

Friedrich von Steuben and the Continental Army

This lesson was created in response to the newly adopted California History-Social Science Framework, and the passage of the FAIR Education Act. This lesson additionally responds to the California History-Social Science Framework's emphasis on disciplinary inquiry and historical thinking. This lesson explores both the concepts of change and revealing of an enduring issue as qualifiers for historical significance. Through this lesson students will learn to go beyond the textbook to determine historical significance in addition to close reading skills that allow the student to pull out evidence from the various secondary sources as evidence to prove their claim of significance. Additionally, this lesson explores the enduring issue of gays in the military and how the military, from its inception with the American Revolution, has had conflicted policies and weighed the military expertise of the individual as an important factor when making determinations as to continued service.

Unit Topic: The American Revolution

Lesson Topic: The Historical Significance of Baron Von Steuben

Lesson Focus Question: *Why was Baron Von Steuben historically significant?*

Teaching Thesis. Baron Von Steuben is historically significant because he changed how the American Army fought and revealed the enduring issue of gays in the military. Baron Von Steuben, being a Prussian military genius was sent by Franklin to the United States to help the Continental Army defeat the British during the American Revolutionary War. Baron Von Steuben, while at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778 put the Continental Army, under the command of Gen George Washington, through drills and other military practices in order to teach them how to be a formidable fighting force. Not only did this help the Continental Army win the Revolutionary War, his drill style and teaching were used for many years to train soldiers throughout the Armed Services. Additionally, Baron Von Steuben reveals the enduring issue of gays in the military. Franklin, through the vetting process of Von Steuben, learned of his homosexual affections- something that he was in the process of being criminally prosecuted for in the French courts. Franklin, in dire need to have someone of a high caliber of military expertise support Gen Washington, decided that Von Steuben's military expertise was much more important and vouched for Von Steuben and sent him to Valley Forge to help the Army. After the war was over Von Steuben homosexuality was an open secret. He lived his remaining years as an American citizen and lived with Gen. Benjamin Walker, to whom he left his estate upon his death. These actions show that the enduring issue of gays in the military have been around as long as the military has been and that various responses to the allowance or denial of gays in the military have been debated and discussed for over three hundred years.

LESSON OVERVIEW

Part 1: Textbook Exploration of Von Steuben

Section Question: *According to the textbook, who was Baron Von Steuben and why was he at Valley Forge ?*

Source Used: Textbook Excerpt (could be replaced with teacher textbook)

The purpose of this source is for students to see how a textbook write history, with little detail or depth and that for students to be able to answer the focus question they will need to expand their research to other primary and secondary sources.

Procedures: Students will closely read the textbook excerpt for general comprehension. After deconstructing the lesson question as a class, students will work in groups of 4 to re-read the excerpt and answer the section question.

Goal: Students should, through conversation and an attempt to answer the section question, determine that there is not enough information on Von Steuben to on its own answer the lesson question.

Historical Thinking Skill: Historical Significance is **constructed**. That is, people, events and developments meet the criteria for historical significance only when they are shown to occupy a **meaningful place in the narrative**.

Historical Thinking Skill: Inferences made from a source can never stand alone. They should always be **corroborated**- checked against other sources (primary or secondary).

Part 2: Baron Von Steuben Changed the American Revolution

Section Question: *How did Baron von Steuben's actions at Valley Forge change the American Revolution?*

Source Used: Erick Trickey, "The Prussian Nobleman Who Helped Save the American Revolution: When American troops faltered, Baron von Steuben helped whip them into shape," *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 26, 2017.

This source shows how Von Steuben changed the American Revolution and Continental Army and thereby meets the first criteria for historical significance -- resulting in change.

Procedures: Students will individually read the secondary source for general comprehension. After deconstructing the lesson question as a class, students will get into groups of 4 to re-read the source and complete the "Before, Actors, Effects" chart.

Goal: Students, based on close reading of the secondary source and discussion with classmates, will understand that Baron Von Steuben's actions at Valley Forge changed the way the Continental Army fought.

Historical Thinking Skill: Events, people, or developments have **historical significance** if they **resulted in change**. That is, that had deep consequences, for many people, over a long period of time.

Part 3A: The Enduring Issue of the American Military

Section Question: *How did different people respond to Baron von Steuben's homosexuality?*

Sources Used: Excerpt from Mark Segal, "The Gay Man Who Saved the United States," *LGBTQ Nation*,

October 09, 2013.

