INTRODUCTION
During the Revolutionary War, a variety of methods were used to gather information about the enemy or to disrupt the enemy’s activities, including military intelligence, counterintelligence, deception, and propaganda.

OBJECTIVES
As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:
1. Examine several accounts of American and British espionage during the American Revolution.
2. Determine what motivated an individual to be a spy.
3. Analyze the success or failure of a spy’s actions.
4. Explain how espionage affected the outcome of the American Revolution.

STANDARDS OF LEARNING
This lesson meets the National Standards of Learning in the areas of historical issues-analysis and decision making.

MATERIALS
Situation Cards 1–12
The Matrix Graphic Organizer

SETTING THE STAGE
Ask students what comes to mind when they hear the word “spy.” Conduct a class discussion by asking students to think about inviting imaginary Revolutionary War spies into the classroom. What would they look like? What kind of clothing would they wear? What items would they carry? [Note to teacher: The discussion will probably lead to stereotypical answers—for instance, a man, a soldier, wearing a uniform, wearing black clothing, carrying a pistol or other weapon. By the time students complete this lesson they should realize, however, that spying involved citizens of all descriptions and from all walks of life.]

STRATEGY
1. Divide the class into small groups. Distribute a copy of The Matrix Graphic Organizer to each student. Demonstrate the use of the Graphic Organizer by working through Situation 1.

Distribute two Situation Cards to each group. Have the groups complete the remainder of their Graphic Organizers, using their Situation Cards. [Note to teacher: If you wish, each group may examine more than two Situation Cards. It is perfectly acceptable for more than one group to receive the same Situation Card.]

2. Conduct a class discussion about the information students gleaned from their Situation Cards. In addition to those on the Graphic Organizer, the following questions may be used:
   • Were they working in an official capacity or did they work on their own?
   • Were they working alone or as part of a group?
   • For whom did they spy?
LESSON EXTENSIONS

1. Students may research and study more recent spy and espionage situations such as:
   - The Rosenbergs
   - Gary Powers
   - The Falcon and the Snowman
   - Aldrich Ames
   - Robert Hansen

2. A “Who am I?” activity may be used in which brief biographical descriptions of spies are presented in a multiple-choice format. This activity may be a quiz or take-home activity.

3. Students may work in pairs or small groups to role-play an event from the Situation Cards. One possible role-play is General Charles Cornwallis’s signing the British surrender at Yorktown and being shocked to see James Armistead, in an American uniform, standing behind General George Washington.

“The AMERICAN RATTLESNAKE,” by James Gillray, London, England, April 12, 1782. This print depicts the American forces as a rattlesnake with British forces trapped within its coils. The text on either side of the title reads: “Britons within the Yankeean Plains, Mind how ye March & Trench, The Serpent in the Congress reigns, As well as in the French.”
SITUATION 1

After the British seized control of New York City in the fall of 1776, George Washington directed the activities of numerous spies there. Of particular note was a network of about twenty spies known as the Culper Ring. This network, established in the summer of 1778, was managed by Major Benjamin Tallmadge of the 2nd Connecticut Light Dragoons. Tallmadge operated from an outpost on the Hudson River above the city. The Culper Ring was the most professional of Washington’s agent networks, using code names, secret writing, enciphered communications, couriers, dead drops, signal sites, and specific collection requirements.

The most important piece of intelligence obtained by the Culper Ring came in July 1780. A network member known to this day only as “Lady” reported that British General Sir Henry Clinton was planning to send British troops by sea from New York City to Newport, Rhode Island, to attack newly arrived French forces under the command of General Rochambeau. The French troops had been at sea for two months, and Clinton wanted to attack them before they recovered from the trip.

Washington immediately created a plan for a fictitious attack on New York City. He had the plans delivered to a British outpost by a local farmer, who claimed to have found them on a nearby road. In the meantime, Washington also marched his army toward New York City as further evidence that he was preparing to launch an attack there. Faced with the visible American army movements, Clinton concluded that an attack was imminent and recalled troops to strengthen the city’s defenses. Lady’s intelligence and Washington’s deception saved the French troops from attack and enabled them to later to join the American forces.

SITUATION 2

In 1781, James Armistead, a slave, received his master’s permission to join American forces under the command of French General Marquis de Lafayette. Impressed with James’s intelligence and good memory, Lafayette sent James across British General Cornwallis’s lines to gather information on weapons and troop placements and troop strength. James, pretending to be an escaped slave, was recruited by Cornwallis to return to American lines as a British spy. Lafayette gave him a fake message supposedly intended for a large number of patriot replacements—a force that did not exist. Armistead delivered the message in crumpled, dirty condition to Cornwallis, claiming to have found it along the road during his spy mission. Cornwallis believed him and did not learn he had been tricked until it was too late. After the British surrender at Yorktown, Cornwallis visited Lafayette’s headquarters where he was shocked to see James, who he still thought was his spy, wearing an American uniform.

