



Contributor: Aryssa Damron **Grade Level:** 9th-12th

1. Identify the standards to be addressed:

Common Core Standards Addressed:

College and Career readiness anchor Standards for reading,

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

2. Statement of the objective and lesson outcomes:

Students will learn about Benjamin Burch, a non-famous Patriot of the American Revolution and use primary, secondary, and compiled sources to learn about him as well as the role that graves and cemeteries play in preserving memory and history.

3. Materials, resources, and technology to be used by teacher/students:

Attached packet and Internet access.

4. Introduction of the topic:

Introduce the topic by reading page 1 of the attached packet providing some background on Benjamin Burch. It is recommended to read it aloud to discuss unfamiliar vocabulary as it arises and make natural connections to history lessons they have had in the past or pop culture of the Revolution they have consumed

5. Procedure for instruction:

Proceed through the attachment packet from Page 2--begin by looking at Burch's grave, answering questions about him, etc. On Page 3, you'll read a transcription of the inscription on his grave and answer comprehension questions about it. Page 4 and 5 look at a transcription and digital archive of a pension letter and provided comprehension questions. Conclude with the reading on grave cleaning and working through a grave cleaning or marking plane as laid out on pages 7 and 8. Break this lesson up into smaller parts as needed.

The lesson concludes with students coming up with their own plan about how to clean a gravestone and a verbal discussion about why we clean gravestones today. We encourage conversation around any personal experiences with grave stones, why it matters that we can read them, etc.

6. Assessment of Understanding:

The instructor can assess student understanding by having them self-grade each other's responses to the comprehension question, or randomly selecting students to share a fact they learned about Burch, graves, or pension letters orally or written.

Who Was Benjamin Burch?



During the American Revolution, men from all over the 13 colonies took up arms to defend their liberty against tyranny from the monarchy overseas. Benjamin Burch was a resident of the colony of Maryland when the war began, and like many other men, he enlisted in the army to help win American independence.

Benjamin Burch served in the U.S. Army until November 1783. His service to his country did not end there. Once the war was over, a Congress was established, and Benjamin Burch served as the “Doorkeeper” of the United States. This meant, essentially, that he served as something between a receptionist and a security guard. He helped ensure that only people who were supposed to be accessing the members of Congress could enter the halls where they were meeting. He would also help keep order on the floor.

Was Benjamin Burch done with service to his country then? He was not. When war broke out with Britain (again) he also served in what would become known as The War of 1812.

Benjamin Burch was married to his wife Rebecca for 48 years! They had at least four children: Martha, Mildred, Samuel, and Verlinda.

Benjamin Burch died in 1832 at the age of 70 and was buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery in NE Washington.

How do we know all this about a man you’ve never read about in any history book?

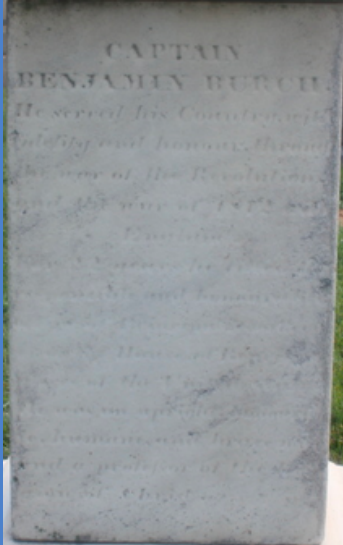
We know from sources like his gravestone, which has an engraved message about his life. We know from his wife Rebecca’s letter to the pension committee after his death. We know because his descendants are members of a genealogical organization, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and they have documents like Bible records, census records, and birth and death certificates tracking his lineage and that of his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Let’s explore some of those sources



Let's Read His Grave

Pictured to the left is Benjamin Burch's grave in Mount Olivet Cemetery in DC! You can go visit it! But it's hard to read, right? Graves are made of stone and are outdoors, so sometimes they get worn down. Pictured to the right is the "Find a Grave" information gathered from this grave by volunteers to help those who cannot visit learn from the gravesite. What can you learn from these two images?



CPT Benjamin Burch

BIRTH 9 May 1761
Prince George's County, Maryland, USA

DEATH 5 May 1832 (aged 70)
Washington, District of Columbia, District of Columbia, USA

BURIAL [Mount Olivet Cemetery](#)
Washington, District of Columbia, District of Columbia, USA

PLOT SECTION 22 Lot: 4 Site: 3rd fm SW

MEMORIAL ID 40738441 · [View Source](#)

SHARE + SAVE TO SUGGEST EDITS

1. When was Burch born?

2. When did Burch die?

3. What do you think is written in the inscription on his stone? We'll look at the real text next--but what do you know about him so far that might be included?

4. What do you know about how graves are cleaned? What would be your first idea for figuring out how to read the text written on the stone if it looked like that?



Inscribed on his grave....

The following text is a transcription of the words inscribed on Burch's grave in Mount Olivet Cemetery. It might have been captured years and years ago, before the stone eroded further. Someone might have laid paper over the text and taken a rubbing, like many students do with crayons and leaves, to see the results more clearly.

"Captain Benjamin Burch. He served his Country with fidelity and honour, throughout the war of the Revolution, and the war of 1812 with England. For 22 years he filled the responsible and honorable office of Doorkeeper of the House of Representatives of the United States. He was an upright, honorable, humane and brave man, and a professor of the Religion of Christ. Through life he possessed the confidence of his fellow citizens in an earnest degree and died it is believed without ever having had a personal enemy on the 5th day of May 1832 aged 71 years."



