



Day 18 American Revolution
45-60 Minutes

Arnold Tries to Capture Canada

Benedict Arnold and the Near Conquest of Canada

A Revolutionary War Sub-Plot
Detailed Lesson Plan with PowerPoint Script

Grade Level: 5–8

Time: ~45 minutes

- 20–25 minutes: PowerPoint anchor
- 20–25 minutes: Article + interactive module and scavenger hunt

Unit: Early Campaigns of the American Revolution

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces students to one of the most dramatic sub-plots of the American Revolution: Benedict Arnold's near conquest of Canada in 1775–1776. Using a teacher-led PowerPoint presentation as the anchor, students learn why the invasion mattered, how it nearly succeeded, and why it ultimately failed.

Students then transition to an online article and interactive module that traces the **timeline of Benedict Arnold's betrayal**, explains the concept of **treason in American history**, and explores what Arnold's legacy *might have been* had he remained loyal. The lesson intentionally introduces material that **skips ahead chronologically**, preparing students for deeper study of Arnold in later lessons.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain what a sub-plot is within a larger historical conflict
 - Describe why the Americans attempted to invade Canada
 - Identify the major challenges faced by Arnold's expedition
 - Analyze how failure and resentment shaped Arnold's later actions
 - Understand treason and its consequences in American history
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Essential Question

How can failure in one part of a war influence decisions that change history?

Materials

- PowerPoint presentation: *Benedict Arnold and the Near Conquest of Canada*
 - Online article on Benedict Arnold
 - Interactive module on:
 - Timeline of Arnold's betrayal
 - Treason in American history
 - Arnold's possible legacy without betrayal
 - Integrated online or printable scavenger hunt
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PowerPoint Anchor Instruction (20–25 minutes)

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

Use the PowerPoint presentation as the instructional anchor.
The following script aligns directly with the slides.

PowerPoint Script

Benedict Arnold and the Near Conquest of Canada

Slide 1 – Benedict Arnold and the Near Conquest of Canada

This presentation explores a lesser-known but important campaign of the American Revolution. Before becoming infamous for betrayal, Benedict Arnold nearly helped the Americans capture Canada.

Slide 2 – What Is a Sub-Plot?

A sub-plot is a smaller story that unfolds within a larger conflict. While not the main storyline of the war, sub-plots like Arnold's invasion of Canada influenced decisions, morale, and outcomes.

Slide 3 – Benedict Arnold Before Betrayal

Benedict Arnold is most remembered for treason, but earlier he was a bold and determined Patriot officer. He volunteered for dangerous missions and believed strongly in the American cause.

Slide 4 – Why Invade Canada?

Canada was controlled by the British and posed a threat from the north. Arnold also believed French Canadians might join the fight for independence if American forces arrived.

Slide 5 – Weak British Defenses

At the time, British forces in Canada were limited. With only about 775 troops across the entire region and fewer than 300 in Quebec, the invasion seemed possible.

Slide 6 – Washington Approves the Mission

Arnold asked George Washington for permission to invade Canada in 1775. Washington approved, seeing the invasion as a way to remove a major British threat.

Slide 7 – The Two-Pronged Attack

Two American forces moved north. Richard Montgomery captured Montreal, while Arnold led 1,050 men through the wilderness of Maine toward Quebec City.

Slide 8 – Early Success

Montreal fell quickly, raising hopes that Canada might join the American cause. Everything depended on Arnold's army reaching and capturing Quebec.

Slide 9 – Major Logistical Problems

Problems began immediately. The mission was delayed by pay issues, maps were inaccurate, and the journey took far longer than expected.

Slide 10 – Sabotage and Disaster

A shipbuilder sympathetic to the British sabotaged boats. Supplies sank into freezing rivers, leaving soldiers without food or equipment.

Slide 11 – More Hardships

A hurricane destroyed remaining supplies. Soldiers deserted, and many became seriously ill with dysentery during the march.

Slide 12 – Reaching Canada

By November 1775, Arnold reached Canada with only 675 starving soldiers and very few supplies remaining.

Slide 13 – British Prepared

British commander Sir Guy Carleton had already learned of the invasion. Reinforcements were stationed in Quebec City, strengthening its defenses.

Slide 14 – Attack on Quebec

Arnold waited for reinforcements and attacked on New Year's Eve, 1775. The goal was to surprise and seize the city.

Slide 15 – Disaster at Quebec

The attack failed. Fewer than 100 of the 300 soldiers who reached the battle escaped. Arnold was shot in the leg and carried from the field.

Slide 16 – Holding On

Despite his injury, Arnold continued to command. He used a single cannon to make it appear that American forces were stronger than they were.

Slide 17 – A Failed Siege

American reinforcements arrived in spring 1776, allowing a partial blockade. When a British fleet arrived in May, the Americans were forced to retreat.

Slide 18 – Retreat from Canada

The invasion failed completely. American forces withdrew, and the chance to bring Canada into the Revolution was lost.

Slide 19 – Growing Disenchantment

After Canada, Arnold was repeatedly passed over for promotion. Combined with hardship and failure, resentment toward Congress and fellow officers grew.

Slide 20 – Why This Sub-Plot Matters

Arnold's Canadian campaign nearly changed the course of the war. Its failure helped shape Arnold's later decisions and eventual betrayal.

Article and Interactive Module (20–25 minutes)

Teacher Directions

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/battles-of-the-revolutionary-war/benedict-arnolds-quest-for-canada>

Students now move to the **online article and interactive module** on Benedict Arnold.

This module:

- Details the **timeline of Arnold's betrayal**
- Explains **treason in American history**
- Explores what Arnold's **legacy might have been** had he remained loyal

Important Teacher Note on Chronology

Some material in the module **skips ahead chronologically**, covering events that occur later in the war. This is intentional and prepares students for deeper study of Benedict Arnold in upcoming lessons.

Student Task

Students complete the **integrated scavenger hunt** (online or printable), focusing on:

- Key moments that led to Arnold's betrayal
 - The definition and consequences of treason
 - How Arnold's reputation might have been different
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Closure (5 minutes)

Discussion prompt:

If Benedict Arnold had never betrayed the American cause, how might history remember him today?

Exit ticket options:

- One reason the Canada campaign mattered

- One factor that may have contributed to Arnold's later betrayal
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Teacher Note for Future Lessons

Students will learn **much more about Benedict Arnold** in upcoming lessons, including his role at Saratoga and the events surrounding his betrayal at West Point.