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<th>The Battle of Yorktown: Breaking the British Empire’s Invincibility</th>
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The Battle of Yorktown
Breaking the British Empire's Invincibility

BATTLE EXHIBIT

THESIS

By 1781, the colonies in America were becoming restless, wanting to break free from the British Empire's control. The British, however, still believed they could conquer the colonies. The Battle of Yorktown was a turning point in the war, and it marked the end of the British Empire's invincibility.

BATTERED ENEMIES

FRENCH ALLIANCE

CEREAL KACKUS

BOMBARDMENT BEGIN

IMPACT

CONCLUSION
By 1781, the Revolutionary War was at its peak. The rebellious American colonists, called Patriots, were fighting for independence against the mighty British Empire. In September, they joined forces with the French, attempting a siege on the British occupied Yorktown. Due to strong leadership and French military support, the Patriots broke the barrier of British invincibility with a decisive victory, changing the course of history and inspiring other colonies worldwide to seek independence.
Leading up to the Revolutionary War, British presence spanned the globe. Its military strength was unmatched and considered invincible. To fund Britain’s dominance after the French and Indian War (1763), they raised taxes on their colonies through measures like the Stamp Act and Sugar Act. This taxation without representation led to a Patriot revolution.

“But where, says some, is the King of America? I’ll tell you. Friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Britain.”

-Thomas Paine
Common Sense, 1776

“The Sugar Act was the first of several laws creating taxes and controlling the colonies’ trade. Many colonists, calling themselves patriots, protested the new laws.”

-Sabrina Crewe,
Author
The Battle of Yorktown

“This vast empire, on which the sun never sets.”

-Earl George Macartney
Envoy and Chief Secretary for Ireland
1773
After the French and Indian War, France was an unlikely Patriot ally. Under ambassador Benjamin Franklin’s leadership, the Patriots appealed to French fears of losing their colonies to Britain and secured their assistance with the signing of the Treaty of Alliance (1778).

“Americans could not have succeeded in striking the scale of the defeat on the British Army at Yorktown without the assistance of the French — who were now also at war against Britain. Spain supplied the French and French supplied the Americans.”

-Professor Bruce Dorsey
Early American History
Swarthmore College

“There are two points at which an offensive can be made against the enemy: Chesapeake and New York. The southwesterly winds and the state of defense in Virginia will probably make you prefer the Chesapeake Bay, and it will be there where we think you may be able to render the greatest service.”

-General Washington’s letter to General Rochambeau then translated to Admiral de Grasse
August 1781
CRUCIAL BLOCKADE

In 1781 General Washington made a critical change in battle plans. He directed the French navy to move from the West Indies to Chesapeake Bay and block incoming British ships. On August 29, French Admiral de Grasse’s navy arrived before British reinforcements. The battle began on September 5, involving 28 French and 19 British warships. Both sides lost ships but the French dominated, preventing a British landing.

“Without a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive. And with it, everything honorable and glorious.”
- General Washington’s Letter to General Lafayette
September 15, 1781

“Washington’s bold decision to move the Continental army down to the Chesapeake to cooperate with French forces and his superb organization of the march… and direction of the artillery that battered the British into surrender.”
- Professor Richard Johnson
Early American History
University of Washington

“The two sides volleyed using hundreds of guns, with the French inflicting more damage than the English.”
- Russell Roberts, author
The Battle of Yorktown
Picture of Center Panel of Exhibit
The Siege of Yorktown began on September 28, 1781. French Generals Rochambeau and Lafayette and their 9,000 experienced soldiers joined Washington’s army outside of Yorktown. Following Washington’s strategy, they encircled and attacked the British using advanced French artillery and mortars.

