



**Contributor:** Barbra Genter Davis **Grade Level:** 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>

**1. Identify the standards to be addressed:**

**Social Studies:** U3.2 The American Revolution and Its Consequences Explain the multi-faceted nature of the American Revolution and its consequences.

5 – U3.2.1 Describe the advantages and disadvantages of each side during the American Revolution with respect to military leadership, geography, types of resources, and incentives. (National Geography Standard 4, p. 150, E)

5 – U3.2.3 Compare the role of women, African Americans, American Indians, and France in helping shape the outcome of the war.

*Reading - Key Ideas and Details:*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2

Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.3

Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

*Craft and Structure:*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6

Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

*Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8

Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

**Writing -** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

## **2. Statement of the objective and lesson outcomes:**

The students will develop an understanding and appreciation of sacrifices made by American citizens during the Revolutionary War. The main focus will be on those who were held captive in British prisons, especially in New York, and one woman who supplied food for prisoners and assisted with their escape.

The students will analyze primary source documents that illustrate the efforts of New York colonist, Elizabeth Burgin, in easing the suffering of American prisoners of war during the American Revolution. Using an historical fiction mentor text excerpt and three primary source letters, the students will begin to understand the sacrifices made by Elizabeth Burgin, due to her decision to assist imprisoned American soldiers and patriots.

The students will write a letter of response to Elizabeth (based on Primary Source #2 or Primary Source #3) from the perspective of General George Washington or the perspective of the Continental Congress, in answer to her letters of concern, request, or petition.

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

1. Mentor text: Meyers, Anna. *The Keeping Room*. Puffin Books. New York, NY. ISBN 97801413046871997, pp. 71-85. Available through most libraries.
2. Illustration of the Sugar House Prison in New York City (below)
3. Photos of original Sugar House window in New York City (below)
4. Illustration of Elizabeth Burgin (below)
5. Article about Elizabeth Burgin for students (below)
6. Primary Source #1: Letter from Elizabeth Burgin to Rev. James Calville - Nov. 19, 1779 (below)
7. Primary Source #2: Letter from Elizabeth Burgin to General Washington - Mar. 16, 1780 ( below)
8. Primary Source #3: Petition for Elizabeth Burgin to the Continental Congress - July 2, 1781 (below)
9. Letter template (below)

## **4. Introduction of the topic:**

During the course of the American Revolution, thousands of Americans gave their lives in defense of their rights and in fighting for the freedom to create and govern their own newly created country. While students are able to grasp the loss of American lives on the battlefield, they generally do not consider the fact that the majority of American soldiers who died during the American Revolution lost their lives due to disease, exposure, and starvation. Many of these deaths were preventable, yet the British, who held thousands of men as prisoners of war, chose to allow these men to die agonizing deaths in prisons in New York City and on ships in New York Harbor. This lesson will focus on the bravery of one woman, who was known to bring comfort and aid to these men, and who helped facilitate the escape of 200 American prisoners of war.

During the American Revolution, between 1775-1783, as many as 18,000 Americans, both military and civilian, perished in British prisons in New York City and on prison ships in New York Harbor. The number of British prison deaths was up to three times higher than the total number of deaths that Americans suffered in combat during the war. The overall mortality rate among these prisoners has been estimated between 60-70% of the total prison detainees. The atrocities suffered by the American prisoners in the Sugar House Prison in New York City (as well as on prison ships in New York Harbor) were due to filthy, unsanitary conditions, lack of clean (if any) water, vast overcrowding (up to 800 prisoners being housed in a single prison building, with as many as 20 men occupying one cell), corruption of British commanders

and prison guards, beatings, open roofs allowing in rain and cold, starvation, moldy, rotten food, infestation of ticks and lice, slop buckets and necessary tubs overflowing, diseases such as typhus, dysentery, smallpox, and scurvy, as well as rampant vermin that feasted on the bodies of the sick and dying. Among the American civilian patriots were those who tried to ease the suffering of the men being held captive. One of these civilians was a woman from New York named Elizabeth Burgin. While information about her life is quite limited, her name appears in primary source letters and petitions in which her heroic actions are recognized and rewarded by General George Washington, the Continental Congress, and soldiers who gained their freedom by her efforts.

