



Day 30 American Revolution

The Treaty of Alliance with France

The Treaty of Alliance (1778): Diplomacy, Rivalry, and a Global War

Time: 60–70 minutes

Grade Range: Upper elementary–middle school

Unit: American Revolution / Turning Points

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students examine the Treaty of Alliance of 1778 as a major turning point in the American Revolution. Using a teacher-led PowerPoint as the anchor, students explore how long-standing rivalry between England and France, combined with American diplomacy, transformed a colonial rebellion into a global war. Students then apply their learning through article analysis, a rivalry-focused scavenger hunt, and an examination of Benjamin Franklin's influence in France.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain why France chose to support the American colonies
 - Describe the main terms of the Treaty of Alliance
 - Analyze how the treaty shifted the balance of power in the war
 - Understand the importance of diplomacy and international rivalries
 - Evaluate Benjamin Franklin's role in securing French support
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Materials

- PowerPoint: **Treaty of Alliance (1778)** (anchor)
 - Article: **Treaty of Alliance**
 - **England vs. France Rivalry** online or printable scavenger hunt
 - Article: **Benjamin Franklin in France**
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Optional Hook / Introduction (5–10 minutes)

Benjamin Franklin in France

Begin the lesson by briefly discussing Benjamin Franklin's role in France.

Teacher Prompt:

- Why might a foreign country help a small group of colonies fight the strongest empire in the world?

Explain that Franklin's intelligence, charm, and reputation as a scientist made him extremely popular in France. Tell students that by the end of the lesson, they will understand **why France decided to risk war with Britain**.

Anchor Activity

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/revwar/alliance.pptx>

Treaty of Alliance PowerPoint (30–35 minutes)

Below is a **slide-by-slide teacher script** designed to *greatly elaborate* on each slide.

Slide 1 – The Treaty of Alliance (1778)

Teacher Script:

"The Treaty of Alliance was one of the most important agreements in American history. Without it, the United States may never have won independence. This treaty officially connected the American Revolution to a much larger international conflict."

Slide 2 – What Was the Treaty of Alliance?

Teacher Script:

“This treaty was a formal military alliance between the United States and France, signed in 1778. For the first time, the young United States was recognized as a legitimate nation by a major world power.”

Slide 3 – Why France Was Interested

Teacher Script:

“France did not help the Americans simply out of kindness. France and Britain had been rivals for centuries. Supporting the American colonies gave France a chance to weaken its greatest enemy.”

Slide 4 – Secret Negotiations

Teacher Script:

“Negotiations between France and the Americans were secret at first. France did not want to provoke Britain until it was sure the Americans had a real chance to win.”

Slide 5 – American Diplomacy

Teacher Script:

“The Americans desperately needed help. They lacked money, supplies, ships, and trained soldiers. Diplomacy—talking instead of fighting—became just as important as battles.”

Slide 6 – Signing the Treaty

Teacher Script:

“When the treaty was signed on February 6, 1778, it officially brought France into the war. Britain now faced a powerful enemy with one of the strongest navies in the world.”

Slide 7 – Military Assistance

Teacher Script:

“France sent soldiers, ships, weapons, and experienced officers. French naval power would later play a decisive role in cutting off British escape routes.”

Slide 8 – Financial Support

Teacher Script:

“Wars are expensive. French loans and money helped pay soldiers, buy supplies, and keep the Continental Army alive.”

Slide 9 – Defensive Alliance

Teacher Script:

“This treaty promised that each country would defend the other if Britain attacked. France was risking a massive war—but believed it was worth the risk.”

Slide 10 – Impact on the Revolutionary War

Teacher Script:

“The treaty changed everything. It boosted American morale and convinced many colonists that independence was truly possible.”

Slide 11 – Road to Yorktown

Teacher Script:

“French ships helped trap British forces at Yorktown in 1781. Without the French navy, this victory likely would not have happened.”

Slide 12 – Global Consequences

Teacher Script:

“Once France entered the war, fighting spread beyond America. Britain now had to defend its empire around the world.”

Slide 13 – Spain Enters the War

Teacher Script:

“Spain joined the conflict in 1779, further stretching British resources. The war had become global.”

Slide 14 – A Global Conflict

Teacher Script:

“The American Revolution was no longer just about colonies and independence—it was about power, empire, and global politics.”

Slide 15 – Why the Treaty Matters

Teacher Script:

“The Treaty of Alliance proved that diplomacy can change history. It helped secure American independence and shaped how the United States would interact with the world.”

Guided Reading & Scavenger Hunt (15–20 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/effects-of-the-revolutionary-war/treaty-of-alliance>

Students now:

1. Read the **Treaty of Alliance** article
2. Complete the **England vs. France Rivalry** scavenger hunt

Focus Questions:

- Why were England and France rivals?
 - How did this rivalry help the Americans?
 - What risks did France take?
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Extension / Reflection: Benjamin Franklin in France (10–15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/effects-of-the-revolutionary-war/franklin-in-france>

Students read the article on **Benjamin Franklin in France**.

Discussion Prompts:

- Why was Franklin effective as a diplomat?
- How did his reputation help the American cause?

- Could the treaty have happened without him?
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Closure (5 minutes)

Return to the central idea:

- How did a treaty change the course of the war?
- Why was foreign support more important than any single battle?

Emphasize that **the American Revolution was won not only on battlefields, but at negotiating tables.**