5. This inscription mentions another job that we did not mention on the first page. What job or profession is that?

6. There is a discrepancy in dates between this inscription and the "Find a Grave" details on page 2. What is the difference?

7. What is your favorite way this inscription describes Burch and what do you think it means about who Burch was to the person or people who wrote this inscription?



Source Evaluation: Pension Letter & Response

Read the below snippet from the pension letter written in 1832 by Rebecca Burch, the widow of Benjamin Burch. Then read the response from Congress and answer the following questions.

Rebecca's Letter: revwarapps.org/w23743.pdf

"I Rebecca Burch aged upwards of Seventy years, for the purpose of availing myself of the benefits of the Second Section of the act of Congress of the 4 of July 1836 entitled "An act th granting half pay to widows or orphans where their husbands and fathers have died of wounds received in the military service of the United States in certain cases and for other purposes" do declare – That Captain Benjamin Burch, deceased, to the best of my knowledge and belief entered into the regular service of the United States in the Revolutionary war, in or about the year 1779, in the Maryland line – and that he continued in service until the war was over & was regularly discharged and returned home – that he entered as a private & as I have been informed & do believe, he held the rank of Sergeant at his discharge, which was in the year 1783."

Congress's Response: www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-00336_00_00-119-0939-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-00336_00_00-119-0939-0000.pdf



Scan to access this resource
online!

"As the money which the husband of the petitioner would have received had he applied therefor, has continued to remain in the Treasury, and continues to remain there, the committee are of opinion that it is proper to pay it to his aged and now helpless widow, especially as she is not embraced under any of the acts granting pensions to widows of revolutionary soldiers, having been married a few months after the termination of the enlistment of her husband"



Pension Sources: Comprehension

Use the two following snippets of sources to answer the following questions about Benjamin Burch, Rebecca, and his life and afterlife.

8. Was Benjamin Burch alive when Rebecca asked for a pension?

9. Were Burch and Rebecca married when he enlisted in the war?

10. Did the committee grant her pension request?

11. Was Benjamin Burch alive when the 2nd section of the pension act was passed?

12. Why did Rebecca write her letter?

13. Were you surprised by the committee's response? Why or why not? Use what you know about 19th century American history, women's rights, and more.

14. Where do they think these documents are stored? Are they personal documents? Are they government documents? Why do you think that?



Final Thoughts: How Do We Remember?

So much of what we know about Benjamin Burch comes from government documents, historical records, and his burial site. How many people who fought in the Revolutionary War are buried near you? It's not as easy to find out as you might think, because graves are made of stone and stones erode, fade, fall over, and get grown over.

Look at this before and after photo of the grave of Benjamin Burch. The "after" photo is after two hours of hard work, in the rain, by members of the Manor House Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The founding Regent, or Chapter President, of the Manor House Chapter was Francis Ballinger. Francis Ballinger was the great-granddaughter of Benjamin Burch.



Quick Tips for Grave Cleaning

KNOW THE STONE

The first thing to know before beginning a gravestone cleaning is what kind of stone you are working with. That will determine your cleaning process, recommended materials, etc. Also ensure the stone is in good enough condition to be cleaned. If it is following over, it should be fixed before you begin cleaning.

REMOVE DETRITUS

Start by removing the visible detritus like moss, weeds, sticks, etc, that can be easily removed by hand or with a gentle tool. Clean up around the edges and in cracks to remove as much as you can by hand before beginning to work with a cleaning agent.

BE GENEROUS WITH WATER

Rough cleaning of a stone or the use of certain materials can harm the stone. Be sure to clean with a non-ionic cleaner, soft brushes, and use lots of water! Always wet the headstone generously before you begin cleaning and scrubbing.

Use the comparison photos and the graphic about grave cleaning, and then flip the page. On the next page, you'll see a grave that needs a lot of work. Come up with three ideas for what to do in what order to make this grave more legible to people who want to learn from it.



My Grave Cleaning Plan



What is your first step?

What is your second step?

What is your third step?



Further Resources for Learning

BENJAMIN BURCH & HIS WARS

- <https://revwarapps.org/w23743.pdf>
- <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40738441/benjamin-burch>
- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/revolutionary-war-veteran-and-widow-pensions.htm>
- <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2015/summer/rev-war-pensions.html>
- <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/timeline/>
- <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/burning-washington-dc>
- <https://www.senate.gov/about/officers-staff/sergeant-at-arms/sergeant-at-arms-overview.htm>
- <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/big-idea-7-remembering-the-veterans-of-the-revolutionary-war>

GRAVE CLEANING & MEMORY IN CEMETERIES

- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/cemetery-preservation-course-cleaning-grave-markers.htm#:~:text=Even%20with%20the%20most%20careful,h arsh%20cleaners%2C%20such%20as%20bleach.>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WdUSzKcmjs>
- <https://cemeteryconservatorsunitedstandards.org/standards/cleaning/>
- <https://www.thetelegraph.com/news/article/grave-rubbing-steps-history-18373547.php>
- <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/Notable-Graves/Revolutionary-War>
- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/tomb-of-the-unknown-revolutionary-war-soldier.htm>
- <https://congressionalcemetery.org/2022/09/05/6-reasons-why-we-use-headstones/>
- <https://congressionalcemetery.org/2022/08/01/get-to-know-your-ancestry-through-cemetery-records/>