Procedures: Students will individually read the secondary source for general comprehension. After deconstructing the lesson question as a class, students will get into groups of 4 to re-read the source and complete the responses of historical actors chart.

Goal: Students, based on close reading of the secondary source, will explore how, during 1770, members of the military, both within the United States and throughout the world, had varying perspectives on the participation of gay soldiers in the military -- from outright condemnation to silent acceptance.

Historical Thinking Skill: Events, people, or developments have **historical significance** if they **revealing**. That is, they shed light on enduring or emerging issues in history or contemporary life.

Part 3B: The Enduring Issue of the American Military

Section Question: *What are current policies surrounding the participation of gay soldiers in the military?*

Sources Used: Excerpt from the *Key Dates in U. S. Policy on Gay Men and Women in Military Service*
Timeline U.S. Naval Institute: <https://www.usni.org/news-and-features/dont-ask-dont-tell/timeline>

Procedures: Students will individually read the secondary source for general comprehension. After deconstructing the lesson question as a class, students will get into groups of 4 to re-read the source and complete the processing chart

Goal: Students, based on close reading of the secondary source, will explore the ongoing issue of the participation of gay soldiers in the military and how rights have expanded and contracted over time.

Historical Thinking Skill: Events, people, or developments have **historical significance** if they **revealing**. That is, they shed light on enduring or emerging issues in history or contemporary life.

Part 4: Paragraph Response to Lesson Focus Question

Writing Prompt: *Why is Baron Von Steuben historically significant?*

Source Used: Both secondary articles on Von Steuben and the timeline.

Procedures: Students will, after collaborative conversation with peers in table groups, write an analytical response paragraph answering the lesson focus question.

Goal: Students, based on close reading of all the sources, will be able to construct an analytical response paragraph arguing that Baron von Steuben is historical significance and meets both of the criteria for significance: 1) change for many over a long period of time and 2) revealing an enduring issue.

Historical Thinking Skill: 1) Events, people, or developments have historical significance if they **resulted in change**. That is, that had deep consequences, for many people, over a long period of time. 2) Events, people, or developments have **historical significance** if they **revealing**. That is, they shed light on enduring or emerging issues in history or contemporary life.

History-Social Science Content Standards

5.6 Students understand the course and consequences of the American Revolution.

1. Identify and map the major military battles, campaigns, and turning points of the Revolutionary War, the roles of the American and British leaders, and the Indian leaders' alliances on both sides.
2. Describe the contributions of France and other nations and of individuals to the outcome of the Revolution (e.g., Benjamin Franklin's negotiations with the French, the French navy, the Treaty of Paris, The Netherlands, Russia, the Marquis Marie Joseph de Lafayette, Tadeusz Kościuszko, Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben).

8.1 Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

3. Analyze how the American Revolution affected other nations, especially France.

Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

RI.6-8.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

RI.6-8.2 Determine central idea or information of a primary or secondary source

Common Core Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

WHST.11-12.1 Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.

Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards

SL.6-8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.6-8.4 Present claims and findings (e.g., argument, narrative, response to literature presentations), emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Friedrich von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *Who was Baron Von Steuben and why is he historically significant ?*

Source: Excerpted from “Winter at Valley Forge,” *History Alive : The United States through Industrialization* (2005), pp 94-95.

Late in 1777, . . . Washington and his army were on their way to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, to make camp for the winter. . . .

We had nothing to eat for two or three days previous. . . . The army was now not only starved but naked. The greatest part were not only shirtless and barefoot, but destitute of [without] all other clothing, especially blankets.

. . . . To distract his men from their misery, Washington put Baron Friedrich von Steuben, a volunteer from Prussia, in charge of training. The Prussian's method, wrote [Joseph] Martin, was “continual drill.” It worked wonders. “The army grows stronger every day,” wrote one officer. “There is a spirit of discipline among the troops that is better than the numbers.”

Reading Question: *Who was Baron Von Steuben and why is he historically significant ?*

Directions: Use direct evidence from the reading above to complete the table. If there is no evidence, leave blank.

Who was Baron von Steuben?	
According to this source, why is he historically significant?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● An enduring change for many people over a long period of time● Reveals an enduring issue in history (something that has been occurring for a long time)

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Friedrich von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *How did Baron von Steuben's actions at Valley Forge change the American Revolution?*



Source: Erick Trickey, “The Prussian Nobleman Who Helped Save the American Revolution: When American troops faltered, Baron von Steuben helped whip them into shape,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 26, 2017.

