

# The American Revolution

## Overview

How did this upstart nation best one of the world's most established empires? This activity explores the factors that made the American Revolution possible. This includes pressures from Napoleon, guerilla warfare, the American Indians, the Spanish, and the influence of distance. Students will divide into small groups of Patriots and British and, on a game board, will roll marbles at cardboard figures representing the other side. The first side to win a total of three battles, wins the American Revolution. Initially it looks like the British will win easily, but the game is rigged and as it progresses and outside influences come to bear, the scrappy Patriots prove to be more than the British bargained for.

The total class time to complete the activity should be about two, 50-minute periods. You will measure student learning through discussion and evaluation of game activities.



Surrender at Saratoga  
Source: *The Library of Congress*

## Objectives

- Students will work individually and cooperatively to accomplish goals. (NCSS)
- Students will understand the factors that contributed to the victory of the Patriots over the British in the American Revolution.

## Materials

- copies of reproducibles (pages 45–50) as described on page 40
- one large marble per group (4 to 6 groups)
- scissors
- tape
- crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- two or three pieces of 11" x 17" poster board or construction paper for the game boards
- five 9" x 12" envelopes to hold group packets

# The American Revolution (cont.)

## Preparation

Total preparation time should be around 10 minutes. Ask a parent to volunteer to help with the copying before you begin the activity.

1. Create a 9" x 12" envelope packet for each group in your class (groups of four or six). Each packet needs to contain the following:
  - *American Revolution Game Rules* (page 45)
  - *Materials Instruction Sheet* (page 46)
  - *British Soldier Template* (page 47) enough for five soldiers per student on each British team
  - *Patriot Soldier Template* (page 48) enough for three soldiers per student on each Patriot team
  - *Weapon Ramp Template* (page 49), copy on cardboard if possible
2. Cut 11" x 17" pieces of poster board or construction paper (one per group) for students to make their game boards.
3. Divide your class into groups of four or six. This will put an even number of British and Patriots in each group. If you have an odd number of students, one or more groups will have to have students play multiple roles.
4. Make an overhead transparency of the *Habits of Mind Discussion* (page 50) to use at the conclusion of the activity.

## Directions

1. Read the *Introduction Read-Aloud* (page 41) to the students. Follow the teacher notes within the introduction to get the class ready to begin the activity.
2. Once students have created their game materials, read the *Read-Aloud Directions* (page 42).
3. Then, read the "Before the Game" directions from the *Battle One Description: Long Island* (page 42). Pass out one marble to each group, and let students play to a conclusion according to the game rules.
4. Once all groups are done, chart how many British and how many Patriots won their small-group battles. The side with the most small-group wins is victorious in the overall battle. The British will likely win this first battle easily. Read the "After the Game" comments from the *Battle One Description: Long Island* (page 42).
5. Repeat the above technique with the *Battle Two Description: Princeton* (page 42), *Battle Three Description: Fort Edward* (page 43), and the rest of the battle descriptions until one side has won a total of four battles. The game is rigged such that the Patriots should win after 6–7 total battles.
6. Read the *Closure Read-Aloud* (page 44) to the students.
7. Clean up the game materials and finish with the *Habits of Mind Discussion* (page 50). Depending on the efficiency of your class, you may complete the entire game in one period, following with the discussion at the beginning of the next period. Or, you may need to continue the game itself into a second period, finishing with the discussion at the end of this period.

# The American Revolution *(cont.)*

## Things to Consider

1. As this is a game of chance and skill, there is a slight possibility that even though the game is heavily rigged, the British will, in fact, win. If this happens, you will want to discuss the overwhelming odds the Patriots faced and reinforce the role of luck in helping the Patriots triumph over the British. Help students see that this conflict could easily have ended with a Patriots loss. How would the world be different today?
2. Clean-up time and time to reset the activity are required at the end of the game period. Take this into account when scheduling, especially if you are a single-subject teacher, using the activity in back-to-back classes; you may need to run the activity on different days for different periods.

## Introduction Read-Aloud

“The British are coming! The British are coming!” Even though Paul Revere didn’t really say this, it sure is a catchy phrase.

