

LINKS TO LIBERTY
Defending the Great Chain at West Point
By Robert J. Skead and Robert A. Skead



Study Guide

About the Book

The Year: 1779

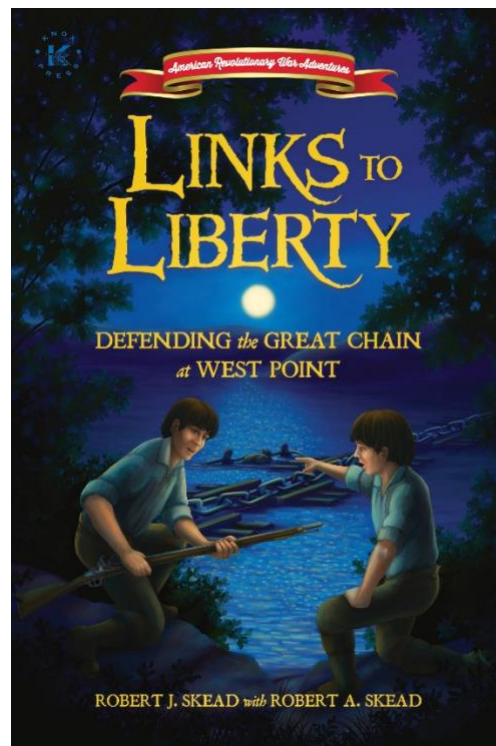
The war: The American Revolution

The secret weapon: twin boys and the Great Chain at West Point

John and Ambrose Clark are hot on the trail of the spy who gave away the secret of their father's mission, which ultimately led to him being shot by Redcoats. But when there is an attack on America's new strategic defense on the Hudson River—the Great Chain at West Point—the twins must protect it. They soon discover things aren't always as they seem and their friends have deadly connections. Discover how the boys' faith in each other help the cause for Liberty!

About this Study Guide

This Study Guide, based on the book *Links to Liberty*, by Knox Press, provides educators with additional content, ideas, activities and resources to teach children (ages 9-13) about the American Revolution, the importance of the Great Chain at West Point and discovering some of the techniques spies, for both the patriot and British cause, used to gather and convey information during the war.



Classroom Activity: Pre Reading

The Big Interview

Before reading *Links to Liberty*, students can work in pairs to create interview questions, based on the preliminary information about the book.

After completing the story, students can finish the interview by creating answers and a separate set of questions about what they still want to know.

Vocabulary & Terminology

The following terms and words from the colonial period may be unfamiliar to your students. Before reading the book, students can work alone or in pairs to define the words/terms, research them more in depth (as needed), and/or discuss them with other students.



American Turtle

The *American Turtle* was the world's first submersible used in combat. David Bushnell built it in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, in 1775 as a means of attaching explosive charges to British Royal Navy vessels occupying North American harbors during the Revolutionary War. Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull recommended the invention to George Washington. The commander-in-chief was skeptical, but he provided funds and support for the development and testing of the vessel.

In 1776, the *Turtle* made several attempts to attach explosives to the hulls of British warships in New York Harbor. All failed. The *Turtle's* transport ship was sunk later that year by the British with the submarine aboard. Although Bushnell said he recovered the machine, but its final fate is unknown.

Culper Spy Ring

British forces occupied New York in August 1776, and the city would remain a British stronghold and a major naval base for the duration of the Revolutionary War. Though getting information from New York on British troop movements and other plans was critical to General George Washington, there was simply no reliable intelligence network that existed on the Patriot side at that time. In 1778, a young cavalry officer named Benjamin Tallmadge established a small group of trustworthy men and women from his hometown of Setauket, Long Island. Known as the Culper Spy Ring, a name derived from the aliases of its main members, Samuel Culper, Sr. and Samuel Culper, Jr., Tallmadge's homegrown network would become the most effective of any intelligence-gathering operation on either side during the Revolutionary War.

Light Dragoons

The 1st Continental Light Dragoons was a mounted regiment of the Continental Army. It was organized between June 13 and September 10, 1776, in Williamsburg, Virginia. Made up of men from eastern and northern Virginia, the Light Dragoons were specific units mounted on horses.

The Continental Congress commissioned the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons, a unit of the Continental Army, on December 12, 1776. The regiment first assembled in March 1777 at

Wethersfield, Connecticut, and comprised of four troops from Connecticut, one troop largely from Massachusetts and New Jersey, and two companies of light infantry.