“Although mortars were indirect firing weapons they could be aimed with deadly accuracy.”
-Christopher Forest, author
_The Biggest Battles of the Revolutionary War_

“[Fire on] that house. It is the best one in town. There you will be almost certain to find Lord Cornwallis and the British headquarters. Fire upon it, my dear marquis, and never spare a particle of my property so long as it affords comfort or shelter to the enemies of my country.”
-General Thomas Nelson to General Lafayette
October 10, 1781
A BREAKTHROUGH

On October 14, 400 French and 400 Patriot soldiers, led by Commander Alexander Hamilton, captured British Redoubts #9 and #10 (Cornwallis’s outer fortifications) in bayonet battles. Hamilton’s daring leadership gave the patriots the advantage, securing them closer positions to fire cannons directly into the British encampment, which left Yorktown in a state of destruction.

“That night Cornwallis tried to escape with his troops across the river to nearby Gloucester— one of his officers called the attempt “a last resort” — but a sudden storm spoiled the attempt.”

-Russell Roberts, author
The Battle of Yorktown

“The Patriots held their ground, Cornwallis couldn’t escape.”

-Christopher Forest, author
The Biggest Battles of the Revolutionary War
NO-SHOW CORNWALLIS

Just five days later, reeling from the bombardment, Britain raised its white flag, surrendering their troops. General Cornwallis never showed at the formal surrender, claiming he was sick.

“I have the honor to inform Congress, that a reduction of the British Army under the command of Lord Cornwallis, is most happily effected.”

- General Washington’s letter to Congress
  October 16, 1781

“I propose a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours, and that two officers may be appointed by each side to meet at Mr. Moore’s house to settle terms for the surrender of the posts of York and Gloucester.

I have the honour to be
your most obedient and
most humble Servant
Cornwallis”

- General Cornwallis’s letter to General Washington
  October 14, 1781

*Americans= Patriot/French
After prolonged negotiations, the Treaty of Paris (1783) was signed, officially ending the Revolutionary War. With the loss of King George's crown jewel, Britain didn’t just lose their chance to retain their New World colonies, they fell into chaos. Prime Minister North resigned, taxes were raised significantly to pay off £250 million in war debt, and Britain's reputation for invincibility was destroyed by losing to a rag-tag army of “insignificant provincials” as called by King George.  

“Oh, God! It's all over.”
-Lord Frederick North  
Prime Minister of England  
November 1783

“Humanity has won its battle. Liberty now has a country.”
-General Lafayette’s letter to General Rochambeau  
November 28, 1783

“His Britannic Majesty acknowledges the United States...to be free sovereign and independent states.”
-Treaty of Paris  
September 3, 1783

CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

The defeat of the invincible British Empire profoundly changed the future of colonialism by demonstrating that military supremacy was a barrier that could be broken. The Yorktown victory empowered the oppressed to fight their oppressor and inspired the colonized to seek their own independence including Nova Scotia and Mexico and foreshadowed revolutions in France and Spain.

“The American Revolution inspired and provoked revolutions and independence movements throughout the globe, both in the decades right after the American Revolution but well into the 20th century.”

-Professor Bruce Dorsey
Early American History
Swarthmore College

“The Latin American independence movements in Mexico and elsewhere in the Americas were directly inspired by the American example.”

-Professor Bruce Dorsey
Early American History
Swarthmore College

“The US revolution inspired others. Some thought it inspired the French Revolution, which is why Lafayette sent the key to the Bastille to George Washington.”

-Professor Gordon S. Wood
Early American History
Brown University Emeritus
Pulitzer Prize Winner

“I would say that the Americans were going to eventually win their independence whether it took a seven-year-long war or a thirty year war, just as Vietnam was ultimately going to win its independence and unity regardless of how powerful the world's greatest military was at that moment.”

-Professor Bruce Dorsey
Early American History
Swarthmore College

“The Latin American independence movements in Mexico and elsewhere in the Americas were directly inspired by the American example.”

-Professor Gordon S. Wood
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Brown University Emeritus
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Picture & Text on Table in Front of Exhibit
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The Battle of Yorktown

Breaking the British Empire's Invincibility

Cooper Brix

Junior Division

Individual Exhibit

Composed Words: 500

Process Paper: 500
Process Paper

In 5th Grade I had an outstanding teacher named Mr. Booth who inspired me to love history, specifically the American Revolution. He asked my class to make a promise, to learn from him and teach others. I decided to create a National History Day project to fulfill that promise. When I was thinking of a topic, I immediately thought of the Battle of Yorktown. This was the last major battle of the Revolution. I am fascinated by the winning strategy of the Patriot and French leaders and the legacy that followed the victory.

