.contemplator.com/america/andre.html>

Library of Congress access to maps and charts of the time period

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/armhtml/armhome.html>