

Title: Patriot, Loyalist, or Neutral? You Decide

Historical Background: During the American Revolution, the American colonists had to decide to support the War for Independence or remain loyal to the British and King George III. Some Americans could not decide which side to choose and remained neutral during the war. Most American colonists, however, did choose sides. Those who supported independence from Britain were known as Patriots and colonists who opposed independence from Britain were known as Loyalists. Most Patriots supported independence because they felt that recent British laws on the American Colonies violated their rights as British citizens (e.g. taxing without consent, quartering soldiers in citizens' homes, and denying colonists the right to a trial). Many Patriots live in the New England Colonies, especially Massachusetts. Most Loyalists who opposed independence tended to be wealthy landowners, Anglican clergymen, or people with close business or political ties to Britain. There was a high concentration of Loyalists in New York City and in the Southern Colonies. Many Loyalists agreed that the American colonists had suffered at the hands of the British but the Loyalist hoped that a peaceful reconciliation with British government was possible. During the Revolution taking a Loyalists stance was dangerous, especially in the Southern Colonies. Many Loyalists were brutally attacked and killed. Their property was destroyed or confiscated. Loyalists by thousands fled the American Colonies for their own safety. Some Loyalists moved to England and many more moved to nearby Canada.

Those living in the American colonies had various reasons for choosing their side. The Iroquois Confederation, except the Seneca Tribe, had a working relationship with British officials and was angered by colonists encroaching into their territory, sided with British. Tenant farmers often choose their position on the Revolution based on which side their landowner supported. For example, if a Patriot landowner was cruel and always raised the rent, the tenant would be a Loyalist, but if the Patriot landowner was kind and collected a fair rent, the tenant would be a Patriot. Non-English speaking colonists, especially those living in the frontier, often kept to themselves and viewed the conflict between the British government and the Patriots as family quarrel among the English. They wanted to stay out of it and be left alone. Colonists who were in debt with British creditors often became Patriots since they hoped winning the Revolution could get them out of paying back their debt.

It is surprising to most students that not all Americans wanted nor fought for independence. They can't imagine why any American would want to remain part of the British Empire. This activity will make students realize that the colonists had different points of view and that deciding which side to take was not easy and was often life threatening.

Correlation to New York State Grades 7/8 Social Studies Core Curriculum:

Unit Three: A Nation is Created

II. The Shift from Protest to Separation

Suggested Timeframe: 1-2 classroom periods

Materials and Resources:

- Worksheet - "Patriot, Loyalist, or Neutral? You Decide" (attached)

Student Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Explain the difference between a Patriot and a Loyalist during the American Revolution.
- Examine colonists' biographies and determine whether the colonist is a Patriot, a Loyalist, or is neutral.
- Predict which colonist would make an excellent spy for the British