In 1775, the world’s most powerful fighting force landed in New York to put down a rebellion of poorly equipped, underpaid, untrained Patriots. It looked like an easy task for the mighty British Empire, who intimidated the world with their tight-marching columns of trained soldiers, bright red uniforms, and rows of bayonets fixed on the ends of their weapons. To the British, this was a chance to teach the upstart Patriots a quick lesson before returning to business as usual with their many colonies.

To the Patriots it was a bit more.

We will be forming groups of British and Patriots and will be replaying some of the battles of the American Revolution. While we all know who won in real life, this one is up for grabs. It will take skill and a little bit of luck to triumph in this, the New World!

*Teacher note: Place students into groups of four or six. Within each group, have them divide in half into a British and a Patriot sub-group.*

Now we will create the three things each group needs to play the game: soldiers, a game board, and a weapon ramp. You have ten minutes to create these three things. All the directions you need are included on the activity sheets I am passing out.

*Teacher note: Pass out the envelopes with reproducibles that you prepared based on the directions on page 40. Also give each group a piece of 11" x 17" paper for the game board and allow ten minutes for completion.*

# The American Revolution *(cont.)*

## Read-Aloud Directions

Okay, now that we all have our game materials, it is time to play. Here are the rules:

1. In each group, you will be fighting a series of battles between the British and the Patriots. In each battle, the side with the most small-group wins will be victorious in the overall battle. The first side to win four battles wins the war.
2. Before each battle, I will read a short description that might change the rules slightly, so listen carefully. But generally, you will be lining up your paper figures and taking turns rolling a marble down the weapon ramp, trying to knock over the other side's soldiers. Once a side has knocked down all the opposing soldiers, the battle is over.
3. You will take turns rolling. You will get one roll per soldier you still have standing. For example, if three of your original British soldiers are still upright, you will get three rolls before it is the other team's turn.
4. Unless the battle description says otherwise, you need to roll at the other team's soldiers from behind the middle line, though you may move the weapon ramp anywhere you like behind the line.
5. Each British student will start with five soldiers, and each Patriot student will start with three soldiers. Once a soldier falls, you will remove him from the board.
6. You may not push the marble down the weapon ramp. You must set it at the top and then let it roll on its own. Please try to keep the marbles from hitting the floor.

## Battle One Description: Long Island

**Before the Game:** General Washington and his small group of Patriots meet Sir William Howe and the British army on Long Island. *Both the British and the Patriots need to position their people in the game area marked "A."*

**After the Game:** The Patriots are routed, but luckily General Washington retreats before losing his entire army. Aided by a thick fog, the Patriots retreat across the Delaware River and are pushed all the way to Pennsylvania where the British cease their chase due to the onset of winter.

## Battle Two Description: Princeton

**Before the Game:** Washington and the Patriots leave a few soldiers to keep their campfires burning and sneak into Princeton, New Jersey, catching the British off guard. *Each Patriot gets a free roll from the zone marked "D" before the game starts. Both sides start with troops in their areas marked "A."*

**After the Game:** Though not a huge victory, the Patriots show they can fight the British and win. The triumph in Princeton, New Jersey, wins many new recruits to the Patriot cause.

# The American Revolution *(cont.)*

## **Battle Three Description: Fort Edward**

**Before the Game:** British General John Burgoyne marches into Fort Edward, but where are the Patriots? They have fled the fort, but have left logs covering the road, making it difficult for the British to transport their heavy cannons and wagons. With the British stuck on the road, the Patriots shoot at them from the woods. *The Patriots may place two pencils anywhere they like on the game board, and may fire from the areas marked "E."*

**After the Game:** Fort Edward is a strong victory for the Patriots and demonstrates the effectiveness of guerilla warfare.

## **Battle Four Description: Cornwallis in the South**

**Before the Game:** A new general is in charge of the British army. Lord Charles Cornwallis sails south from New York into Georgia. The British depend on their superior cannon power. *The British may roll crumpled paper down the weapon ramp with their marbles. They may shoot from the area marked "C."*

**After the Game:** Cornwallis sweeps through Savannah, Georgia, Charleston, South Carolina, and Camden, South Carolina, handing the Patriots devastating losses.

