



Day 26-27 American Revolution

The Saratoga Campaign

The Saratoga Campaign: The Turning Point of the American Revolution

Time: Two class periods (60–70 minutes each)

Grade Range: Upper elementary–middle school

Unit: American Revolution

Lesson Overview

In this two-day lesson, students analyze the Saratoga Campaign as the major turning point of the American Revolution. Using a teacher-led PowerPoint as the anchor, students examine British strategy, American resistance, and leadership decisions that led to Burgoyne's defeat. Students then deepen their understanding through article reading, an interactive module with a scavenger hunt, optional battle case studies, and a reflective writing activity focused on the concept of a “turning point.”

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define and explain the concept of a historical turning point
- Describe the British three-pronged plan and why it failed
- Explain the events leading to the Battle of Saratoga
- Analyze why Saratoga changed the direction of the war
- Apply the idea of a turning point to personal or literary experiences

Materials

- PowerPoint: **Saratoga Campaign (1777)** (anchor)
- Article: **Battle of Saratoga**
- Interactive module: **The Three British Generals and Their Goals**
- Online or printable **scavenger hunt**
- Optional articles: **Battle of Germantown** and **Battle of Brandywine Creek**
- Writing prompt: “**Turning Point**”

DAY ONE

Opening Discussion: What Is a Turning Point? (10 minutes)

Begin with a whole-class discussion.

Teacher Prompts:

- What does the phrase *turning point* mean?
- Can you think of a moment that changed the direction of something important?
- Does a turning point always look important at the time it happens?

Guide students toward the idea that a turning point is **an event that changes momentum**, not just one that looks impressive. Explain that historians often describe the Battle of Saratoga as the turning point of the Revolutionary War.

Anchor Activity

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

Saratoga Campaign PowerPoint (30 minutes)

Use the presentation as the core instructional tool. Below is a **slide-by-slide teacher script**.

Slide 1 – The Saratoga Campaign (1777)

Teacher Script:

“Today we’re going to examine the Saratoga Campaign, an event historians often call the turning point of the American Revolution. It began as a British plan to end the war—and ended by changing its direction completely.”

Slide 2 – The British Three-Pronged Plan

Teacher Script:

“The British believed that if they could cut New England off from the rest of the colonies, the rebellion would collapse. Their plan focused on controlling the Hudson River corridor.”

Slide 3 – British Commanders

Teacher Script:

“Three British forces were supposed to meet in Albany: Burgoyne from Canada, St. Leger from the west, and Howe from New York City. Success depended on coordination.”

Slide 4 – Burgoyne Marches South

Teacher Script:

“General Burgoyne led about 8,000 British and German troops south from Canada. The journey was slow and difficult due to terrain and resistance.”

Slide 5 – Patriot Resistance

Teacher Script:

“Patriot forces slowed Burgoyne by cutting down trees, blocking roads, and forcing him to move slowly. His large baggage train made things even worse.”

Slide 6 – St. Leger’s Failure

Teacher Script:

“St. Leger’s advance from the west failed at Fort Stanwix. Patriot resistance and clever deception forced him to retreat, removing one third of the British plan.”

Slide 7 – Howe Changes the Plan

Teacher Script:

“Instead of marching north to Albany, General Howe decided to invade Philadelphia. This decision would prove disastrous for Burgoyne.”

Slide 8 – Brandywine and Germantown

Teacher Script:

“Howe defeated Washington at Brandywine and captured Philadelphia. Washington later attacked at Germantown but failed. Still, the Continental Army survived.”

Slide 9 – Howe in Philadelphia

Teacher Script:

“Howe stayed in Philadelphia for the winter instead of helping Burgoyne. This left Burgoyne isolated deep in enemy territory.”

Slide 10 – Burgoyne’s Supply Crisis

Teacher Script:

“Low on supplies, Burgoyne sent troops to capture an American supply base at Bennington. This decision weakened his army further.”

Slide 11 – Defeat at Bennington

Teacher Script:

“American forces defeated the British detachment at Bennington. Burgoyne lost men, supplies, and confidence.”

Slide 12 – Trapped at Saratoga

Teacher Script:

“Burgoyne retreated to Saratoga, where Patriot forces under Horatio Gates blocked his path south. He was now trapped.”

Slide 13 – Battles of Saratoga

Teacher Script:

“The fighting at Freeman’s Farm and Bemis Heights saw aggressive Patriot attacks, especially under Benedict Arnold’s leadership.”

Slide 14 – Burgoyne Surrenders**Teacher Script:**

“On October 17, 1777, Burgoyne surrendered his entire army. This was the largest British defeat of the war.”

Slide 15 – The Turning Point**Teacher Script:**

“Saratoga changed everything. It boosted Patriot morale and convinced France that the Americans could win the war.”

Day One Closure (5 minutes)

Ask:

- Which British mistake was the most important?
- Could Saratoga have happened if Howe had gone to Albany?

DAY TWO**Guided Reading & Interactive Exploration (25–30 minutes)**

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/battles-of-the-revolutionary-war/battle-of-saratoga>

Students:

1. Read the **Battle of Saratoga article**
2. Explore the **interactive module** explaining the journeys and goals of Burgoyne, Howe, and St. Leger
3. Complete the **online or printable scavenger hunt**

Focus Questions:

- What was each general's goal?
- Which failure mattered most?
- How did geography shape the outcome?

Optional Extension Readings (10–15 minutes)

Students may also read:

- [Battle of Brandywine Creek](#)
- [Battle of Germantown](#)

Students consider how these battles connect to Saratoga and why they did *not* represent turning points.

Writing Activity: *Turning Point* (20–25 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/revolutionary-war-writing-activities/turning-point>

Writing Prompt

A turning point is an event that changes the direction of something important. Historians call the Battle of Saratoga the turning point of the Revolutionary War because it shifted momentum to the Patriots and led to French support.

Student Task:

- Identify a turning point in your life **or** in the life of a literary character
- Describe what things were like *before* the turning point
- Explain what changed *after* and why it mattered

Encourage students to make clear before-and-after comparisons.

Sharing & Reflection (10 minutes)

Students may volunteer to share their writing. Encourage respectful listening and connections between personal turning points and historical ones.

Final Discussion: Why France Changed Everything (10 minutes)

Close with a discussion on implications.

Teacher Prompts:

- Why was French support so important?
- How did Saratoga turn a colonial rebellion into a global war?
- Could the Patriots have won without France?

Emphasize:

- French troops, ships, supplies, and money
- France's declaration of war on Britain
- Spain's later entry into the conflict

Lesson Takeaway

Reinforce that **Saratoga didn't just win a battle—it changed the future of the war**, proving that turning points often matter more than single victories.

Optional Reading Activities

- [Battle of Saratoga Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 850
- [Battle of Saratoga Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1200
- [Battle of Saratoga Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 850
- [Battle of Saratoga Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1200