



OwlTeacher
Teaching with Movies & Literature

THE CROSSING

Good for the following school subjects:

- ✓ American History
- ✓ The American Revolution

Directed by Robert Harmon
2000; NR; Drama; 89 minutes; Color;
Available from www.OwlTeacher.com bookstore

Synopsis: In this movie, students experience the frantic and dazzling victory at Trenton the day after Christmas in 1776. George Washington, then general of the Continental Army, decided at the last minute to cross the Delaware River on Christmas night and attempt to surprise the Hessians in Trenton, New Jersey. If not for Washington's wise and brave decision, the entire American Revolution might have failed. This battle was a true turning point in American History!

Educational Benefits of this movie: This film allows students to see the man who would become our first president, as general. It offers a glimpse into the personality and traits that made George Washington such an exceptional leader. Students also see how close we came to losing the American Revolution and how this pivotal event affects their lives today. The film outlines the dilemma facing Washington and how he came to make the fateful decision to cross the icy Delaware River despite warnings of failure from others. Finally, the democratic revolutions that took place in the 18th, 19th, and even 20th centuries would probably not have happened if the American Revolution had failed. World History would definitely have turned out differently. Amazing how one decision in time affected the whole of history!

Historical Background: In December of 1776, things were not looking up for the Continental Army. Continuous defeats by the British had left morale low and hopes dimmed. At Long Island, the Continental Army had been pushed back and forced to leave New York City. It was clear to everyone that the British would probably win the war. Washington decided to retreat to "the Jerseys" as the area was known at the time, and try to save his army. General Howe, the British commander, settled in for the winter in Philadelphia with his lover, the wife of a well-known loyalist.

George Washington was greatly discouraged and felt that the end was near. Hungry, cold, and tired, about 2,000 of Washington's men refused to reenlist when their terms of enlistment expired. Washington tried desperately to convince them to hang on just a little longer since the British army was just a short march away, but to no avail. Many of these men were also sick. Everyone, it seems, was giving up.

Utilizing the few days that most of his troops had left in their enlistment contract, Washington decided that he must do something immediately. He would make one

last attempt to revive the army and restore morale. Many people were already calling the American Revolution "a noble, but lost cause." George Washington decided to cross the Delaware River at night on Christmas and surprise the feared German mercenaries, known as the Hessians, who occupied Trenton, New Jersey. The crossing began at 3:00 p.m. on Christmas day. Washington and his men suffered greatly during that crossing, for it was bone-shattering cold and a snowstorm enveloped them, beating against their faces and bodies. Some of the men had no shoes or coats! But the severity of the cold helped the Continentals. How? Well, due to the horrid weather conditions, the Hessians did not even dream that the Americans were foolish enough to dare an attack under such conditions. Normal protocols were cancelled and the Hessians were ready to rest after weeks of constant alertness and marching. By the time the Americans showed up, the Hessians were snoring and nestled deep in their tents, oblivious to the world around them.

It was 4:00 a.m. by the time Washington's men finally made it across the river. One young soldier later wrote about Washington, "I have never seen Washington so determined as he is now. He stands on the bank of the river, wrapped in his cloak, superintending the landing of the troops. He is calm and collected, but very determined. The storm is changing to sleet, and cuts like a knife."

When Washington's men began their attack on the Hessians, the Hessians had no clue what was happening. Washington had ordered that his men cover their flintlocks with their cloaks to keep them dry. The Hessians, on the other hand, were desperately trying to get their wet guns to work. The Hessians suffered 106 casualties and 900 men were captured. The Americans suffered two casualties! Fearing a British attack from Princeton, Washington had his men, the captured Hessians, 1,000 weapons, several canons, and loads of ammunition which were seized from the enemy, re-cross the Delaware. It was a tremendous victory!

Study Questions:

1. Who were the Hessians and why were they fighting for Great Britain?
2. List and describe the ways in which George Washington demonstrated superb leadership before, during, and after the Battle of Trenton.
3. General George Washington demonstrated great courage during difficult moments. Why is this an important trait for a military leader?
4. Washington was described as one of those rare few who, under fire, appeared to be without fear. Why is this important in a military leader?
5. List the ways in which George Washington contributed to his country:
6. What happened to the Continental Army after the Battle of Trenton; where did they from there in terms of the war?
7. Give examples from the movie that show Washington's men suffering tremendously.
8. What if the weather on that fateful day in 1776 had been pleasant? Would Washington's attack have been successful? Why or why not?
9. Explain how each of the following men contributed to the American victory at Trenton:
 - ✓ Henry Knox
 - ✓ Charles Lee
 - ✓ Hugh Mercer
 - ✓ John Sullivan

Project:

Research the Battle of Trenton more thoroughly on your own. Using your research, create a map of the battle. Label the following on your map:

- ✓ the Delaware River
- ✓ Trenton
- ✓ Princeton
- ✓ Washington D.C.
- ✓ New Jersey
- ✓ Pennsylvania
- ✓ The Hessian Camp
- ✓ Washington & his men crossing the river & advancing on the Hessians

Your map must include a compass rose, a legend, and a distance scale (make sure your map is true to scale). Include lightly shaded color to differentiate between water and land, etc. If you wish, you may make your map look old and used by dipping it in strong tea and drying overnight. Then roll it and tie it with string. This is optional, however.