## **5. Procedure for instruction.**

1. Discuss outcomes of American Revolutionary battles in New York, focusing on the number of American prisoners captured by the British Army.
2. Highlight the fact that the majority of these American prisoners lost their lives, not due to combat, but due to disease, exposure, and starvation.
3. Explain that many of the American deaths occurred while they were being held in British prisons, especially those located in buildings in New York City and on ships in New York Harbor.
4. To illustrate the deplorable conditions in these prisons, read aloud an excerpt from Anna Meyer's historical fiction novel, The Keeping Room. Read pages 71-85, which describe the conditions of the main character's father in one of the prisons.
5. Show students the illustration of the Rhinelander Sugar House Building and photos of the Sugar House Prison Window in New York City.
6. Introduce the students to American colonist Elizabeth Burgin. Read with the students the short background article about her contributions to the American soldiers who were held captive in British prisons during the American Revolution. Show illustration of Elizabeth Burgin bringing food to imprisoned American soldiers.
7. Introduce students to the first primary source document: A letter from Elizabeth Burgin to Rev. James Calville, dated November 19, 1779. Read the content of the letter together in order to help students to understand Elizabeth's concerns.
8. Model for students how to create a fictional reply in response to Elizabeth's letter, as if written from Rev. Calville's point of view. Model the use of key-words and textual evidence from the original primary source document.
9. Introduce the next two primary source documents: Letter from Elizabeth Burgin to General Washington, dated Mar. 16, 1780, and a petition to the Continental Congress on Elizabeth's behalf, dated July 2, 1781.
10. After analyzing Primary Source Documents #2 and #3, the students will discuss the contents of each document with a partner or small groups. Students will compare/contrast the content of the two letters.
11. The students will write a response, in the form of a letter, to Elizabeth (as if George Washington) or a response to Elizabeth (as if the response was coming from members of the Continental Congress). The letter should be written from the point of view of the respondent. Students should use key-words and textual evidence in their written responses.

**6. Lesson closure:** The students will share and discuss their written responses with other students, either in partnerships, small groups, or the whole class.

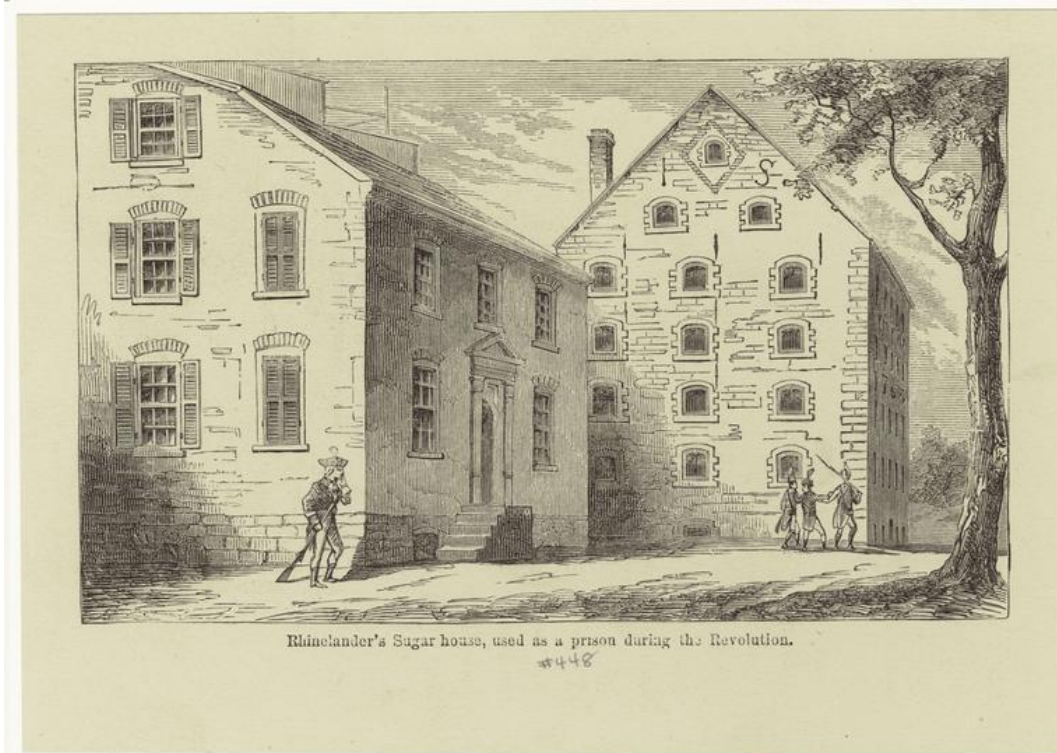
## **7. Assessment of Understanding:**

The students will be assessed on their collaboration with a learning partner or small groups in discussing Primary Sources #2 and #3.

The students will be assessed on their written response in the form of a letter to George Washington or to the members of the Continental Congress.

