Name: Date:

Ms. Centonze Period:

**The Battle of Trenton**

After the American victory in Boston, the war centered in New York. The British wanted control of New York for several reasons. The city, of New York had the finest harbor on the Atlantic coast, and the British needed control of that harbor to keep their troops supplied. By controlling the Hudson River and Lake Champlain they could cut off all access to Canada and isolate New England from the rest of the colonies. Once the colonies were divided and cut off from one another the British hoped to conquer each section easily.

Washington hoped to prevent the British from taking New York and moved his troops from Boston to Brooklyn Heights on Long Island. Meanwhile, the British had planned a combined land and water attack. General William Howe led his troops from Halifax to Staten Island, while his brother Admiral Richard Howe, recently arrived from England, disembarked the Hessian troops which he had transported on his ships. These troops went to Long Island.

The British attacked the troops on Long Island and the Americans were badly defeated. Under cover of fog and darkness Washington was able to ferry his men and equipment across the river to safety. The victorious British entered New York City in September, 1776, to the cheers of the loyalists. It was a short-lived victory, however, for soon afterwards the city was destroyed by fire. The origin of the fire is unknown, but by the time it was brought under control the city was in ruins and useless to the British who occupied it. The British remained in control of New York for the duration of the war.

General Howe then met the type of American that he would never be able to defeat. Captain Nathan Hale, who was just twenty-one years old, had volunteered to break through the British lines in New York to gather information for Washington. He was captured the night of the fire and convicted as a spy without a trial. The next morning he was hanged, and as the rope was placed around his neck, he declared, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

Admiral Howe had come to America not only to fight but to offer peace, as well. He had been authorized by parliament to offer freedom and protection to Mr. Washington and other rebels if they would again pledge allegiance to the king. George Washington refused to receive the communication because it had been addressed to Mr. Washington and not General Washington. Many American farmers did accept the terms of the king’s pardon, however, since things were not going well for the patriot’s cause.

General Howe followed Washington and forced him to retreat up the Hudson River Valley. The war continued to go badly for the Americans. Officers were killed or captured and many of Washington’s troops were leaving the army and returning to their homes. Unable to hold on to the forts along the Hudson River, Washington and his forlorn troops fell back across New Jersey to Pennsylvania.

The spirits of the Americans were very low. Their cause now seemed hopeless. The Second Continental Congress fled from Philadelphia to Baltimore. This was the darkest hour of the war. Tom Paine wrote, “These are the times that try men’s souls.” George Washington wrote in letter that he was afraid that the game was “pretty nearly up.”

As his men shivered on the banks of the Delaware River, Washington decided on a desperate plan. On Christmas night in the middle of a sleet storm, he and his men crossed the ice filled river and attacked the Hessians at Trenton. The Hessians, who were sleeping off the Christmas celebration, were so surprised that they surrendered almost immediately. The entire force of nearly a thousand men and officers were captured, and valuable ammunition was seized.

The Battle of Trenton was a mighty victory for Washington. Encouraged by their success at Trenton many of Washington’s troops decided to stay on and fight, and many Americans again hopefully viewed the cause of freedom.

**Questions:**

1. Why did the British want control of New York?

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1. What helped Washington get his men to safety?

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1. Who was Nathan hale? What did he say?

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1. What did Admiral Howe offer to Washington and the rebels?

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1. What were many of Washington’s men starting to do?

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1. What was Washington’s desperate plan?

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1. Why was Trenton such an important victory?

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