

Jan Turnquist:

Phebe Emerson: Eyewitness to a Revolution

Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



About the Performance

Join Phebe Emerson on April 19, 1775 – the fateful day when the Redcoats marched into Concord from Lexington. Mrs. Emerson, the wife of Concord's minister in 1775, witnessed the famous battle that took place on that day. Phebe brings a fresh perspective to this historical event, discusses how the townspeople felt about the American Revolution, and reviews the events leading up to it. The grandmother of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Phebe gives students a sense of daily life in Colonial America and provides an informational foundation for understanding the “flowering of New England” during the 19th century. Programs are tailored to the grade level and may be adjusted to meet your needs.



About the Artist

An accomplished actress and historian, and executive director of Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House in Concord, MA, Jan Turnquist brings Alcott and other important women from American History vividly to life. In her performances, she comes in character and full historical dress, tells stories full of audience participation, and answers student questions, providing a unique and insightful experience of history. Jan has presented her work under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Federal Women's Council, the National Park Service, and Continental Airlines and has performed at numerous libraries, schools, and universities. She has also appeared on the BBC, PBS, and WCVB.

Program Learning Goals

1. To study historical and personal contexts for the American Revolution.
2. To explore an example of a courageous and accomplished woman.
3. To enrich dramatic arts experience with a unique blend of stage drama and living history, which encourages student participation.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to learn from historical figures?
2. How is "meeting" a historical figure different from learning about them in books or movies?
3. Why is it important to tell stories about the past and historical events?

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Pre-Performance Note for Teachers

This is a performance of living history. Jan Turnquist will be in character as Phebe Emerson for the entire time she is interacting with students and refer to herself as “Mrs. Emerson.”

Please read and discuss the “Pre-Performance Note for Students” to prepare students for what to expect and how to interact with Mrs. Emerson. Be sure to focus on the phrase “willing suspension of disbelief.” This will enable students to take a more active role in the performance.

Before the performance starts, please have the teacher/principal giving the introduction check in with Jan briefly.

Pre-Performance Note for Students

Phebe Emerson will visit us in a living history program on _____.

Like a play, living history involves actors and requires the willing suspension of disbelief by its viewers. Phebe Emerson lived from 1741-1825 and although she will be played by an actress for this visit, please treat her as if she is the real Mrs. Emerson.

Unlike a regular play, living history allows the audience to be a part of the performance. You are invited to respond to Mrs. Emerson’s conversation, but please do not feel pressured to do so. You do not need to be an expert on the 1700s and only need to be yourself.

In her visit, Mrs. Emerson will tell you about her life as a minister’s wife in Concord, Massachusetts and how she watched the famous fight at the bridge on the very first day of the American Revolution, April 19, 1775. She will know nothing of this time or place, but will only know her own life and times. When she enters, she will be a bit upset. While walking to Concord Center, she was frightened by some hogs running loose. Agitated but unhurt, she has been brought in to this room to catch her breath. This is your chance to discover what it was like in Concord on that fateful day when the Redcoats marched out of Boston to seize military supplies and stop the brewing revolution! Mrs. Emerson will mention a **hog-reeve**, a man elected to watch over all the hogs of the town. He was to see that they all had rings in their noses, keep track of them and make sure that they did not do any damage to people or property. Your own willing suspension of disbelief during this performance will lead you to the magic of meeting a woman who lived over 100 years ago, and by simply making her welcome, you will have a chance to travel back in time yourself.

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Vocabulary

- **Colony:** a place where a group of people from another country come to live and force under the control of their home country.
- **Independence:** freedom from another's control.
- **Revolution:** a sudden change or transformation in society, often brought about through violent rebellion.

Key Facts and Context for Students

Phebe Bliss Emerson

Phebe Bliss was born in 1741 in Concord, MA. She was the daughter of Concord's minister, Reverend Daniel Bliss.

In 1766, she married the town's next minister, Reverend William Emerson. Together they built the **Old Manse**, a large house intended for the town's clergy, where they raised their family. On April 19, 1775, Phebe and her children witnessed the battle at the North Bridge, which started the **American Revolutionary War**. Phebe continued to live through huge political and societal changes from the birth of the United States, to

Massachusetts declaring slavery unconstitutional, to the beginning of the Reform Movement of the 1800s. She died in Concord in 1825. Her descendants continued to live at the Old Manse, including her grandson, the famous author **Ralph Waldo Emerson**.



Revolution in Colonial America

In the 1600s and 1700s, British settlers came to North America looking for religious freedom, new economic opportunities, and political liberty. They created 13 colonies along the eastern coast of the continent. While each colony had its own government, the British king still enacted laws and required high taxes from all of the colonies. Many colonists wanted to start a new country separate from Great Britain, which led to the **Boston Tea Party**, the **American Revolution**, and signing the **Declaration of Independence**.

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about the American Revolution? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What might a story teach us about history that we might not get from a history book?
- What does “willing suspension of disbelief” mean? Why must we suspend disbelief to enjoy this performance?