By the end of the lesson, students will have a better understanding of the sacrifices made during the American Revolution, both by the soldiers who fought, were captured, and in many cases, died, but also of the sacrifices made by ordinary citizens, such as Elizabeth Burgin, in working to help these imprisoned men, and to secure the liberties and freedoms of our new country.

Resource Materials With Citations:



<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-2781-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>



Personal photos taken of the Sugar House Prison Window in New York City, June 25, 2017.



**SUGAR HOUSE - PRISON WINDOW**

This window was originally part of the five story Sugar House built in 1763 at the corner of Doane and Rose Streets and used by the British during the Revolutionary War as a prison for American Patriots.

The Sugar House was demolished in 1892 and replaced by the Rhinelander Building incorporating this window into the facade as an historical artifact.

The Rhinelander Building was demolished in 1968 and the site is now occupied by Police Headquarters.

JOHN V. LINDLAY  
2010

[https://www.google.com/search?q=sugar+house+prison>window&rlz=1CAHPZV\\_enUS749&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjWnJvDj-LUAhVMPT4KHQVXAYYQ\\_AUICigB&biw=1366&bih=654&safe=active&ssui=on#imgrc=DxRzla4y8PAj9M:](https://www.google.com/search?q=sugar+house+prison>window&rlz=1CAHPZV_enUS749&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjWnJvDj-LUAhVMPT4KHQVXAYYQ_AUICigB&biw=1366&bih=654&safe=active&ssui=on#imgrc=DxRzla4y8PAj9M:)

## Illustration of Elizabeth Burgin Bringing Food to American Prisoners During the American Revolution



[https://www.google.com/search?q=elizabeth+burgin+american+revolution&rlz=1CAHPZV\\_enUS749&source=lms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjkunwjeLUAhWlbt4KHYomCpMQ\\_AUICygC&biw=1366&bih=654&safe=active&ssui=on#imgrc=bEm2aJ4cq7PujM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=elizabeth+burgin+american+revolution&rlz=1CAHPZV_enUS749&source=lms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjkunwjeLUAhWlbt4KHYomCpMQ_AUICygC&biw=1366&bih=654&safe=active&ssui=on#imgrc=bEm2aJ4cq7PujM:)

### Article for Students - Background Information about Elizabeth Burgin

Little is known about Elizabeth Burgin except that she played a significant role in aiding American soldiers who were prisoners of the British during the Revolutionary War.

During the Revolutionary War, the British held many American prisoners-of-war in prisons in New York City and on prison ships in the New York Harbor. In the prisons and on the ships, the quarters were crowded and the prisoners were given little food or water. Diseases like smallpox and yellow fever spread easily and over seven thousand prisoners died while in the prisons and on the ships.

A resident of New York, Burgin was able to help the prisoners by visiting them and bringing them food. One evening when she returned home from visiting a prison, an American officer asked to meet with her about a plan to help the prisoners escape. The officer wanted Burgin to alert the prisoners to be ready for the escape and to help with the plan of smuggling them out of the prison. Burgin complied and helped more than 200 prisoners escape over the next several weeks. Because of her part, the British offered a two hundred pound reward for her capture. This amount was equal to twenty years of pay for a British soldier, so there was a great incentive for them to try to capture her. Burgin narrowly escaped being captured and left the area. Burgin wrote to General George Washington, asking for his help now that the British had all of her possessions.

General Washington wrote to the Continental Congress about Burgin's role:

*"Regarding Elizabeth Burgin, recently an inhabitant of New York. From the testimony of our own (escaped) officers...it would appear that she has been indefatigable for the relief of the prisoners, and for the facilitation of their escape. For this conduct she incurred the suspicion of the British, and was forced to make her escape under disturbing circumstances."*

In 1781, the Continental Congress awarded Burgin with a pension for her part in helping the Patriots' cause.

[www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/elizabeth-burgin/](http://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/elizabeth-burgin/)

### Primary Source #1

Letter from Elizabeth Burgin to Reverend James Calville, November 19, 1779, Papers of the Continental Congress, National Archives, Washington, DC. Images of the manuscript are on line at:

<http://research.archives.gov/description/5916026> . This letter, with spelling somewhat improved, reads:

Elizabeth Town November 19 1779

July 17th being sent for by General Patterson, suspectd for helping the American prisoners to make their escape. George Hiblay coming from your Excellency the week before, and carried out Major Van Burah, Captain Crane, Lt. Lee, who had made their escape from the guard on Long Island, George Higby brought a paper to me from your Aide directed to Col Magaw on Long Island, he the said George Higby being taken up, and confined in the Provost guard, his wife told General Patterson that he carried out two hundred American prisoners for me, for which reason knowing myself guilty I secreted myself for two weeks in New York understanding that General Patterson had offered a bounty of two hundred pounds for taking me, he kept a guard five days at my house letting nobody come in our out. Through the behalf of friends I got on Long Island and there staid five weeks. William Scudder came to Long Island in a whale boat, and I made my escape with him, we being chased by two boats half way the sound, then got to New England, and came to Philadelphia. Then I got a pass of the Board of war to go to Elizabeth Town to try to get my children from New York, which I obtained in three or four weeks, but could not get my Cloaths or anything but my Children. When application was made by Mr. John Franklin my Cloaths and furniture, they should be sold, and the money be given to the Loyalists.