In 1777, there were approximately 1,120 dragoons in the Continental army. Other than officers, there were no other mounted troops in the entire Continental army.

Frigate

During the Revolutionary War period, this is a warship built for speed and maneuverability. A frigate usually had guns mounted on deck and three masts. The British could use their frigates to fire artillery at enemy vessels and at land targets (buildings and people) and move troops quickly. For example, on August 22, 1776, using approximately 90 frigates, the British moved 20,000 soldiers from Staten Island to Brooklyn. During the next few days, the British inflicted heavy casualties, and the Continentals retreated to Brooklyn Heights.

Loyalists

American colonists who remained loyal to Great Britain during the American Revolutionary War. They were also called **Tories**, Royalists, or King's Men. They were opposed by the Patriots, those who supported the revolution. When their cause was defeated, about twenty per cent of the Loyalists fled to other parts of the British Empire, many to Ontario and New Brunswick, Canada. It has been estimated that between fifteen and twenty percent of the European-American population of the colonies were Loyalists.

Musket

A muzzle-loaded, smooth bore long gun, fired from the shoulder. Muskets were designed for use by infantry and included a bayonet. During the American Revolution, there was a tremendous need to manufacture muskets and rifles. Supplying the troops with needed weapons was a huge challenge. There were few factories producing weapons. American soldiers often used weapons captured by the enemy. France and Spain also contributed weapons to the Continental army.

Discover more:

<https://www.ncpedia.org/history/usrevolution/soldiers>

<https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/exhibition/a-revolution-in-arms/>

Tory

See **Loyalists**

West Point

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West Point, in New York state, was a fortified site during the Revolutionary War. Originally picked due to the abnormal S-curve in the Hudson River at this point, it was founded by one of the best military engineers of the time, Polish General Tadeusz Kościuszko. It was manned by a small garrison of Continental soldiers through the entirety of the war. A great iron chain was laid across the Hudson at this point in order to impede British Navy vessels, but it was never tested by the British. The site consisted of multiple redoubts, including Fort Putnam, which is still preserved in a Revolutionary-period design.



Key Historical Educational Topics Found in the Story

Historical Context and Characters

The Great Chain at West Point Facts

- Mission: The chain prevented the British from taking control of the Hudson River and splitting the American colonies. If the British controlled the river, they'd have the ability to launch a major invasion from Canada and cut New England off from the middle and southern colonies.
- The chain was constructed in six weeks at the Sterling Iron Works, in Warwick and Orange County, New York. The chain links came from Long Pond Iron Works in Ringwood, New Jersey.
- The chain was installed on April 30, 1778.
- Each link: 2 feet long
- 1,200 large iron links
- Each link weighs 100 to 180 pounds
- It took 40 men 4 days to install it

- The chain was supported by a bridge of waterproofed logs, like connected rafts, stretched across the river.
- There was a clever system of pulleys, rollers, and ropes, and midstream, there were anchors to adjust the tension to overcome currents and tides.
- Chain ran across the Hudson from West Point to Constitution Island.
- The Great Chain earned the nickname as “Washington’s giant watch chain.”
- If a ship tried to ram it, the chain would hold and break open the ship’s hull.



Spying Techniques: Ciphers & Codes

Used to ensure the contents of a letter could not be understood from someone not intended to read the letter should it be captured. With ciphers, letters were used to replace other letters to hide its real message. The recipient of the letter used a key which referenced pages from a well-known book to decode the letter’s true message. Spy groups also created their own code books. Spy letters often were written with intricate codes where numbers replaced letters. This method was used by the Culper Spy Ring.

For example:

Here's how the Culper system worked (with notes about their code numbers from the spy ledger):

Townsend (Culper Junior/Code number 723) was stationed in occupied New York City (727). Woodhull (Culper Senior, 722) was in Setauket. Both gathered intelligence on the British (72).

Townsend would relay messages through Roe (724) to Woodhull, in Setauket. Woodhull would notify Caleb Brewster (725), who would convey the message to the last link, Benjamin Tallmadge in Connecticut (735).

Discover more about spying techniques:

<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/spy-techniques-of-the-revolutionary-war/>

Discover more about the Culper Code Book:

<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/the-culper-code-book/>

Historical Characters

John André (May 2, 1751 – October 2, 1780)

This British Army officer was hanged as a spy by the Continental Army for helping Benedict Arnold’s attempt to surrender the fort at West Point, New York, to the British.