Context: Erick Trickey is a writer in Boston, covering politics, history, cities, arts, and science. He has written for *POLITICO Magazine*, *Next City*, the *Boston Globe*, *Boston Magazine*, and *Cleveland Magazine*.

Von Steuben, his salary [from the Prussian Army] slashed, started looking for a new military job. But Europe’s great armies, mostly at peace, didn’t hire him. In September 1777, the disgraced baron sailed from France to volunteer for the Continental Army, . . . A letter from America’s diplomats in Paris, Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, [was with him] vouching for von Steuben and reporting that France’s minister of war and foreign minister had done so too.

Von Steuben landed at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on December 1, 1777, with four French aides to translate for him and a large dog named Azor. . . . Aware that the Continental Congress had soured on foreign volunteers, von Steuben offered to serve under Washington and asked to be paid only if America won the war.

“What [Steuben] discovered [at Valley Forge] was nothing less than appalling,” wrote Fleming in *Washington’s Secret War*. “He was confronting a wrecked army. . . . Valley Forge, their winter quarters, was nearly as punishing as battle: hastily built huts, cruel temperatures, scarce food.

The baron found soldiers without uniforms, rusted muskets without bayonets, companies with men missing and unaccounted for. With constant turnover and little order, regiment sizes varied wildly. Different officers used different military drill manuals, leading to chaos when their units tried to work together. . . . The army had to get into better shape before fighting resumed in the spring.

So, von Steuben put the entire army through Prussian-style drills, starting with a model company of 100 men. He taught them how to reload their muskets quickly after firing, charge with a bayonet and march in compact columns instead of miles-long lines. Meanwhile, he wrote detailed lists of officers’ duties, giving them more responsibility than in English systems.

Though von Steuben raged and cursed in a garbled mixture of French, English, and German, his instructions and presence began to build morale. “If anything, the curses contributed to Steuben’s reputation as an exotic character who was good for a laugh now and then,” wrote Fleming.

And though the baron was appalled at the condition of the army he was tasked with making over, he soon developed an appreciation for its soldiers. “The genius of this nation is not in the least to be compared with that of the Prussian, Austrians, or French,” von Steuben wrote to a Prussian friend. “You say to your soldier ‘Do this and he doeth it’; but I am obliged to say [to the American soldier]: ‘This is the reason why you ought to do that: and then he does it.’”

The baron’s lessons didn’t just make the American troops look impressive in parades—under his tutelage, they became a formidable battlefield force. . . . The Continental Army’s new strength as a fighting force, combined with the arrival of the French fleet off the coast of New York in July 1778, turned the tide of the war.

Excerpted from: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/baron-von-steuben-180963048/#RCPxtp4WIW4V7Dy8.99>

Continental Army BEFORE Von Steuben	Von Steuben’s Training and Drills	Continental Army AFTER Von Steuben

Baron von Steuben is historically significant because he changed _____ from _____ to _____.

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Friedrich von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *How did different people respond to Baron von Steuben's homosexuality?*

Source: Excerpt from Mark Segal, "The Gay Man Who Saved the United States," *LGBTQ Nation*, October 09, 2013.

Context: Mark Segal is an American journalist and the founder of the *Philadelphia Gay News* and president of the National Gay Newspaper Guild. Segal has been a long standing gay rights activist, particularly in the Philadelphia area. He based much of this article on Paul D. Lockhart's biography of von Steuben, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge* (2010).

Gen. George Washington and the Continental Congress knew that, without help from additional seasoned military experts, the colonies would clearly lose. Washington wrote the colonies' representatives in Paris, among them Benjamin Franklin, to see what he could come up with. Franklin learned of a "brilliant Prussian" military genius, Lt. Gen. Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, who had a string of successes across Germanic Europe. During the process, Franklin discovered von Steuben's reputation for having "affections" with males and the issue became pressing, as members of the French clergy demanded the French court, as in other countries, take action against Von Steuben for his alleged relationships with other men.

Franklin had a choice here -- and he decided von Steuben's expertise was more important to the colonies than his sexuality. With . . . von Steuben about to be jailed [for his alleged relationships with other men], Franklin, signed a recommendation letter to Gen. Washington [and he was invited to lead the Continental Army at Valley Forge].