Armistead was granted his freedom by the Virginia Legislature as a result of this and other intelligence service. He later took the name James Armistead Lafayette in honor of his former commander, the Marquis de Lafayette.

SITUATION 3

After receiving accurate intelligence that the British were hiring Hessian mercenaries for service in America, the Continental Congress appointed a three-man committee “to devise a plan for encouraging the Hessians and other foreigners . . . to quit that iniquitous service.” The result was a resolution, possibly drafted by Thomas Jefferson, offering land grants to German deserters. Benjamin Franklin arranged for the leaflets to be translated into German, to be disguised as tobacco packets, and to fall into the hands of ordinary Hessian soldiers. George Washington sent Christopher Ludwick, posing as a deserter, into the Hessian camp to encourage them to defect. He is credited with the defection of “many hundred soldiers” from the German ranks.
SITUATION 4
The American Committee of Secret Correspondence realized the necessity of gathering information regarding developments in other countries that could affect the Revolution. With that in mind the committee instructed the first intelligence “agent,” Dr. Arthur Lee, a physician living in London, that “it is considered of utmost consequence to the cause of liberty that the Committee be kept informed of developments in Europe.” Another agent, Mr. Dumas, a Swiss journalist in The Hague, the Netherlands, was given instructions regarding the use of cover names and letter drops that would allow him to secretly communicate with the committee and Dr. Lee. A third agent, Silas Deane, was sent to France with instructions to quietly purchase supplies while attempting to obtain secret assistance from the French government.

SITUATION 5
After Benedict Arnold turned traitor, George Washington wanted him captured alive so Arnold could be publicly hanged for his activities. Washington said, “Public punishment is the sole object in view.” To this end, Sergeant Major John Champe of Virginia was assigned to “desert” to the British. Because of the need for secrecy, the American troops were not informed of his mission. As a result, Champe deserted under a hail of American gunfire. The official documents he carried, and his cooperation during interrogation, convinced the British that he was on their side. Champe, wearing a British uniform and having been given freedom of movement in British-occupied New York, made contact with American agents and laid plans for Arnold’s capture. Arnold’s troops embarked for Virginia on the night the operation was to take place, and the plan was cancelled. A later attempt to capture Arnold was ruined by the presence of British ships in the area. Arnold was never captured or punished by the Americans.

SITUATION 6
James Aitken, a house painter, carried out the only American sabotage operation in England. After obtaining a passport from the French foreign minister, he arrived in Dover, England, with crude plans to destroy Royal dockyards. He used an incendiary device of his own design to start devastating fires. He attacked the Portsmouth dockyard on the afternoon of December 7, 1776, by starting a fire that burned until the next morning, destroying tons of British supplies. In Bristol, he burned two warehouses and several houses. By January 1777, the British cabinet met in emergency session and urged immediate measures to capture the mysterious “John the Painter.” The British offered a reward of £1,000, and newspapers reported panic throughout England. Aitken was soon arrested, with a pistol and inflammables in his possession. He refused to admit to the sabotage, but after describing his actions to an American visitor who was secretly a British agent, Aitken was tried and found guilty. On March 10, 1777, Aitken went to the gallows at Portsmouth, where his exploits had begun.

SITUATION 7
Enoch Crosby, a veteran of the Continental Army, was mistakenly thought to be a loyalist by a Westchester County, New York, tory. He confided to Crosby about a loyalist militia company that was being formed. Crosby joined the company, gathered information about them, pretended to be captured by the Americans so he could give them the information, and then managed to “escape” and infiltrate yet another tory military unit. The second unit was captured, and Crosby was able to “escape” yet again. He repeated this operation two more times before tory suspicions made it necessary for him to retire from this counterintelligence work.
SITUATION 8
In the summer of 1781, Washington was anxious to learn of British activity in New York City. Sergeant Daniel Bissell was ordered to make his way into the city, avoiding press gangs and armed patrols, and pose as a Continental Army deserter. He joined Benedict Arnold’s Loyalist troops in New York. For over a year, Bissell gathered detailed information on British fortifications and the size, placement, and operations of British forces in the city and harbor.
While hospitalized during the winter of 1782, Bissell learned of Arnold’s plan to raid and burn New London, but he had no way to get the information to Washington. When he recovered enough to leave the hospital, Bissell was reassigned as a quartermaster sergeant, moving supplies to various British units. He used the opportunity to fulfill his mission to gather information on major British positions. A short time later, Bissell received permission to go on a foraging expedition on Staten Island with another American and a boy, and all three escaped to American lines. For his actions, Bissell became the third recipient of George Washington’s Badge of Military Merit, the highest order of military merit presented during the Revolutionary War.