## **Battle Five Description: Saratoga**

**Before the Game:** Patriot General Horatio Gates sets up cannons on a bluff to guard a small stretch of road below. Instead of walking the dangerous road, General Burgoyne decides to fight the dug-in Patriots on the bluff. Unfortunately for Burgoyne, American farmers join the battle, bringing with them their deadly accurate rifles. *To symbolize increased accuracy, the Patriots may push the marble (not too hard!) instead of just rolling it down the ramp and may shoot from the area marked "D."*

**After the Game:** The Battle of Saratoga was a great victory for the Patriots; due mainly to the accuracy of the farmers' rifles and the readiness of the Patriot defenses. The British lost 600 soldiers to the Patriot's 150.

## **Battle Six Description: Vincennes**

**Before the Game:** At the battle of Vincennes, the Patriots are led by General George Rogers Clark. They attack a British fort that is fortified with many cannons. While this does not sound like such a good idea, General Clark has a plan. He keeps his troops moving at all times so they cannot be hit by cannons, and he has them whoop and shout to make the British inside the fort think there are many more attackers than there actually are. *In this battle, the British must shoot cannons (wadded balls of paper) instead of muskets (marbles), stay behind the center line, and set up troops only in their area "A." The Patriots may reposition their troops after every roll into areas "A" or "B."*

# The American Revolution *(cont.)*

## **Battle Six Description: Vincennes *(cont.)***

**After the Game:** To the British inside Fort Vincennes, it sounded like they were being attacked by an army of thousands, but this army would not stand still. The British could not hit them with their cannons. In fact, General Clark had only 150 men with him. The British fort surrendered.

## **Battle Seven Description: Yorktown**

**Before the Game:** In August 1781, British General Cornwallis marches his troops to Yorktown, a river port on the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. Unfortunately for Cornwallis, the French had joined the war on the side of the Patriots. Cornwallis depends on being able to get supplies from fleets of British ships, but French Admiral Comte de Grasse stops these ships from reaching Yorktown. General Washington sets up a horseshoe of troops around the British on land, who are backed against the water. *In this battle, both Patriots and British may shoot cannons (crumpled paper balls) instead of muskets (marbles) if they choose. Patriots may fire from the game board areas marked "E," while the British must stay behind the center line. This battle was also influenced by a daring raid led by Alexander Hamilton. At any point you choose, a Patriot may fire two extra cannon balls from the area marked "F." British must line up in area "A," while the Patriots can line up in "A" or "B."*

**After the Game:** Yorktown was the last battle of the American Revolution. On October 17, 1781, a British officer climbed out of the trenches waving a white handkerchief. The Patriots were victorious.

## **Closure Read-Aloud**

So what do you think? Was the game fair? Of course, it wasn't fair! The Patriots cheated! But have you ever heard the quote, "All's fair in love and war"? Maybe the British should have paid a little more attention when they learned this quote in school.

After the first couple of disastrous battles, the Patriots learned to break all the established rules of warfare. Much to the dismay of the British they wouldn't stand still in the middle of an open field wearing bright coats that looked like big red bull's-eyes. And, they used resources, like sharp-shooting farmers the British had never counted on. The Patriots learned from their mistakes and made up their strategies as they went, without hundreds of years of military tradition telling them what to do. They were able to adapt to the land and to the changing circumstances of each battle. Which British general would have thought to run around in circles yelling, like Clark? And which British leader would have left fires burning to trick the enemy, like Washington at Princeton?

These Patriots, through their creativity and resourcefulness, were able to best one of the mightiest empires in the world, while laying the principles of courage and individualism on which the American ideal was founded.

## **American Revolution Game Rules**

1. You are fighting battles between the Patriots and the British.
2. To win, you need to knock over all the opposing side's soldiers by rolling a marble down your weapon ramp.
3. You need to roll from your own side of the centerline.
4. Each student gets one roll for each of their soldiers that is still standing.
5. Once a soldier falls, remove it from the board.
6. Your teacher will read a description of each battle, which might change the rules a little bit.
7. The first side to win a total of four battles wins the American Revolution!