I started looking for sources at my school and local libraries. As I studied, I needed additional Primary and Secondary sources. At the University of Washington's Suzzallo and Odegaard libraries, I learned how to access the Library of Congress, journals by George Washington and entire books with detailed battle maps. In those books, I found interesting quotes and pictures. When I started writing my content, I wanted to get the point of view from current professors who are experts on the American Revolution. To my surprise, they quickly responded to my emails.

I have always been artistic and creative, so I wanted to create an exhibit. I had so many ideas and thoughts about how to achieve my desired look. I decided to make the background look like the wood on the side of a battleship to symbolize the importance of the navy's role in the outcome of the battle. The diorama gives an immersive view of the battlefield which includes George Washington, soldiers, artillery and redoubt defenses. For my header board, I used a
printing press font called, "Benjamin Franklin." so it would look like a newspaper headline from that period. I learned how to use Adobe Photoshop and "mask" the wood grain onto the letters to match the board and then printed it at a print shop. I used muted red and blues and off-white paper to convey an aged appearance. I decided to include a high quality video from George Washington’s Mount Vernon about the importance of capturing Redoubts #9 and #10 and why that was so beneficial to the outcome.

My topic relates to the theme, Breaking Barriers, because their defeat at Yorktown broke the British Empire's reputation of invincibility. With the help of influential leaders such as General George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, the Patriots were able to win the battle and end the long-running American Revolution. This victory motivated colonies from around the world to seek their own independence, such as Mexico and Nova Scotia. It also was an example for other colonizers to respect and not impose taxes on their colonies. Some historians say that the victory of America's Revolution inspired revolutions in other countries, such as France and Spain. The reason I wanted to do this project is that I think it is essential for people to know history, especially the history of the United States. I hope that people see my project, learn from it, and teach others.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

*Alexander Hamilton. 1805. Library Of Congress,*


This Primary source is a portrait of Alexander Hamilton done by John Trumbull, who actually served with Hamilton during the Battle of Yorktown. This source is credible because it's from the Library of Congress, the official research library for the United States Congress. I used this portrait to show what Hamilton looked like and to visually represent his bold leadership in determining the outcome of the battle.


https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-02-02-0078

This Primary source is used to show the audience what the Stamp Act looked like. This is from the National Archives. This source is credible because it is an official agency of the United States Government. This is an image of a taxation stamp used by the British during the Stamp Act which would have been placed on goods such as tea or paper.

This Primary source is a set of scans from the pamphlet, “Common Sense.” This was originally published without an author. However, when the book became popular, Thomas Paine announced he wrote it. This source is credible because it's from the Library of Congress, the official library of the United States Congress. I used quotes and the cover from this pamphlet to support my argument that the British were arrogant and that the colonies wanted independence from Britain.


This Primary source is a portrait of General George Washington painted by Charles Pealpoke in 1795. This source is credible because it is from the Met Museum, a renown art museum. This painting was used to show what George Washington, the leader of the Revolutionary War, looked like.


This Primary source is a scan of a newspaper from the *Pennsylvania Packet*. This source is credible because it is from the Library of Congress, the official library of the United States Congress. This scan contains letters from George Washington and Marquis de Lafayette. I used quotes from the newspaper article to show how George Washington requested French aid to block incoming reinforcements.

This Primary source is a painting of King George III. This source is credible because it's from the British Library, the national library of the United Kingdom and the largest library in the world by the number of items catalogued. I used this picture to show what King George III looked like and to demonstrate his arrogance.


This Secondary source is a compilation of diaries from the Revolutionary War. This source was used to provide a different perspective on the Battle of Yorktown. In this book, I found a quote from a German Hessian soldier about the heavy enemy bombardment (the Patriots/French) and how they were forced to relocate their camp.