At the end of the war Von Steuben gained status as an American citizen and land in New York and New Jersey which he shared with his aide-de-camps Capt. William North and Gen. Benjamin Walker. Additionally, in 1790 von Steuben was granted an annual pension of \$2,500 for his service during the Revolutionary War. Walker lived with him through the remainder of his life, and von Steuben left his estate to Walker. His last will and testament has been described as a love letter to Walker and has been purported to describe their "extraordinarily intense emotional relationship,"

Excerpted from: http://bilerico.lgbtqnation.com/2013/10/the_gay_man_who_saved_the_united_states.php

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Friedrich von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *How did different people respond to Baron von Steuben’s homosexuality?*

Source: Excerpt from Mark Segal, “The Gay Man Who Saved the United States,” *LGBTQ Nation*, October 09, 2013.

Directions: Read the Segal article, complete the chart, and draft a response to the focus question.

Historical Actor	Attitude toward von Steuben	Evidence to Support Claim
French Officials		
Benjamin Franklin		

Baron von Steuben is historically significant because he revealed the enduring issue of _____
_____. Benjamin Franklin, an American patriot, and French officials responded
differently. Franklin _____
while the French _____.

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Friedrich von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *How do current policies surrounding gay soldiers in the military reveal its enduring nature?*

Source: Excerpt from the *Key Dates in U. S. Policy on Gay Men and Women in Military Service* Timeline U.S. Naval Institute.

Context: These dates from the more recent events (1972-2010) of a larger timeline created by the US Naval Institute develop a chronology for the history of gay soldiers in the US military, from the nation's inception to the present. These selected dates trace how the rights of gay men and women in the military have expanded and contracted over time and how the relationship between sexual orientation and military service has been linked.

November 1972 - Army Regulation 635-200 establishes policy for discharging enlisted personnel found to be unfit or unsuitable for duty. Homosexual acts are specifically designated as grounds for dismissal. Enforcement, however, is often left to the discretion of commanders.

January 16, 1981 – The Department of Defense issues Directive 1332.14, stating that "homosexuality is incompatible with military service" and that any service member who has "engaged in, has attempted to engage in, or has solicited another to engage in a homosexual act" will face mandatory discharge.

December, 1988 – In a report commissioned by the Department of Defense, supports the conclusions of the Report that homosexuals pose no significant security risk to military service.

1992 – During his presidential campaign, Governor Bill Clinton promises that, if elected, he would allow military service by all who otherwise qualify to serve – regardless of sexual orientation.

June 12, 1992 – The Government Accounting Office (GAO) released a report estimating that the cost associated for replacing service men and women discharged for homosexuality is \$28,266 for each enlisted member and \$120,772 for each officer.

November 30, 1993 – . . . President Clinton signed into law the current policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" into law. [The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members or applicants, while barring openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from military service.]

2007 – Senator Barack Obama, campaigning for the presidency, pledges that if elected he will repeal the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy within 100 days of taking office and allow gay men and women to serve openly in the military.

December 2010- The "Don't Ask Don't Tell" law is repealed. The Armed Services issue a statement that the repeal which would now allow gay men and women to serve openly in the military would have a minimal negative impact on the military's effectiveness.

Excerpted from: <https://www.usni.org/news-and-features/dont-ask-dont-tell/timeline>

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Friedrich von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *How do current policies surrounding gay soldiers in the military reveal its enduring nature?*

Source: Excerpt from the *Key Dates in U. S. Policy on Gay Men and Women in Military Service* Timeline U.S. Naval Institute.

Directions: Using the dates from the timeline, complete the chart.

<u>Expanded Rights</u>	Enduring Issue <i>What (if any) connection is there to von Steuben?</i>

<u>Contracted Rights</u>	Enduring Issue <i>What (if any) connection is there to von Steuben?</i>

Lesson Question: *Why is Baron Von Steuben historically significant?*

Reading Question: *How should Baron Von Steuben be remembered in United States History?*

Definitions of Historical Significance:

- **Results in Change:** An event, person or development results in change if they had deep consequences for many people over a long period of time.
- **Reveals an Enduring Issue:** An event, person or development is revealing if they shed light on an and enduring issues in history or contemporary life.

<i>How should Baron Von Steuben be remembered in United States History?</i>	
Source 1: <i>Smithsonian Magazine</i>	According to _____ Baron Von Steuben should be remembered because . . .
Source 2: <i>LGBTQ Nation</i>	According to _____ Baron Von Steuben should be remembered because . . .
Draft your argument.	Based upon these two sources, Baron von Steuben should be remembered because . . .