SITUATION 9
Haym Solomon, a wealthy businessman and recent Jewish immigrant, worked as a stay-behind agent after George Washington evacuated American forces from New York City in September 1776. He was arrested by the British as a patriotic sympathizer and confined to Sugar House Prison. Solomon, who spoke several European languages, was soon released to the custody of General von Heister, commander of the German mercenaries, who needed someone to serve as a German-language interpreter. While in German custody, Solomon encouraged a number of the German soldiers to resign or desert the British army. Eventually paroled by the British, Solomon continued to work as an undercover agent, using his own money to aid American patriot prisoners in New York. He was arrested again in 1778, accused of being an accomplice in a plot to burn the British fleet and warehouses in the city, and condemned to death for sabotage. He bribed his guard while awaiting execution, however, and escaped to Philadelphia. After his escape, he openly used his money to help finance the Revolution. Solomon died in 1785, with the government owing him more than $700,000 in unpaid loans.

SITUATION 10
James Rivington, a successful American agent in New York City, was the king’s printer. He was never suspected by the British to be an American spy because he consistently published antipatriotic content in his newspaper. Meanwhile, he gathered invaluable information from customers in his coffeehouse—especially from high-ranking British military officers. Accounts from the period suggest that Rivington supported the American cause solely out of the money it paid him, yet he “proved faithful to his bargain, and often would provide intelligence of great importance.” Rivington’s greatest espionage achievement was acquiring the Royal Navy’s signal book for the Americans in 1781. That intelligence helped the French fleet repel British ships attempting to relieve General Charles Cornwallis’s forces at Yorktown, Virginia.
SITUATION 11
Lydia Barrington Darragh, a resident of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, successfully eavesdropped on the British officers who occupied her home. The Darraghs, insisting that they had nowhere else to go, offered the first floor of their home to the British if they would allow the family to continue living on the second floor. The British, assuming that since the Darraghs were Quakers they were neutral in the Revolutionary War, accepted the proposed arrangement. When British officers met in the house, Mrs. Darragh hid in a nearby closet and took notes. Her husband, William, transcribed the information into a form of shorthand on tiny slips of paper that Lydia hid in buttons that were sewn onto the coat of her fourteen-year-old son John. John was then sent to visit his older brother, Charles, in the American encampment outside the city. Charles snipped off the buttons, removed and transcribed the notes, and gave the information to his officers.

SITUATION 12
Ann Bates was a teacher and loyalist spy in Philadelphia. She and her husband, a gunsmith who repaired British artillery, were devoted loyalists during the American Revolution. Sometime in 1778, after her husband joined the British army, Ann managed to obtain a pass to travel to New York. Once in New York, Bates began spying for the British under the command of Major John André. André sent Bates to Washington’s camp at White Plains, New York. Disguised as a peddler, she moved freely among the Continental soldiers, selling them odds and ends, while gathering detailed information about the number of artillery pieces, military supplies, and troop movements, strength, and morale. André sent Bates’s reports to General Sir Henry Clinton, the British commander in New York City.

It was Bates who learned that Marquis de Lafayette had joined Washington and had been dispatched to Rhode Island to await the arrival of a French fleet. Armed with this information, Clinton doubled his garrison and strengthened the fortifications at Newport, Rhode Island. Bates also reportedly acted as a go-between in the early stages of communication that led to Benedict Arnold’s meeting with André.

In 1780, André accompanied Clinton to South Carolina, taking Bates with him and continued to use her as a spy in various military campaigns in South Carolina. In 1781, just before the collapse of the British forces, Bates and her husband sailed for England where they took up permanent residence.

# The Matrix Graphic Organizer

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<th>Situation #</th>
<th>Who was involved?</th>
<th>What was the situation?</th>
<th>What method of espionage was being used?</th>
<th>What was the intended outcome?</th>
<th>Was it successful?</th>
<th>Who ultimately benefited from the action?</th>
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We at Colonial Williamsburg would enjoy receiving copies of some of your students’ work from any of the lesson plans in this packet. If you would care to share examples, please send them to:

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