

Winter at Valley Forge Reading Comprehension - Lexile 900

Name _____

During the 1700s and 1800s, fighting in wars usually stopped during the winter, and armies set up camps. In 1777, when winter came to Pennsylvania, General George Washington chose Valley Forge, about 18 miles west of Philadelphia, as the place for the Continental Army to camp. The location was far enough from the British in Philadelphia to avoid surprise attacks, and its position between hills and the Schuylkill River made it easy to defend.

However, the Continental Army was in bad shape. Of the 12,000 soldiers, many didn't have enough supplies or clothes to survive the winter, and many were starving. At Valley Forge, they built defense lines and over 1,000 small huts to protect them from the harsh weather. The rain and melting snow made it hard to stay dry, and disease spread quickly. The only regular food they got was a mix of flour and water called "firecake," and sometimes they got meat and bread. Many soldiers had worn-out clothes and no blankets, and many didn't have shoes. Wounded soldiers often died from the cold. The crowded and unsanitary conditions caused diseases like typhoid and pneumonia, and over 2,000 soldiers died from sickness.

On February 23, 1778, former German General Baron von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge to train the soldiers. He taught them how to march in formation, fire guns quickly, use bayonets, and be better soldiers. Even though von Steuben didn't speak much English, he created a training guide in French, which was translated into English. Unlike many American generals, he worked closely with the soldiers, which made them like him. His presence helped raise the soldiers' spirits during the tough winter and made the army more skilled and better prepared to fight the British.

On June 19, 1778, the Continental Army left Valley Forge to follow the British as they moved north toward New York.

1. Why did General George Washington choose Valley Forge for the Continental Army's winter camp in 1777?

- A) It was close to the British army in Philadelphia for easy attacks.
- B) Its location was easily defensible and far enough from the British to avoid surprise attacks.
- C) The weather conditions there were ideal for training soldiers.
- D) It was a large, comfortable area with many resources for the soldiers.

2. What were the main problems the army faced during the winter at Valley Forge?

- A) They had no food, and there was plenty of shelter.
- B) They lacked supplies, clothing, and food, and many soldiers were sick or starving.
- C) They were under constant attack by the British.
- D) They were too comfortable and lacked motivation to fight.

3. What was "firecake" and why was it significant for the soldiers at Valley Forge?

- A) It was a type of bread made with flour and water, the only reliable food the soldiers received.
- B) It was a special type of meat given to the soldiers for extra nutrition.
- C) It was a treat that boosted morale during the harsh winter.
- D) It was a tool used for building the soldiers' huts.

4. How did Baron von Steuben help the Continental Army at Valley Forge?

- A) He helped build shelters and find food for the soldiers.
- B) He trained the soldiers in military tactics, including how to march in formation and use weapons effectively.
- C) He translated messages from the British army.
- D) He led surprise attacks on the British forces around Philadelphia.

5. What happened after the Continental Army left Valley Forge in June 1778?

- A) They returned to Philadelphia to rest and regroup.
- B) They moved north to pursue the British army, who were heading toward New York.
- C) They took a break for the summer and planned their next attack.
- D) They retreated to the countryside to avoid further battles.

Answers:

- 1.) B
- 2.) B
- 3.) A
- 4.) B
- 5.) B