**Battle of Cowpens Readers Theater**

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**Teacher Notes**

*Before conducting this readers theater, it is strongly recommended that the teacher review the key vocabulary and background information listed below.*

**Key Vocabulary**

*Quarter* - merciful consideration of an opponent

*Scout* - a soldier, airplane, etc., that is sent to get information about the size, location, equipment, etc., of an enemy

*Militia* - a group of people who are not part of the regular army

*Regulars* - trained soldiers in the army

*Huzzay* - a sound of jubilation, similar to “Hooray!”

*Epaulets* - a decorative piece on the shoulder of a uniform

*Parole* - the release of a prisoner temporarily on the promise of good behavior

*Commission* - a certificate conferring military rank and authority

*Bayonet* - a triangular-shaped knife that is attached to the end of a musket and used as a weapon in battle

*Saber* - a long, heavy sword with a curved blade (those used during the Revolutionary War were mainly intended to crush bones, not for slashing or cutting)

**Background Info**

1. *General Daniel Morgan BIO* - General Daniel Morgan had served in the British Army during the French and Indian War. His role was that of a wagoner, moving supplies for the army. It was during that time period when he gained his nickname, “The Old Wagoner.” Morgan spent subsequent years in and out of the British Army. When the Revolutionary War broke out, there was no doubt, he’d stand with the Patriots. In the early days of the war, Morgan was captured by British troops in Quebec, Canada in December 1775. Because Morgan was an officer, the British released him under “parole” eight months later with the promise that he would not fight the British again. He, however, quickly rejoined the Patriots fighting until 1779, when he resigned. But by October 1780, Congress offered Morgan a promotion to the rank of Brigadier General, which he accepted to once again take up the Patriot cause. He is most well-known for his role at the Cow Pens, where under his leadership, his men defeated the formidable Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, giving a much-needed victory to the Patriots. For his leadership, he was awarded a gold medal by Congress in 1790.
2. *17th Light Dragoons* - The 17th Light Dragoons were British soldiers with a long and proud history of service. Their helmets struck fear in the men they met, as upon them was a skull and crossbones, beneath which read “or glory.” (An image search may also benefit you and your students.)
3. *“Cracking his whip”* - In the reader's theater script, Morgan mentions “cracking his whip” over Tarleton. This is merely a figure of speech, but was an actual quote Morgan stated before the battle.
4. *“Fired Up”* - In correspondence prior to the battle, General Nathanael Greene instructs General Morgan to “Spirit up the people.” Greene knew that Morgan was a frontier man himself and the militia would relate well to him. Morgan was indeed very talented at motivating and encouraging his men.
5. *Thomas Young* - As noted in the script, Thomas Young’s brother, John, died at the hands of a loyalist militia. In 1780, Thomas and John served in the same regiment and were attacked. Thomas watched his brother die and swore to one day avenge his death.
6. *James Collins* - Similarly, James Collins heavily resented loyalists. Collins had witnessed them plundering rebel (Patriot) Americans homes for clothing, food, etc. He recalled the loyalists taking rebel men (stricken by smallpox) out of their homes and killing them in their front yards, all while their wives and children watched in horror.
7. *Colonel Andrew Pickens BIO* - Colonel Andrew Pickens had equal frustration with the British and/or loyalists. After being paroled by the British in 1780, Pickens took an oath of neutrality. In the months that followed, Pickens was offered officer positions in both the Patriot and British armies. He was however, a man of his word and refused both offers. The British threatened to punish him for refusing to join them and in turn, Pickens saw this threat as voiding the agreement they had previously made. Now, he had the opportunity to keep his word, while joining the Patriots again with a clear conscience. Upon knowledge of Pickens’ stance, General Cornwallis ordered the seizure of all of Pickens’ property, followed by the destruction of his plantation and all homes on the property. Pickens’ wife, Rebecca, and their children watched as their home was completely destroyed.
8. *“Tarleton’s Quarter”* - “Tarleton’s Quarter” became the Patriot rallying cry following the Battle of Waxhaws in 1780. After the battle, news spread that Tarleton ordered his men to murder the surrendering Patriots. This was not exactly the whole truth. Near the battle’s chaotic end, some Patriots pleaded for quarter, while other Patriots continued firing. One shot hit Tarleton’s horse, causing the horse and Tarleton to fall to the ground. With this, British soldiers bayoneted or sabered over a dozen Patriots who were attempting to surrender. In later writings, Tarleton defended the actions of his men, stating that they believed he had been fatally shot and were merely avenging his death. In all, over one hundred Patriot soldiers died in the battle. The American colonists considered it a “massacre,” assuming Tarleton ordered the actions taken that day. “Tarleton’s Quarter” was forever after a reminder to Patriot soldiers of the atrocities at Waxhaws.
9. *Dramatic Effect of Script* - It is important that students understand that the Battle of Waxhaws and the personal situations of Thomas Young, James Collins, and Andrew Pickens are just a few personal stories of people and places in South Carolina. They are factual, yet they are used here to show personal reactions during the battle script. The British Army was not all bad, as the Patriot Army was not always good. These were exceptions to the generally “gentlemanly” British forces and are used here to add dramatic effect to the script.