This Primary source is a painting done by Benjamin West of the Signing of the Treaty of Paris. This source is credible because it's from the Library of Congress, the official research library for the United States Congress. I used this painting to show who came to the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The British never officially showed up and, consequently, their half of the painting was left incomplete.

This Primary source is a scan of the original Treaty of Alliance with France in 1778. This source is credible because it's from the National Archives, an official agency of the United States Government. I used this picture to represent the importance of the French's cooperation and of how important Benjamin Franklin was in making it happen.


This Primary source is a scan of the original Treaty of Paris from 1783. This source is credible because it's from the National Archives, an official agency of the United States government. This picture was used to show what the treaty looked like and who signed it.


This Secondary source is a compilation of letters from George Washington during the American Revolution by Saxe Commins. I found this book at the University of Washington's Suzzallo library. I used this book to find quotes from George Washington and the people he wrote to.


**Secondary Sources**

"Battle of Yorktown." *BattleField Trust*,


**Infographic.**

This Secondary source is a digital chart of the stats for the Battle of Yorktown. This source is credible because it is from American Battlefield Trust, a charitable organization whose primary focus is about preservation of battlefields and the historical education of youth. This image was used to reveal how much people sacrificed for the war effort by providing the numbers of casualties and losses on both sides.

**Boatner III, Mark M. Encyclopedia of the American Revolution. New York, DAVID McKAY COMPANY, 1966.**

In this Secondary source I found maps which I used to understand what the battlefield looked like. This author is credible because he is an American soldier, historian, and author and he served in World War II and the Korean War. He taught Military history at West Point and has written several books. I also used this book to help draw the background of my diorama.
Breville, Onfroy De. *The French storming redoubt #9 during the Siege of Yorktown*. 1899.


This Secondary source was painted by Onfroy de Breville in 1899 and depicts the French storming redoubt #9 during the Battle of Yorktown. This source is credible because it is from the Library of Congress, the official research for the United States Congress. I used this picture to demonstrate how the French contributed to the Battle of Yorktown, specifically what they did during the storming of redoubt #9 and #10.


This Secondary source provided a variety of facts that other books did not. The book is credible because it was written by American History professors at Brown University. This book provides background information for the Battle of Yorktown. For example, this book discussed how George Washington set up a fake camp outside of New York and wrote a letter claiming that he was going to attack New York.


This Secondary source is a book called, *The World Turned Upside Down: George Washington and the Battle of Yorktown*, by Richard Ferrie. This author is an early Revolution historian who has written many books relating to George Washington's efforts in the American Revolution and his presidency. I used this book to find quotes and then I looked for the original document on The Library of Congress page.
This Secondary source is an article from the Subscription database, Encyclopedia Britannica. This source is credible because it is an encyclopedia that has been edited by multiple authors. I used this source to learn about the French Revolution and to locate high quality images of the Revolution, such as the storming of Bastille and also the key to Bastille.


This Secondary source is a book entitled, *The Battle of Yorktown,* written by Scott Ingram. This source is credible because the author won a NAACP Image Award For Outstanding Literary Work for this book. I used this book to find images and also more information about how the French helped during the Battle.

Johnson, Richard R. E-mail interview. Conducted by Cooper Brix, 28 Feb. 2020.

This Secondary source is an email interview with Professor Richard R. Johnson from the University of Washington. He is an historian of early America and the early modern Atlantic world, who specializes in the American Revolution. I reached out to him to get an additional scholarly viewpoint regarding the importance of the Battle of Yorktown, its significance and legacy. He emailed me back and I quoted him. It was interesting to note that he said the Patriots would not have won without the help of the French.
http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#c4194082-2793-481e-a3d5-30e3f5942723

This secondary source is a portrait of General Marquis de Lafayette. It was painted by Joseph-Désiré Court in 1834. This is a credible source because it is from The Palace of Versailles was the principal royal residence of France from 1682, under Louis XIV, until the start of the French Revolution in 1789. This picture to show my audience the valuable contribution of the French leadership.