Benedict Arnold (January 14, 1741 – June 14, 1801)

His name is synonymous with “traitor,” but Arnold, who was born in Connecticut, first served as a general for the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. He defected to the side of the British while still a general on the American side. As commander of the fort at West Point, he planned to surrender it to the Redcoats. The plan was exposed in September 1780, and he escaped and was commissioned as a brigadier general into the British Army.



While in the Continental Army, Arnold distinguished himself through acts of intelligence and bravery. He helped capture Fort Ticonderoga in 1775, win the Battle of Ridgefield, Connecticut, and earned himself a promotion to major general. His actions in battle led to leg injuries that ended his combat career for several years. Despite his successes, Arnold was passed over for promotion by the Continental Congress. Historians believe this made him bitter and caused him to switch sides and become a traitor.

General Gold Selleck Silliman (May 7, 1732 – July 21, 1790)

A native of Fairfield, Connecticut, Gold Silliman graduated from Yale University and practiced law as a crown attorney before the Revolution. During the War for Independence, Silliman became a militia general. In May 1775 he was appointed as a colonel of the Fourth Regiment Connecticut Militia and became brigadier general in 1776. In 1779, Silliman and his son were captured in their home by Tories and held prisoner until an exchange could be arranged a year later.

Major Benjamin Tallmadge (February 25, 1754 – March 7, 1835)

Benjamin Tallmadge was the son of a clergyman. He graduated from Yale College in 1773, where he was a classmate of American Revolutionary War spy Nathan Hale. Tallmadge was a major in the Second Continental Light Dragoons, but eventually he was promoted to the rank of colonel and became the chief intelligence officer for George Washington. In this position, he organized the Culper Spy Ring based out of New York City and Long Island.

English Language Arts Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Student Activities



1. You are a Culper Spy!

Your Secret Mission:

Using the key found below, decipher the letter sent by a British spy informing his colleagues about the plans to attack the Great Chain. In the story, this is the letter Major Tallmadge had in his possession and deciphered thanks to the help of the code book discovered by John Clark.

Andre 101	Arnold 105	Attack 150	Chain 198
Connecticut 218	Hudson 333	Muskets 475	New Jersey 480
New York 485	Rebels 490	Royal Army 500	Stansbury 520
Troops 600	Turtle 610	Washington 777	West Point 000

Extremely urgent to alert 101 of a planned 150 directed at the 198 in the vicinity of 000 by a small contingent of 500 specifically trained for covert activity on the twelfth.

Using the same key, decipher the letter below sent by a British Redcoat to his senior officers in New York City after John and Ambrose Clark helped stop the destruction of the Great Chain.

I regret to inform you that a small contingent of 500 attempted an 150 on the 198 at 000 but were thwarted in this activity. 490 from 218 caught the 500 by surprise and many were killed or captured. Please inform 101.

Now, write your own creative spy letter, using the Culper Spy Code.

2. You need to alert the Continental Army of an attack that is coming to your town in the next one or two days. Create your own Cipher Code book, like the Culper Spy Code.

See the link below for how to make one:

<https://ourjourneywestward.com/homemade-lewis-and-clark-journals/>

3. Complex Issues

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At various parts of the story, create a Hands-Head-Heart Chart.

List about the boys...

- Their actions in a column (hands)
- Their knowledge in a column (head)
- Their feelings in a column (heart)



4. Multiple Perspectives

A. Students can look at the story from the British point of view.

Create a diary entry from the point of view of the British Soldier.

What did he see? How did he feel? What are his regrets?

See Example: Journal of a British officer During the American Revolution

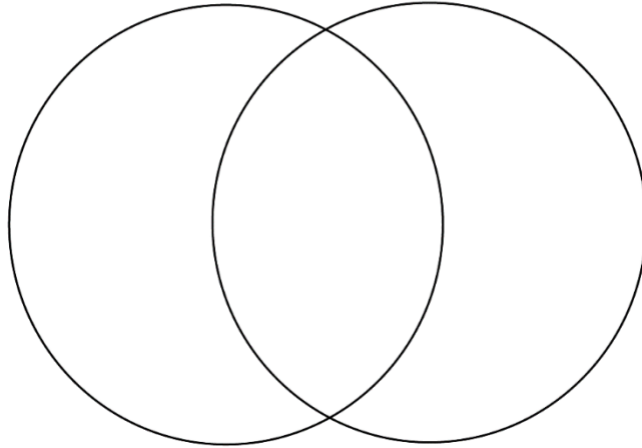
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1886571.pdf>

B. Ask students to research and think about Benedict Arnold and how such a great general in the American army can be so easily turned for the British. This is an opportunity to teach a short lesson in standing up for what you believe. Compare him to the many American Patriots who died for America's cause rather than seeking glory for themselves.