# Materials Instruction Sheet

## Soldiers

Each student playing a British soldier needs to make five soldiers. Each student playing a Patriot soldier needs to make three soldiers. Cut out the soldiers from the *British or Patriot Template Sheet* (pages 47–48) and put them together so they stand up. If you have time, color your soldiers.

## Game Board

Copy the game board pictured below onto 11" x 17" poster board or construction paper. Once you have copied this game board, tape it down on a flat surface, such as a desk or the floor.

Patriots		British			
B			E		B
A		C	D	F	A
B			E		B

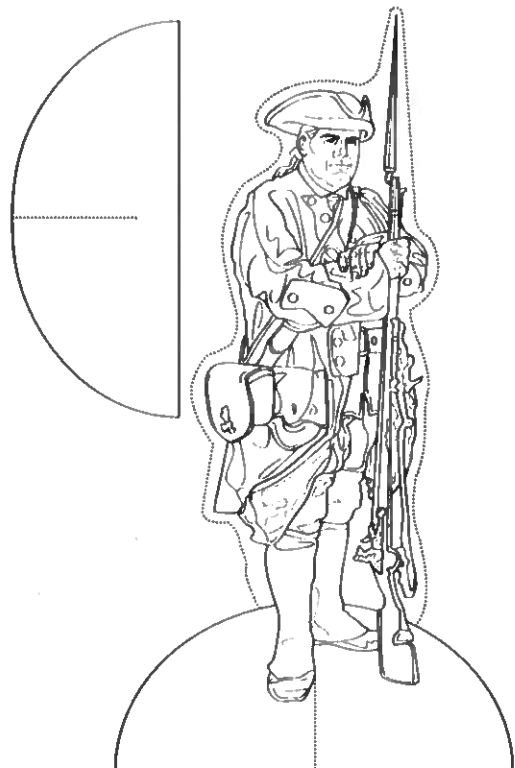
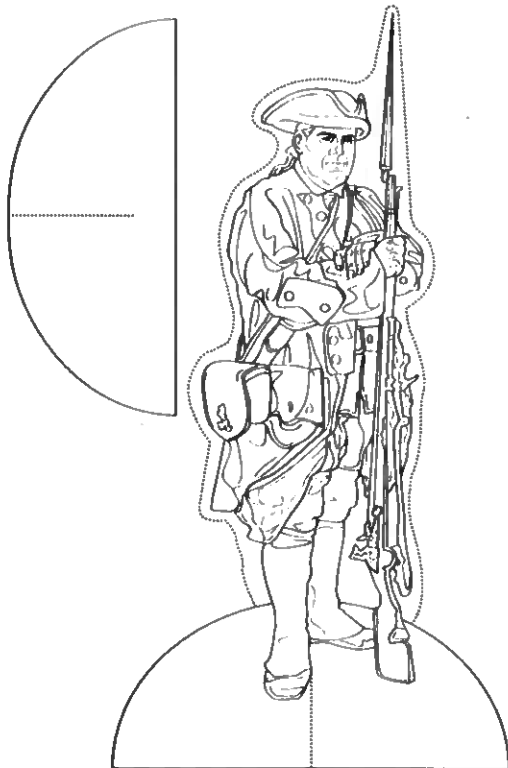
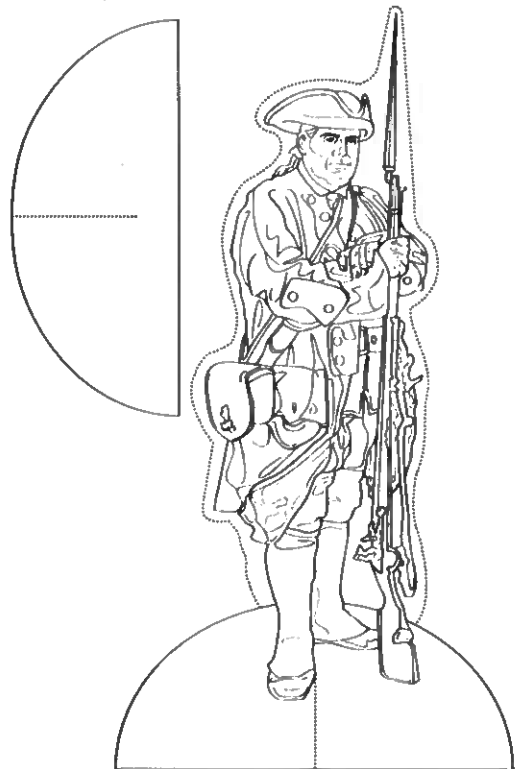
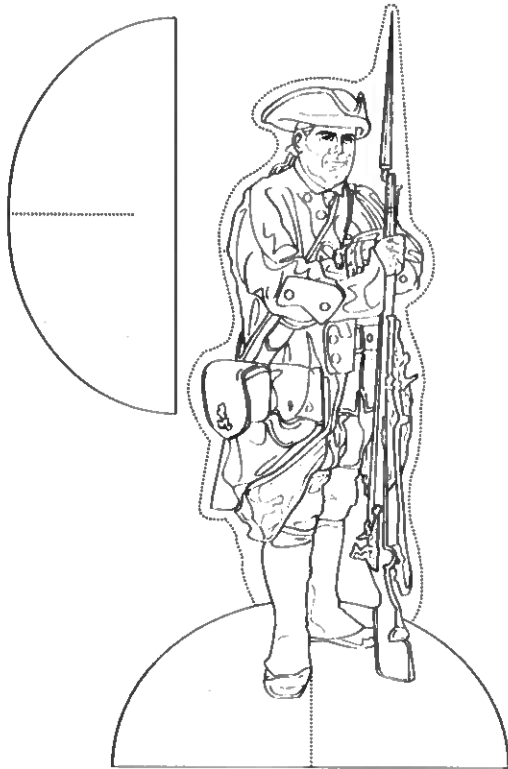
## Weapon Ramp

