

# Lesson 2: The French and Indian War

## ***Concept Question:***

- Throughout the French and Indian War, what were the British fighting for? What were the French fighting for? What were the Native Americans fighting for?
- Why isn't the artistic portrayal of "The Death of General Wolfe" by Benjamin West a credible representation of the actual event?

## ***Topical Essential Question:***

- How do you know if a primary source is trustworthy, unbiased, and credible?

## ***Overarching Essential Questions:***

- What are the causes of the American Revolution?

## ***Learning Objectives***

- Students will read and annotate a summary of the French and Indian War.
- Students will analyze, interpret, and challenge the trustworthiness of Benjamin West's painting, "The Death of General Wolf."
- Students will learn to question the credibility of primary and secondary sources.

***Do Now:***

Are all primary sources trustworthy? Why or why not?

***When we think about historical events, like wars, why is it important to think about other things that happened around the same time? Give an example.***

The French and Indian War, also called the Seven Years War by the English, was part of a major struggle between European powers. It took place both across the continents of Europe and North America and involved France, England, Russia, Prussia, Spain, and others. The war began because Britain felt they needed to prevent the French from gaining control over trade and territories that the British thought were rightfully theirs. In North America, combat took place over a large span of land and included battles in Canada, through Western Pennsylvania, and all the way to the Mississippi River. This war included the first major military experience of George Washington and the first use of colonial militia. It ended with the British control of North America. However, the French and Indian War was also very expensive and contributed to the conflict between the British and their American colonies.



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

George Washington as Captain in the French and Indian War, by Junius Brutus Stearns, oil on canvas, circa 1849-1856.

***Why did the French and Indian War begin?***

***Why did the British think the territory in North America was “rightfully theirs”?***

***Using context clues, what is a “colonial militia”?***

***How did the French and Indian War end?***

***Why did the French and British both want control over the Ohio River Valley and the Mississippi River Valley?***

***Why causes war to be officially declared?***

***Why was the beginning phase of the war unsuccessful for Britain?***

***Why do you think Indigenous people fought with the French and not the British?***

The War, which began in 1754, was the fourth colonial conflict between England and France. Unlike the three previous conflicts, this one began in America. French and British soldiers butted heads over control of the Ohio Valley. The Ohio Valley was important because it provided fur traders access to cities and ports on the East Coast. This business was very profitable. Another desired territory was the Mississippi River Valley, the entry point to the frontier in the west.

Troops were sent out to protect valuable territories from French control. Early on, a squadron of British and American soldiers, led by a bold but unknown twenty-two year old named George Washington, attacked the French at Fort Duquesne. Soon after the attack, though, Washington's troops surrendered to the French. The French also defeated a second British military force squadron. When this news reached England, a war was officially declared. Americans would call this the French and Indian War.

The first phase of this war was very unsuccessful for Britain. When their troops attempted attacks on the French, they ended in defeat over and over again. The British were afraid of the French and their Indian allies because their attacks were brutal and they burned and destroyed settlements in their path. Eventually, the French destroyed a settlement within sixty miles of Philadelphia, a central city in the American colonies. Americans were disheartened. They believed that Britain was not making the proper commitment to protect them or the North American territory.

***What was the turning point of the French and Indian War?***

***Who was James Wolfe and what did he do?***

***f you were a colonist, how would you feel during the French and Indian War?***



British Secretary of State William Pitt helped turn the tide against the French. He is also the namesake of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The turning point in the war came when the British asked William Pitt to take over wartime operations. Pitt believed control of North America was critical to England as a world power. In other words, he felt they could not afford to lose the war. Pitt committed more troops to the war and replaced old leaders with young ones. He also gave control of recruitment and supplies to local authorities in the colonies and promised to pay them for their work.

British luck started changing with their capture of the city of Louisbourg in Canada. They blocked the St. Lawrence Seaway, which stopped all French trade to inland towns and the frontier. Then, the British struck a final blow to the French cause in Quebec in 1759. British Commander James Wolfe bravely sent his forces up a rocky hill to surprise the French. In the battle that followed on the Plains of Abraham, both Wolfe and the French commander were killed. The British gained control over this important territory. They continued to be successful in battle after that, conquering Montreal as well. Ultimately the British gained control of the territories at stake, and thus the

French chapter in North American history was over.

***What is this image depicting?***

***Who do you think the focal person of the painting is?***

***What is the story Benjamin West is telling in this painting?***

***Why do you think Benjamin West depicted the battle in this way?***



*“The same truth that guides the pen of the historian should govern the pencil (paintbrush of the artist.”*

What does this quote mean?

**Exit slip.**

Why are many primary sources exaggerated, biased, and untruthful representations of historical events? How can historians interpret primary sources to understand the full picture?