5. Put students back in history. No one is all good or bad.

Venn Diagram for the twins and the British soldiers. Give significant similarities. Surprisingly, there are details in common!

Venn Diagram



6. Art Lessons

- A. Draw a poster depicting the Great Chain at West Point communicating its mission.
- B. Construct a chain in a pan of water and lay the links over small pieces of wood.
- C. Draw a map of the journey to transport the chain from Warwick to West Point (30 miles over hills and mountains).

Student Writing Prompts



1. Write a headline for a colonial newspaper about the Great Chain at West Point, a Twitter post of 25 words or 144 characters from John Clark about his experience, or a diary entry from a Continental Army soldier stationed at West Point about the Great Chain.
2. Analyze Ambrose Clark's decision to leave the fort and find the Hessian chaplain, Matthias, to give him his book back. Do you think it was best for the situation? What would you have done in that same time period? Create an alternate solution and hypothesize the outcomes—short-term and long-term for the twins.
3. Write a letter to John and Ambrose Clark that agrees or disagrees with one of their decisions (like defending the Great Chain at West Point, trying to rescue a brother or becoming a Dragoon soldier versus going to college).
4. With partners, create a cost-benefit analysis for one of either John or Ambrose Clark's decisions. Itemize the list with costs or benefits to help evaluate the decisions made. Individually, write an essay response with several reasons why you agree or disagree with a decision. Once completed, create a poster that would persuade John or Ambrose Clark to agree with you.
5. Create an alternative ending to the story using proper historical themes of time and place.
5. Create a children's picture book of *Links to Liberty*. Choose a few important events to illustrate their exciting journey. Make sure the pictures use at least half a page and the content is age appropriate for grades 3 to 5.

Classroom Discussion Questions



Story-focused:

1. If you were either John or Ambrose, would you have questioned Sophie about the people she and her family knew who could be enemies of the colonies? Why or why not would that be uncomfortable for you?
2. On page 141, in the scene where Peleg Ransom is dying, he said, “Live... a life... worth dying for.” What do you think he meant by that? Explain your thinking.
3. In the story, on page 37 (and in real life), Major Benjamin Tallmadge said, “*The road we are embarking upon is treacherous, but we will be on it together, united. And we know what we’re fighting for. A world where we can all live without fear of a capricious king. A world where freedom is not simply a word, but as essential to our everyday lives as the air we breathe.*” Why is freedom not free?
4. Define bravery. When did Ambrose display bravery? When did John show he was brave? When have you displayed bravery in your life?
5. In the story, Ambrose endured pain and didn’t give the enemy information. What would you be willing to suffer for?
6. Define trust. What did Major Tallmadge learn about trust by the end of the story?
7. In the story, John saw bad things that happened turn into positive things. When have you seen something bad work out to become something good in your life?
8. Why do you think the authors titled the book, “Links to Liberty”? Explain why you agree or suggest a different title.

Period-focused:

1. Why did the colonists call themselves Patriots?
2. Why did the Americans invent the Great Chain at West Point?
3. Why was the Great Chain impressive for its time?
4. Why was the Great Chain at West Point important to the Continentals?
5. Why are spies used by governments?

Personal Reflections:

1. Have you ever invented something? What prompted the idea? How did it make you feel?
2. Would you have fought to protect the Great Chain? Why or why not?
3. Why did people at this time risk their lives for liberty and the pursuit of happiness?
4. How has your life been impacted by the outcome of the American Revolution and other peoples’ sacrifices?
5. Why did enslaved persons support the Patriots in the Revolutionary War?

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6. Ambrose decided to become a Dragoon and fight for liberty. John chose to attend Yale and pursue a different career. What are your plans for your future?



Primary Sources



General George Washington Letter on the Importance of the Hudson River

Dated 2 December 1777 to Militia General Israel Putnam:

Dear Sir:

The importance of the Hudson River in the present contest, and the necessity of defending it, are subjects which have been so frequently and fully discussed, and are so well understood, that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon them. These facts appear when it is considered that it runs through a whole State; that it is the only passage by which the enemy from New York, or any part of our coast, can ever hope to co-operate with an army from Canada; that the possession of it is indispensably essential to preserve the communication between the Eastern, Middle, and Southern States; and further, that upon its security, in a great measure, depend our chief supplies of flour for the subsistence of our forces...

