

## Colonization and Revolutionary War Valley Forge

One of the hardest battles George Washington and his troops fought wasn't against the British. It was against the winter. In the fall of 1777, the British Redcoats **occupied**<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia, one of the most important colonial cities. Many congressmen wanted General Washington to **reclaim**<sup>2</sup> the city. But Washington knew the Continental Army was not ready. Instead of attacking Philadelphia, Washington took his army to a **plateau**<sup>3</sup> nearby, above the town of Valley Forge. There, he waited out the winter months.

The winter was **bitterly**<sup>4</sup> cold. Colonists had hidden supplies for the army, but the British had raided their goods. The months from December 1777 to February 1778 were the hardest three months of the war. The troops had little food beyond the squirrels and small animals they could hunt in the forest. Many did not have uniforms, and many more lacked boots. A soldier's feet would get so cold from walking on the snow and ice that his entire leg might turn black from frostbite. Sometimes, the frostbite was so severe that the soldier's leg would have to be **amputated**.<sup>5</sup>

The men lived in wooden huts. Each hut was one room and had a small fireplace. Twelve men shared a hut. They had just enough space to lie down, but they did not have blankets. The temperatures often fell below freezing. Many men became sick, and some died. Diseases such as smallpox, dysentery, and typhus killed as many as 3,000 men. The winter tested the loyalty of American troops. Some soldiers abandoned the army.

Washington did what he could to help his troops. A new man was put in charge of sending supplies to the soldiers. He built bridges and improved roads so that food could reach the army. Another man helped Washington train the

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<sup>1</sup> **occupied** – to take over by force

<sup>2</sup> **reclaim** – to take back

<sup>3</sup> **plateau** – a large level piece of land, usually high up

<sup>4</sup> **bitterly** – harshly or extremely

<sup>5</sup> **amputated** – cut off

soldiers to fight the British more effectively. By spring, things began to improve rapidly for the troops.

The nation would never forget the sacrifices of the Continental Army at Valley Forge. Washington's men grew to recognize him as a strong, caring leader. He led the army until the end of the Revolutionary War when Great Britain **surrendered**.<sup>6</sup> Washington was looking forward to retiring to his home at Mount Vernon. But because he was so respected, colonists called him to duty. He became the first President of the United States.

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<sup>6</sup> **surrendered** – gave up (something) to the power of another

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was one of the hardest battles that the Continental Army ever fought?
  - a. The Battle for Philadelphia in December 1777.
  - b. The Battle of Mount Vernon in 1778.
  - c. The battle against the winter from 1777 to 1778.
  - d. The battle against the British in Valley Forge in February 1778.
  
2. The second part of the passage tells you about:
  - a. How many battles the British won against the Continental Army.
  - b. The battle to reclaim Philadelphia.
  - c. The difficult winter conditions Washington's troops had to endure.
  - d. Washington's attempts to support his troops.
  
3. The most important point of the passage is
  - a. The Revolutionary War was won thanks to the courage and sacrifices made by Washington and his troops.
  - b. The British gave up too easily.
  - c. Washington and his troops didn't have enough supplies.
  - d. The winter nearly wiped out Washington's troops.
  
4. What was George Washington looking forward to doing at the end of the war?
  - a. He was looking forward to being the President of the United States of America.
  - b. He was looking forward to retiring to his home at Mount Vernon.
  - c. He was looking forward to being part of the Civil War.
  - d. He was looking forward to spending time at Valley Forge.
  
5. What was one example of a way that Washington tried to help his troops?
  - a. He trained his soldiers to fight the British more effectively.
  - b. He put himself in charge of supplies.
  - c. He blew up roads so that British soldiers couldn't get food.
  - d. He moved his troops south to a warmer location.

6. What sort of personal qualities might a soldier in the Continental Army have needed to survive the Revolutionary War? Make a list of qualities. Explain why you think each is important for a soldier to survive the war.

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7. Why were the three months between December 1777 and February 1778 the hardest of the war?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

George Washington knew his troops were not ready to attack Philadelphia \_\_\_\_\_ he took his army to Valley Forge.

- a. though
- b. because
- c. so
- d. but

9. Answer the following question based on the sentence below.

The troops hunted squirrels and small animals in the forest because they did not have much food.

In the sentence, the phrase "they did not have much food" answers which question?

- a. When?
- b. Why?
- c. Who?
- d. What?

10. **Vocabulary Word:** reclaim: to take back.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Teacher Guide and Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 750

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** The passage describes the experience of American colonial troops during the winter of 1777-78 in Valley Forge. The hardships for the soldiers, as well as the efforts of George Washington to help them, are included.

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**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary. Qualities a soldier in the Continental Army needed in order to survive the Revolutionary War consisted of resilience, perseverance, and strength. These qualities were important because the soldiers needed to be able to recover from illness and have the ability to keep fighting despite their hardships while keeping their strength up so that George Washington could lead them to victory.

7. Why were the three months between December 1777 and February 1778 the hardest of the war?

**Suggested answer:** The troops had to survive with little food and very poor conditions. Though it was bitterly cold, they did not have blankets, and many didn't have uniforms or boots to keep them warm. Diseases also killed many of the men.

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Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.