Each group will need to create one weapon ramp. You will roll a marble or a crumpled sheet of paper down this ramp to try to knock over the opposing side's soldiers. Cut out and fold the ramp as shown on the *Weapon Ramp Template* (page 49).



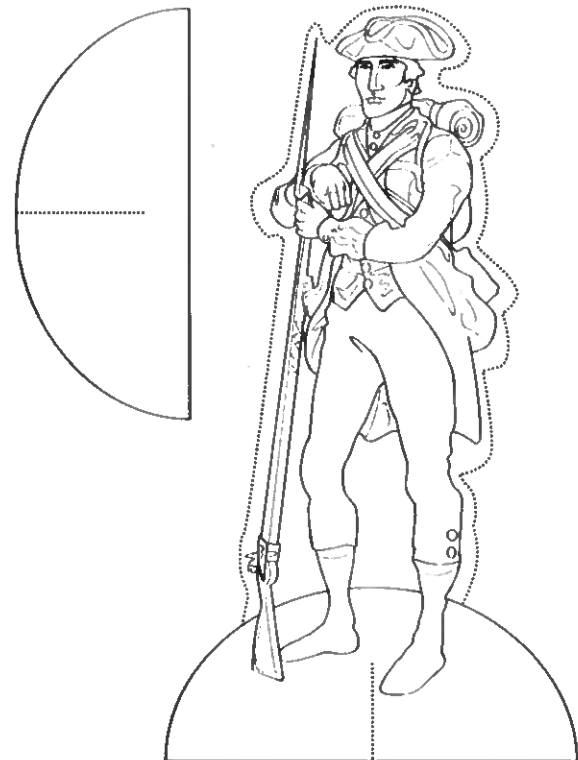
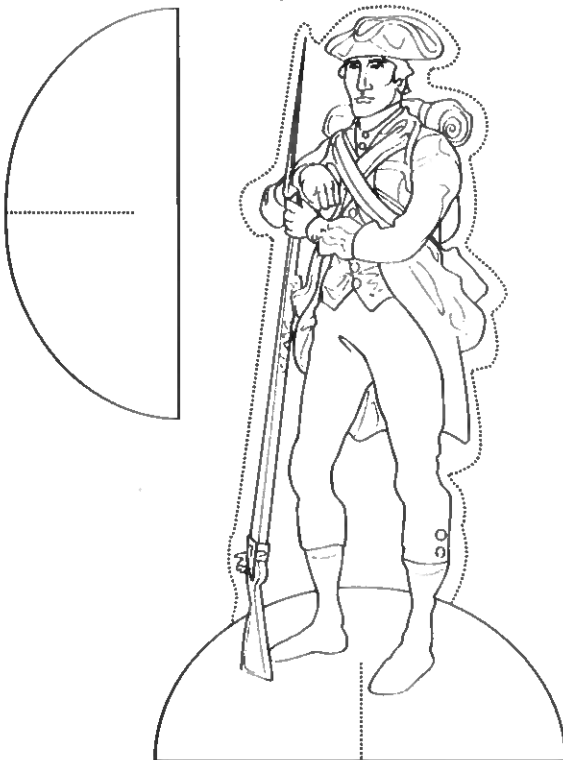
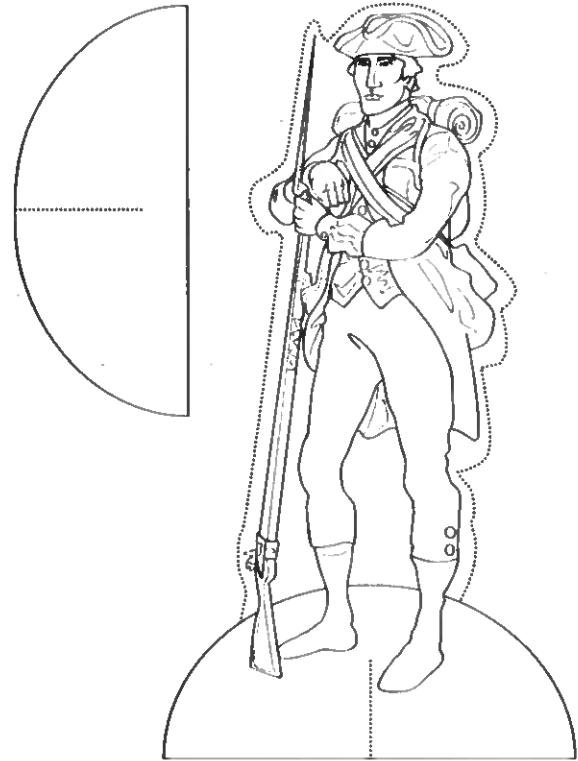
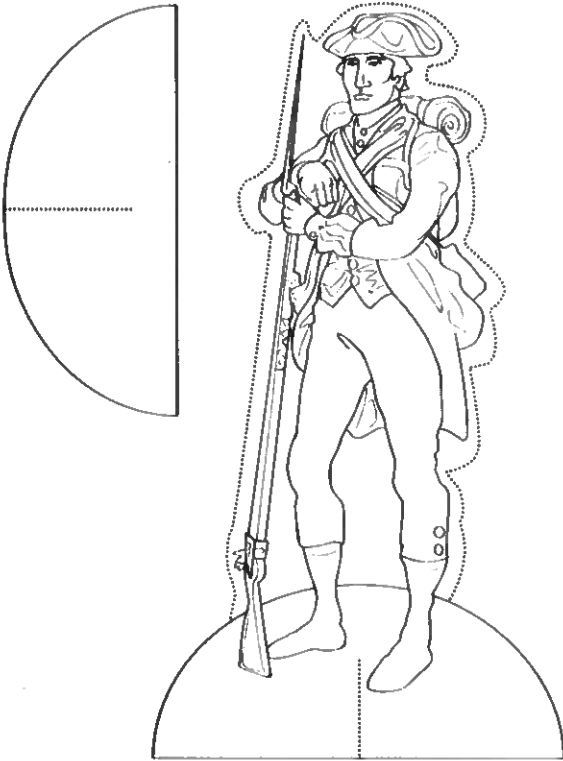
# British Soldier Template

