Forging an Army

Read how leadership, words, and hardship shaped the Continental Army.

8.C.2.3.C "Explain how an effective military force was shaped by the leadership of General George Washington, Thomas Paine's The Crisis, and conditions at the Valley Forge encampment."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one decision Washington made, circle one idea from Paine's essay, and mark 1 beside a Valley Forge hardship and 2 beside a Valley Forge improvement. Use your marks to explain how the army grew stronger.

An Army That Kept Going

1 In late 1776, the Continental Army was losing ground around New York. General George Washington kept it from being trapped by moving his soldiers across rivers and away from larger British forces. Retreat did not mean surrender: keeping an army together gave it a chance to fight again. That December, Washington led a surprise attack on Hessian troops at Trenton, New Jersey, and won. The victory did not end the war, but it showed exhausted soldiers that careful planning and a well-timed strike could work.

2 The army also needed a reason to keep going. In December 1776, writer Thomas Paine published the first essay in *The American Crisis*. Its opening words, "These are the times that try men's souls," admitted how frightening the struggle felt. Paine argued that freedom would be worth the sacrifice and that people who stood firm in hard times deserved respect. Washington had the essay read to soldiers before the attack at Trenton. Paine could not provide weapons or food, but his words could strengthen the soldiers' resolve to stay and fight.

3 At Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in the winter of 1777 to 1778, the army faced a different test. Food and clothing were scarce, and disease killed many soldiers. Some left, but the army remained in camp. Washington pressed for supplies and supported training led by Baron von Steuben, a former Prussian officer. His drills taught soldiers to move and fight together more reliably. As supplies improved and troops practiced, the army became better prepared for later battles. Survival alone was not the achievement: hardship, leadership, and practice helped turn scattered fighters into a more effective force.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Washington's retreats help make the later victory at Trenton possible?

2. How could Paine's essay help the army even though it provided no food or weapons?

3. How did Washington's actions and von Steuben's drills help the army respond to its difficulties at Valley Forge?

4. How did Paine's words and von Steuben's drills meet different needs of the army?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence letter from a soldier at Valley Forge in spring 1778 to a friend deciding whether to join the army. Explain how Washington, Paine's *The American Crisis*, and the camp's hardships and training shaped the army, then predict how it will fight in the future.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.2.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one decision Washington made, circle one idea from Paine's essay, and mark 1 beside a Valley Forge hardship and 2 beside a Valley Forge improvement. Use your marks to explain how the army grew stronger. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Washington's retreats help make the later victory at Trenton possible?	**His retreats kept the army from being trapped and preserved soldiers who could later carry out the surprise attack.**
2	How could Paine's essay help the army even though it provided no food or weapons?	**It gave soldiers a reason to stand firm through fear and sacrifice, strengthening their resolve to keep fighting.**
3	How did Washington's actions and von Steuben's drills help the army respond to its difficulties at Valley Forge?	**Washington pressed for supplies during shortages and supported von Steuben's training. The drills helped soldiers move and fight together more reliably.**
4	How did Paine's words and von Steuben's drills meet different needs of the army?	**Paine's words strengthened soldiers' resolve, while von Steuben's drills improved their ability to act together in battle.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

You asked whether our army is ready for another battle. Washington kept us together through retreats and showed us at Trenton that a planned surprise could succeed. Paine's *The American Crisis* gave us a reason to stand firm when the struggle felt frightening. At Valley Forge, hunger and disease tested us, while Washington sought supplies and von Steuben drilled us to act together. Because we endured those hardships and practiced as a unit, I expect us to face future battles with stronger resolve and skill.

Accept historically accurate explanations that connect each influence to the army's ability to continue fighting or fight more effectively. The letter should include all three influences, a prediction grounded in the passage, and exactly five sentences.