I am dear Sir, &c...



Notable portions of a letter from Lieutenant Reynolds, Aide to Colonel Timothy Pickering, The Adjutant General, U.S. Army, West Point, to his wife, about General Washington and the removal of the Great Chain:

November 30, 1779

My Dearest Rebecca:

... Yesterday, November 29, 1779 was a very special day here at our Fortress at West Point. General Washington had his key leaders to a conference meeting. ... So many famous people have come to West Point, literally putting their lives on the line for freedom and independence for our cause. General Von Steuben from Prussia, The Marquis de Lafayette of France, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton, Aide-De-Camp, to General Washington, Engineers Colonel Kosciuszko and Captain Machin, and the Army's current Adjutant Generals Colonel Pickering and Colonel Scammell were all in attendance with an even larger contingent of the Army and its leaders. ...

General Washington has brought his staff here to oversee the specific timing and trials of bringing in the great chain across the Hudson, put in place by Colonel Pickering and his Soldiers over the past two years. "Washington's Watch Chain", as the newspapers in New York, have dubbed it, is the great chain across the Hudson, which has now been in place almost two years and seems to be doing its intended purpose of keeping the British Navy in New York. Our Gun Batteries overlook the chain and river and are ready to attack any British ship trying to navigate the Hudson north to Canada. Colonel

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Pickering continues to maintain contact with the Sterling Foundry Works to replace weak links in the chain, or to provide extra links as needed. The chain came out of the river yesterday and it was quite an operation to behold. General Washington took his entire staff down to River Bank to the chain emplacement and oversaw the removal of the chain personally.



www.KnoxPress.com

It was quite a spectacle to see as the entire staff, General Washington on his great horse, Nelson, overseeing all the Soldiers and officers conducting the boat operation to retrieve the chain before the river would freeze over. ... Boats were used to maneuver the barges and rafts toward shore where the oxen could pull the great chain up on the bank of the river. It took the entire afternoon and evening by torchlight to get the chain onto the shore and it was none too soon as the river had ice floating in it as we finished up last night.

I will never forget seeing General Washington riding back and forth on that great horse talking to every Soldier, talking with the head of his honor guard and with his guests. General Washington is always at his best when riding. He becomes more animated and actually talks to almost everyone. ... General Von Steuben and The Marquis de Lafayette both commented to Colonel Pickering that General Washington is the right man at the right time for the American Army, as he is as noble as any aristocrat on horseback yet is truly an American Patriot in demeanor and leadership. ...

I remain your Loving and Humble Husband,

Lieutenant JR Reynolds.

About the Storytellers

The Skeads are a father-son writing team and members of Sons of the American Revolution. Their ancestor, Lambertson Clark, one of the main characters in the story, served in the Revolutionary War as a member of the Connecticut Militia and the Continental Army. The tales in the American Revolutionary War Adventures series were crafted to inspire readers to do great things, nurture patriotism, and celebrate the courage and creativity of colonial patriots and General George Washington. Discover more at www.robertskead.com.

Note to Teachers

It is the role of the Past to teach the Future. Without that aid the Future continually stumbles never understanding that it has all been done before. With the aid of the pen of Robert J. Skead and his father, our past, seen through the eyes of his heroes the Clark twins, teaches a great deal about courage, patriotism, and right and wrong during the trying times of the American Revolution. Books such as *Links to Liberty*, the exciting story of the great West Point Chain, ought to be read by all young Americans. The future of this nation, and to a great extent, the future of the world, will be in their hands. They will need the Past as a guide.

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- Hugh T. Harrington, Editor Emeritus, *Journal of the American Revolution*



Scholastic's 7 Reasons to Use Historical Fiction in the Classroom

1. It piques kids' curiosity.
2. It levels the playing field of prior knowledge.
3. It hammers home everyday details.
4. It puts people back into history. No one in history is all good or all bad.
5. It presents the complexity of issues.
6. It promotes multiple perspectives.
7. It connects social studies learning to the rest of our school day.

Additional Resources:

- [George Washington's Character Certificate](#)
- [Continental Army Oath of Allegiance](#)
- [TeachingHistory.org](#)
- [Why Historical Fiction Belongs in the Classroom](#)
- [Teaching Historical Fiction: Using Time Periods to Support Understanding, Grades 3–8](#)
- [Washington's Letters](#)
- [Museum of the American Revolution](#)