



Women in the American Revolution: The Story of Anna Smith Strong

Unit at a Glance

Lesson number	Featured person	Accomplishments	Target character trait
Lesson 1	Elizabeth Freeman	Sued for her freedom and inspired many enslaved women	Curiosity
Lesson 2	Anna Smith Strong	The only female member of George Washington's spy ring	Courage
Lesson 3	Nanyehi (Nancy Ward)	A respected member of the Cherokee Nation	Humanity
Lesson 4	Deborah Sampson	Disguised herself as a man to fight in the Revolutionary War	Grit
Lesson 5	Esther de Berdt Reed	Author and fundraiser for the Continental Army	Compassion

Unit Essential Questions

- The Declaration of Independence lists several self-evident truths: People, by their very existence, are free and equal and have rights. No one, not even a king, can govern them without their consent. What are freedom, equality, rights, and government with consent?

- To what extent were the women covered in these lessons able to use their character strengths to achieve the self-evident truths outlined in the Declaration of Independence?

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will explore the life of Anna Smith Strong, the only female member of George Washington's Culper Spy Ring. Through close reading and character analysis, students will examine how Strong's courage enabled her to perform a dangerous mission: helping the spy ring deliver top-secret information to George Washington. Students will also practice generating thoughtful questions about character development and support their analysis with textual evidence. These activities will enable students to explore how Strong demonstrated courage when she participated in the Culper Spy Ring, which achieved more than any other intelligence network during the American Revolutionary War.

Objectives

- Identify and analyze a historical individual's character strengths.
- Support claims using textual evidence in a structured written response.
- Formulate meaningful questions about the development of a historical individual in a nonfiction text.
- Collaborate with others to generate questions and share different perspectives about a nonfiction text.
- Engage respectfully in small- and large-group discussions, showing positive collaboration and cooperation skills.
- Demonstrate command of standard English grammar and usage while speaking and in writing.

Materials

- “Anna Smith Strong: A Spy During the American Revolution” text
- [The Culper Spy Ring: Path Through History](#) video by [Discover Long Island](#)

Warm-Up

- Show students this short video about the Culper Spy Ring: [The Culper Spy Ring: Path Through History](#) by [Discover Long Island](#) (about 3 minutes).
- As the students watch, have them answer the following questions on a sheet of notebook paper:
 - What was the result of the Battle of Long Island?
 - What was the name of the woman in the Culper Spy Ring?
 - What did George Washington need spies to do?
 - How did Anna Smith Strong's code system work?
 - What was the result of the Culper Spy Ring?
- Facilitate a whole-class discussion (5 minutes) about the answers to the questions.

Learning Activities

READ ABOUT ANNA SMITH STRONG

Hand out the text “Anna Smith Strong: A Spy During the American Revolution.” Have students read the text individually or in pairs.

While students are reading, have them respond to the following questions:

- Why was it difficult for those outside the Culper Spy Ring to detect that Anna Smith Strong was a spy?
- How did spies send messages to one another? How did Strong send messages?
- What did the Culper Spy Ring accomplish?
- How long was the Culper Spy Ring kept secret?

- Do you think it was important for General Washington not to know the identities of his spies? Why or why not?
- What role did an ordinary clothesline play in the American Revolution?

CRACK THE CODE

Divide students into pairs and hand each pair the following directions:

Instructions: Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to crack the code embedded in the reading about Anna Smith Strong. Just like Strong's messages, which were hidden in plain sight, a secret message is hidden among the words of this text. To break the code and figure out the message, you will need several hints.

**Note for teacher:* At your discretion, give students the following hints:

- The message includes 11 words.
- Each paragraph contributes one word to the final message.
- The number 5 is important.
- Pay attention to word positions.
- You might pay attention to the first and last sentences of each paragraph.
(*Note for teacher only: This one includes a red herring, as students really need to pay attention only to the first sentence).
- The 11 words are given in order (Explain that paragraph 1 has the first word, paragraph 2 has the second word, etc.).

**Note for teacher only:* To break the code, students need to find the fifth word in the first sentence of each paragraph. The words are already put in order. The solution is, *The courage of one person can make a very significant difference.*

Scale the hints up or down as needed for your students. The point of this activity is to get students to reread the text and pick up more details about Anna Smith Strong while doing a fun activity.

LETTERS TO ANNA SMITH STRONG

After students have read the text and completed the “Crack the Code” activity, put them into pairs or small groups. Tell them that they are going to work together to write a letter to Strong, asking her how she felt as a spy for General Washington. If needed, brainstorm possible questions students might ask Strong before they begin writing. Keep the generated questions up on the board while students are writing their letters.

LETTERS FROM ANNA SMITH STRONG

When all students have finished their letters, switch letters among groups. Make sure each group has a letter that is not their own. Then the groups will think about how Strong might have answered these letters. Tell each group that they will write a response letter to Strong (in reply to the letter they were given). Set guidelines for students so they know they must use textual evidence to support their responses and they must justify their responses by including details about Strong. After all students have finished their letters, give each group their “response letter” from “Anna Smith Strong.”

DEBRIEF

Following the letter-writing activity, discuss the following questions with students as a whole group:

- How did you go about responding to the letter you were given and the questions you were asked?
- How did you decide what Anna Smith Strong might say in her response letter?
- What surprised you about the response you received from Strong?
- What part of the letter-writing process was easy and what was challenging? Why?

Closing

Individually, through an exit ticket, ask students the following question:

- The Declaration of Independence lists several self-evident truths: People, by their very existence, are free and equal, and they have rights. No one, not even a

king, can govern them without their consent. To what extent did Anna Smith Strong show courage to achieve the self-evident truths outlined in the Declaration of Independence?

ELA Common Core Standards Met

Standard number	Standard text
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.4 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.10 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.10 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Character and Social Emotional Development National Guidelines Met

Standard type	Standard text
Responsible and ethical decision-making A3	Write about and share a principle you want to live by that you learned from a family member, book, movie, or personal experience.

Intellectual character A3	Recognize and understand why the intellectual character strengths are not innate (something you are born with) but can be developed with practice and support.
Social awareness A1	Experience and demonstrate empathy.
Social awareness A3	Demonstrate respect for other people's opinions and perspectives.
Social awareness A5	Practice "perspective-taking" as a strategy to strengthen your acceptance of others.
Interpersonal/relationship skills A5	Understand and practice positive collaboration and cooperation skills (e.g., teamwork).