**Directions:** Cut out the soldiers and bases to make five soldiers for each person on your team.



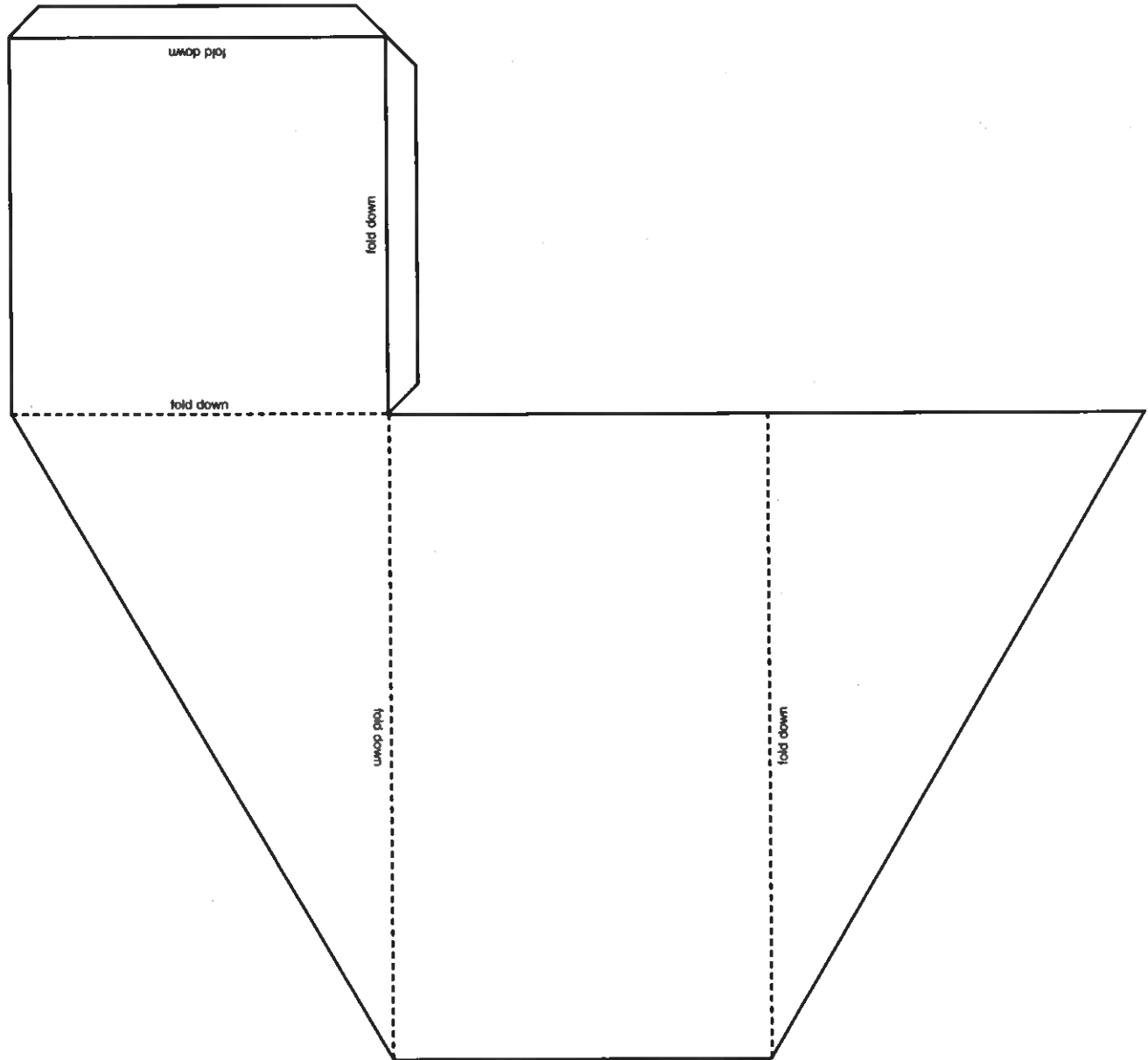
# Patriot Soldier Template

**Directions:** Cut out the soldiers and bases to make three soldiers for each person on your team.



# Weapon Ramp Template

**Directions:** Cut along the solid lines and fold along the dotted lines. Use tape or glue to hold the ramp together.



## **Habits of Mind Discussion**

- What do you think was the most important factor that helped the Patriots win the American Revolution?
- Which was your favorite battle and why?
- Can you think of anything going on in the world now that reminds you of the American Revolution?
- In past American wars, has the United States ever been like Britain and our opponent ever been like the Patriots?