I am now sir, very desolate, without money, without Cloaths or friends to go to. I mean to go to Philadelphia, where God knows how I shall live, a cold winter coming on. For the truth of the above your Excellency can enquire of Major John Stewart, or Col. Thomas Thomas. I lived opposite Mr. John Franklins, and by their desire make this application. If your Excellency please you can direct to Mr. Thomas Franklin in Philadelphia where I can be found. If the General thinks proper I should be glad to draw provision for myself and Children in Philadelphia, where I mean to remain. Helping our poor prisoners brought me to want, which I don't repent.

Elizabeth Burgin

<https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/09/elizabeth-burgin-helps-the-prisoners-somehow/>

## Primary Source #2

### To George Washington from Elizabeth Burgin, 16 March 1780

Philada March the 16 1780

Kind General

When I Vew the Kind Prvidence of God in Delivering me Throw to many Dificultys I think I Canot Give him Sufficient Praise At the Same Time I Feel a hart Full of Gratitude For the Many Favours I have Recevd From Your Excelency your Order: For Rations for my Self and Children are Punktily Obeyd Wich is Great Releif to me in A Strange Place I Recev'd a Kind Letter From Your Aidicamp Informing me that your Excelency had Recomend me to the honorable Continential Congress—Congress have Refferd me to the Board of War In Whose house I now Live Rent Free & in Some Measure as Comfortable As one under my Distitute Situation Could Expect I Should Be Glad to See a French Fleett Surrounding New York By Watter & the Brave Americans Storming the Lines By Land & Were I a man I Think I Should not Want Courage to Be one of the Foremost in Mounting one of their Strongest Fortreses Pardon me Dear Sir For these Expressions Probaly an Annesity of mind For the home Were I Lived Comfortably With my Children Caused me to Drop Them & Tho I Beleive With an Unshaken Faith that if Those Creatures Who now Poses New York Dont Sneak of as they Did From Boston Philada & Rode lland the Will one Day or Other Be Cannonaded out in the mean Time I Should Be Glad I Were Able to Putt my Self in Some Way of Bussiness to Suport mySelf Children Without Being Chargeable to Congress receipt of my hearty Thank For all the Favours I have Received thus With my Prayrs For your Welfare I Conclude & Make Bold to Subscribe My Self Your Excelency Most Obeedent Humble Servant

Elizabeth Burgin

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-01137>

### Primary Source #3

“The Petition of Elizabeth Burgin to Congress,” July 2, 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress. Images of the manuscript are on line at: <http://www.fold3.com/image/434831/> and <http://www.fold3.com/image/1/434835/> . Her petition reads:

2 July 1781, Philadelphia

The Petition of Elizabeth Burgin to Congress –

That your Petitioner was a resident of New York, where she possessed everything comfortable about her, till the summer 1779 when she was rendered so obnoxious to the British Commanders, by her exertions in the service of the American Prisoners there, that she was at first under the necessity of concealing herself, & afterwards of flying in disguise to the people, an attachment to whose cause, had reduced her to a situation so unsuitable to her sex & age. What those exertions are, the services she rendered her country were, she leaves to be told by others. Mr. Franklin & General McDougall are not unacquainted with them, & His Excellency General Washington was sensible of them. That he addressed Congress in her favour, and at the same time gave her an Order to draw Rations for herself & three small Children, till the pleasure of Congress was known. The Letter was referred to the Board of War, who kindly permitted her to occupy part of the House where the Office is kept, & have in some other respects assisted her, but her chief Dependance being on getting her rations, which from the scarcity of provisions, she could not at all times obtain, she was often obliged to sell part of what little property she had left to remove the misery and want of her hapless Family. As she wishes not to be troublesome or expensive to the United States, she humbly conceives if the Honble Congress would be pleased to direct her full employment in cutting out the linen into shirts, purchased in this city for the army, it would afford her a maintenance, until a happy change of affairs will permit her to return with safety to her native place.

<https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/09/elizabeth-burgin-helps-the-prisoners-somehow/>

