

Activity Steps

1. (5 minutes) First, as a class, discuss how the news travels today. It is important for students to recognize how much information is available to them and how fast they can access information in real time as events happen globally. They might also consider how quickly they can reach each other or connect with family living far away. Some prompts to help guide this discussion back in time to the American Revolution include:
 - How do you learn about current events and other breaking news today?
 - What news media or information sources might your parents or grandparents have had available to them at your age?
 - Think further back in time to the American Revolution before cars, computers, telephones, radios, etc. What would have been the primary ways for letters and news to spread among people living in Colonial America at that time?
 - Now consider news traveling to America from overseas. How might news from Europe, whether from family members or the British parliament, make it to the Colonies?
2. (5 minutes) Next, show the class a visual representation of how news of the Declaration of Independence spread from one city to another in the Colonies:
[When and How did the Colonies Find Out about the Declaration of Independence? | Declaration Resources Project](#)

Note: This link features two different interactive maps about the spread of the Declaration of Independence.

3. (10 minutes) Display (or distribute copies) of [the map of the postal routes post Revolution \(1796\)](#).

Together as a class, analyze this map to discuss different ways to explore the spread of news in post-Revolutionary America. For example, students might identify cities and consider the routes that a rider on horseback could have taken to travel between one city to another.

Some questions for prompting discussion include:

- Looking at the postal map from 1796, is there one straight path from St. Louis in the West to Norfolk, VA on the East Coast?
 - (When looking for St. Louis, follow the Mississippi River and Norfolk is east of Richmond which is in bigger letters in Virginia. If you need additional help finding these spots, compare a modern map to this one)
- How would someone travel this route in 1796? How would the news have moved across the map? River, Car, Boat, Horse, Telephones?

- Are the states shaped the same as they are today? Why? What makes them different?
- What's the difference between driving and riding horse back when traveling?
- How secure is the mail, how likely is it to reach its destination?
 - What affects the answer to the question above?
- Are there more stops in the cities? Is there more than one path to get somewhere?
- How does the mode of transportation of letters and newspapers affect how news and information spreads?

4. (10 minutes) Working in small groups, give each group a newspaper from the two connected to this activity. Point out the foreign affairs sections in each newspaper and have students look closely at these sections. Encourage them to notice the dates and locations of where news is coming from. What do students notice? What do they wonder based on their observations?

Note: The goal of this analysis is not for students to read each article but instead to think about where the news is coming from and when. A sentence stem ("I think ___ because ___.") might help students to generate hypotheses based on their observations.

Some questions that teachers can have the students to think about when they are exploring the papers:

- When/where is this newspaper from? How do you know based on your observations?
- What, if anything, is interesting to you about the heading of the newspaper?
- How many different places does this newspaper claim to bring news from? Please describe.
- Where is news coming from, and how do you know?
- What is the oldest news? Is it close or far from the location of the paper?
- What might the placement of news items communicate about the importance of a subject? Where do you think the most important and newest items are placed? Why? How might this compare to how news is communicated today, in print or online?

(10 minutes) Last, call the class back together. Invite students to share where they found the sources of news articles came from and how long it took for the news to reach their newspapers (i.e., using the date of the paper and the date on the article).

(Optional extension) Using an online mapping software, as a class, determine how long it would take to travel these same distances by car (or other transportation mode) today. After a couple of examples, compare modern travel of physical mail and media to the rate of information and news traveling in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

