

## Deborah Sampson: Patriot Soldier

Deborah Sampson was born on December 1, 1790 in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Although she was from a Pilgrim heritage, her family was quite poor. Deborah Sampson was white, single and what was probably considered of low socio-economic status. Deborah Sampson's contribution to women's history during the Revolutionary War was that she disguised herself as a male soldier, Robert Shurtleiff, and fought bravely alongside other male soldiers (Keiter).

At the age of 10, after serving in two other homes, Deborah Sampson was sent to live and serve in the home of Deacon Benjamin Thomas. Deacon Thomas had a farm and a large family. During her service she learned how to weave and teach school for her livelihood. Upon reaching the age of 18, Deborah had served her time as an indentured servant (Keiter).

Deborah Sampson's gender, race and social standing restricted her choices in life, however, she continued to demonstrate her industrious and resilient physical and mental abilities (Berkin, 2015). Upon receiving an honorable discharge from the military in 1783, Deborah married, had three children, and lived the life of a farmer's wife. She also was the first woman to tour and lecture. Deborah Sampson's life was not the typical life of a Revolutionary woman. She made a difference by making unique decisions about her life (Keiter).

Dr. Carol Berkin discussed during her lecture of July 6, 2015 that Deborah Sampson was a domestic servant, who was big, strong and hard working. When the Revolutionary War broke out men were receiving signing bonuses, which was more money than she was earning as a domestic servant. Deborah Sampson decided she would disguise herself as a male, and also receive a signing bonus. Next, she decided to sign up again to receive a second bonus, however, this time she stayed and served for 3-1/2 years as a male soldier, named Robert Shurtleiff (Berkin, 2005).

Deborah Sampson was careful not to get caught as a female. Even though, during her service she was wounded twice, her gender was never revealed. It is also said that she had girlfriends and drank in taverns as if she were a man. Ultimately, her gender was discovered when she came down with camp fever. The doctor treating her fever opened her shirt and her gender was revealed. Deborah Sampson was a brave soldier. She received an honorable discharge (Berkin, 2015).

The following letter from Paul Revere demonstrates that Deborah Sampson was indeed an extraordinary woman, who performed acts of bravery. On February 20, 1804 Paul Revere wrote a letter to William Eustis requesting that Deborah Sampson receive a soldier's pension (implied). The primary source document or letter can be viewed at <http://masshist.org/database/326>. Initially she was given a partial pension. The second request, due to ill health, resulted in a larger pension. Finally, on the third request she was granted the full and complete pension (MHS).

On May 23, 1983 Governor Michael Dukakis signed an official proclamation that Deborah Sampson was a heroine of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This is another first for Deborah Sampson. Deborah Sampson's life was filled with hard times, heartache and struggle. As a side note, it was initially believed that Deborah's father died at sea, and left his wife and seven children destitute, however, later research indicates that Deborah's father actually abandoned his family and lived an impoverished life in Maine until 1811 (Leonard, 2006).

Essential Question: Would you have been a revolutionary participant in 1776? (Gilder Lehrman, 2015).

1. After reviewing the brief biographical information above, would you want to be a woman during the Colonial Period? Why or Why Not?
2. Do you think male soldiers had to petition for a rightfully earned full pension? Why or Why Not?

The biographical synopsis of Deborah Sampson provides the student with a brief introduction to some of the challenges Patriot Women faced during the Revolutionary War. Through the lesson plan (<http://patriotwomen.weebly.com/lesson-plan.html>) teachers will guide students through a lesson that will incorporate the use of a storyboard to help them develop a character's situation, and then turn the storyboard into a comic or an infographic depicting the life of a Colonial woman.

Teaching comics can support literacy instruction, particularly, reading and writing. The domain for this project is comprehension and order of events, and can be used in grades 2-12. It focuses on the cognitive process of sequencing events. I used comics as an assignment because the images and text in comics supports students in producing meaning, and in "becoming engaged in the search of meaning." This process can be especially helpful for English Language Learners (Frey & Fisher, 2008).

Additionally, the project embraces teaching students to be visually literate. Students will learn about incorporating principles and elements to create meaning in developing their project. The Gestalt theory will play a key role in the design process of the comic and infographic. The Gestalt theory of proximity and grouping in the comic and infographic will allow students to

form meaning due to placement. It will also allow students to demonstrate that the images belong together in a frame to create visual understanding (Hagen & Golombisky, 2013).

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**DEBORAH SAMSON*****Recommended Further Readings***

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