Pre-Performance Activity: Creative Timeline

Learning Goal:

- To understand the events of the American Revolution.
- To create a unique way of portraying information.

Materials:

Books and vetted websites about the Revolutionary War and Colonial America (see *resources on page 7*), long paper, art supplies



Directions:

1. Discuss the Revolutionary War. Why did it happen? Review some of the important events of the war and those leading up to it, such as: the Sugar Act (1764), the Repeal of the Stamp Act (1766), the Boston Massacre (1770), the Boston Tea Party (1774), the Battle of Lexington and Concord (1775), and the Battle of Bunker Hill (1775).
2. Create a timeline of the events of the Revolutionary War and those leading up to it on large, long paper. Hang it in the classroom.
3. Divide the class into small groups and assign each an event from the timeline to research.
4. Have each group present their findings in a creative way, such as a report, illustration, short play or recording.
5. Share each group's project in timeline order to create an innovative and interactive representation of history.
6. Discuss how the presentations brought these historical events to life. What do students remember from each event? What were similarities and differences between these events? How did earlier events affect later events?

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Pre-Performance Activity Extensions

- Have students think of relevant questions to ask Phebe Emerson during her visit.
- Research historical figures who played important roles in the Revolutionary War (George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Major General Nathaniel Greene, Paul Revere, Abigail Adams, Benjamin Franklin, etc.).



Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about Phebe Emerson?
- What did you learn about colonial times and the Revolutionary War? What was life like in America at that time?
- How does a living history portrayal like this performance compare to learning about history from books or movies? What did you like best about it?

Post-Performance Activity: Colonial Newspaper

Learning Goal:

To exercise writing skills while exploring American Colonial life and culture.

Materials:

Books and vetted websites about the Revolutionary War and Colonial America (see *resources on page 7*), newspaper, tea bags, tub of water, white paper, writing/coloring supplies

Directions:

1. Discuss Jan Turnquist's performance. What did students learn about colonial times and the Revolutionary War? What was life like in America at that time?
2. Look through a newspaper together. Discuss the different sections, content, photos, format, etc.
3. Read a front page article out loud. Review the basic components of the the article (who, what, when, where, why, how, etc.).

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Post-Performance Activity, continued

Directions, continued:

4. Brainstorm what might have been covered by a newspaper in the 1770s. For example: breaking news about the battle at the North Bridge, op-eds featuring Patriot or Loyalist viewpoints, advertisements for tools or home goods, etc.
5. Divide students into groups and assign each group a section of the newspaper to write together.
6. Discuss the newspaper's layout. Where should the top stories go? What should be the order of sections? Where should advertisements be strategically placed?
7. Place a few tea bags in a tub of water. Have students take turns submerging a piece of white paper in the tub of water. Place the tea soaked paper in a safe place to dry.
8. Have students transcribe their newspaper articles onto the dry tea paper and accompany the text with pictures.
9. Share the newspaper with the class.

Post-Performance Activity Extensions

- Find examples of newspapers from the 1700s online or in the library. Compare the class-made newspaper with the historical one.
- Play "Revolutionary Charades." Make a list of people and events from the Revolutionary War. Write each one on an index card. Have student teams draw a card and then dramatize the person or event for the rest of the class to guess.



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Further Resources

- [Jan Turnquist Artist Website](#)
- [The Old Manse in Concord, MA](#)
- "[Colonial America & American Revolution Learning Resources](#)" from the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
- Collier, Christopher and James Lincoln Collier: *The American Revolution 1763-1783*, Cavendish Square Publishing (2014)
- Forbes, Esther: *Johnny Tremain: A Story of Boston in Revolt* (1943)
- Fritz, Jean: *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?*, Puffin Books (1996)
- Meltzer, Milton: *The American Revolutionaries: A History in Their Own Words, 1750-1800*, HarperCollins (1987)
- Raphael, Ray: *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*, New Press (2016)
- Woelfle, Gretchen: *Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution*, Calkins Creek Books (2016)



Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards, continued

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

History and Social Science

Grade 3

- Topic 1: Massachusetts cities and towns today and in history (HSS.3.T1)
- Topic 5: The Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Native Peoples, and Africans (HSS.3.T6)
- Topic 6: Massachusetts in the 18th century through the American Revolution (HSS.3.T6)

Grade 4

- Topic 4: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today (HSS.4.T4)
- Topic 4a: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today: The Northeast (HSS.4.T4a)

Grade 5

- Topic 1: Early colonization and growth of colonies (HSS.5.T1)
- Topic 2: Reasons for revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the formation of government (HSS.5.T2)

Grade 8

- Topic 1: The philosophical foundations of the United States political system (HSS.8.T1)
- Topic 2: The development of the United States government (HSS.8.T2)

Grades 9-12

- United States History I Topic 1: Origins of the Revolution and the Constitution (HSS.USI.T1)