The Key to Bastille. George Washington’s Mount Vernon,
https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/bastille-key/

This secondary source is a high quality image of the Key to Bastille. This source is credible because it comes from the Mount Vernon Library at the site of George Washington's home. The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association preserves and manages the Mount Vernon Estate and Library collections. This source was used to show the inspiration that George Washington’s leadership and the success of the American Revolution provided the French Revolutionary movement. The Bastille’s main prison key, a symbol of royal despotism, was given to French leader Lafayette after it was stormed in July 1789. In a symbol of gratitude, Lafayette sent the key to George Washington in 1790, where it still remains.
King, Sidney E. *The Siege at Night*. National Parks Service, Collections

This Secondary source is a painting depicting the construction of fortifications by American and French troops done under cover of darkness in order to escape detection by British troops. This source is credible because the National Park Service is an agency of the United States government that manages all national parks and national monuments. This represents the execution of a strategic plan and the Patriot’s dedicated work toward gaining their independence.


This Secondary source is a portrait of General Comte de Rochambeau; It was painted in 1834 by Charles Philippe Larivière. This is a credible source because it is from The Palace of Versailles was the principal royal residence of France from 1682, under Louis XIV, until the start of the French Revolution in 1789. The painter is actually a French soldier who was in the Battle of Yorktown, He served under General Lafayette from May to October 1781, during the Battle of Yorktown.
http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#c4113082-7696-481e-a3d5-20e3f5942723

This Secondary source is a portrait of French Admiral, Count de Grasse, which was painted by Jean Mauzaisse in 1843. This is a credible source because it is from The Palace of Versailles was the principal royal residence of France from 1682, under Louis XIV, until the start of the French Revolution in 1789. At the time, Jean Mauzaisse was the royal French painter. This painting was used to show the courageous leader of the French Naval force. This portrait shows his age and decorated uniform indicating his experience leading the navy.


This Secondary source was useful in providing a map and timeline of the Yorktown campaign. The graphics give my reader an understanding of what the battle plan looked like. Additionally, the timeline helps the reader follow the progression of the battle. This source is credible because it comes from the Mount Vernon Library at the site of George Washington's home. The Mount Vernon Library stores the publications and writing of George Washington. This specific graphic was created by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association for in person and online visitors of George Washington’s Mount Vernon.

This Secondary source is a book written by Russell Roberts. The author is an early American and American Revolution historian who specializes in teaching history to youth. I used this book to gain a broad understanding of the battle and also find primary sources, including sources in the National Archives and the Library of Congress. I also found out more about George Washington leadership and others during the battle.

"Siege of Yorktown." *National Park Service,*

This Secondary source is a resource called the National Park Service. This source is credible because it's an agency of the United States government that manages all national parks and national monuments. I used this source to find more pictures and paintings of the time during the battle and shortly after the Battle of Yorktown.


This Primary source was painted by John Trumbull in 1820. This source is credible because it's from the Library of Congress, the official research library for the United States Congress. I used this image to show what Cornwallis’s surrender would have looked like had he shown up.

This Secondary source is an email interview with Professor Gordan S. Wood. He is an American historian and a professor at Brown University. He is also recipient of the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for one of his books. I wanted to reach out to him because I wanted to get an additional point of view about the Battle. When he emailed back, I was able to quote him and found his information very interesting.


This secondary source was useful in providing a map and timeline of the Yorktown campaign. These graphics give my reader an understanding of what the battle plan looked like. Additionally, the timeline helps the reader follow the progression of the battle. This source is credible because it comes from the Mount Vernon Library at the site of George Washington's home. The Mount Vernon Library stores the publications and writing of George Washington. These graphics were created by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association for in person and online visitors of The George Washington’s Mount Vernon.
This secondary source is an in-depth video recount of the British and French attack on British Redoubts #9 and #10 that depicts the execution of a critical part of General Washington's plan. I know this source is credible because it comes from George Washington's Mount Vernon Which is run by The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. The library in this museum stores the publications and writing of George Washington. This video is an important piece of my exhibit because it shows the critical moment in the battle where the Patriots and French overpower the British forces. Overtaking the redoubts helped them win the battle and, ultimately, the American Revolutionary War.