**Battle of Cowpens Readers Theater**

Character List

**Narrator 1:** A student whose speaking parts offer an omniscient third person point of view to readers and viewers.

**Narrator 2:** Another student offering an omniscient third person point of view.

**General Daniel Morgan**: General Morgan was a hero to many rough frontiersman, so much so that he earned the nickname “Old Wagoner.” At the time of the battle, he was 45 years old, with dark hair and blue eyes. Standing at six feet, two inches tall with large muscles and broad shoulders, his physical features demanded the attention of all those around him. His prior service in the Continental Army, earned him a reputation as someone to be feared and respected, while also trusted by those who served under him. Morgan was a natural leader and speaker who inspired his men.

**Colonel Andrew Pickens**: Like Morgan, Colonel Pickens was a born leader. He too, was a tall man in his forties, yet more slender in build. He was known to think before he spoke. Pickens was deeply religious and a man of his word. Prior to joining the Patriots and fighting in the Continental Army, Pickens had been a Loyalists in the early days of the war. (*ask your teacher or a ranger about his decisions to switch sides*)

**Lt. Colonel John Eager Howard**: Far younger than Morgan and Pickens, Lt. Colonel Howard, had advanced quickly in the Continental Army. He was known to reserved off the battlefield, yet bold and brave on it. Howard was considered by many to be one of the finest officers around.

**Lt. Colonel William Washington**: Cousin of General George Washington, “Billy,” as he was known was another substantial figure in the Continental Army. He too was approximately six feet tall, and despite being overweight was still quite strong. Many considered him too kind to his troops. Like Howard, he loved the action of the battle.

**Thomas Brandon**: Thomas Brandon was a colonel in the SC Militia at the time of the battle. Brandon led the Fair Forest Regiment.

**Alexander Strickland:** experienced soldier from Virigina who enlisted in the Continental Army in 1776

**Thomas Young**: As an officer in the SC Militia from Laurens, Young turned 17 on the day of the battle.

**James Collins**: Private Collins was also 17 during the time of the battle. As a member of the SC Militia, he had served and fought under Thomas Sumter prior to the battle of Cowpens.

**William Kennedy**: A local militia, who was known as one of the best shots in the state.

**John Savage**: Another militia with battlefield experience, selected to serve on the sharpshooter line for his ability to accurately fire his rifle.

**George Gresham:** A militiamen from Georgia, who was also excellent marksmen.

**Robert Kirkwood**: Kirkwood was a well-trained and brave captain in the Continental Army.

**John Bantham**: Bantham enlisted in the Army at the start of the war, and fought in numerous battles prior to Cowpens.

**John Welchel**: Welchel was a member of the SC Militia who fought at Cowpens with his father and three brothers.

**James Harden**: Sergeant Harden was a member of the SC Militia, where he had served since 1777.

**Act 1, Scene 1**

**Narrator 1:** “It is the evening of January 16, 1781. Morgan sent messages asking Patriots to come to the well known ‘Cow Pens.’ The Cow Pens was the perfect spot for him to lay a trap for Lt. Col. Tarleton.”

**Brandon**: “Good to see you General Morgan.”

**Morgan**: “It’s good to see you here. Thank you for bringing your boys here to the Cowpens. Scouts have informed me that Tarleton and his troops are on our tail.”

**Brandon**: “Well, my boys are ready for him.”

**Morgan:** “Have them line up with Pickens men and camp in place on the main militia line in front of the Continentals. If any of your men are crack shots, send them to the front line with the sharpshooters.”

**Narrator 2**: “The officers and General Morgan discuss the plan for battle, while the Continental soldiers and militia prepare supper.”

**Pickens** (to General Morgan): “I’m a little concerned about this battle. I’m afraid even some of my best men are no match compared to the 1200 British Regulars coming with Tarleton.”

**Morgan** (to Pickens): “I know those Brits all too well. I’ve been close enough to see the skull and bones on their helmets. But I ain’t scared of ‘em. I believe in our men and this ground is perfect. Think of what we just trudged through. Tarleton will be stumbling through those swamps and along that muddy road at night. His Lobsterbacks have to be tired and hungry. Resting here tonight will give our men time to sleep and eat a hot meal.”

**Pickens** (to General Morgan): “That’s definitely what they need. And placing them in their lines this evening is brilliant. They’ll be ready whenever Ole Banny gets here. I have full faith in you, your plan, and our veteran officers. May God give us strength and courage.”

**Morgan** (to Pickens) “No doubt Tarleton will come straight at us in an all-out charge. Make sure that your militiamen know that.”

**Narrator 1**: “Morgan then moves to the Continental Line. He talks to all of them, discussing not only the battle plan, but their personal lives.”

**Morgan** (to Continental soldier Strickland): “You’ve been with me since the beginning at Winchester, and even stuck it out when I tried to retire. You’ve seen the worst of the war at Brandywine, Germantown, and Saratoga. I know you’re battle weary and more than ready to see your family. Hopefully, victory is ours tomorrow, and we’ll all be home soon.”

**Strickland**: “I’m indeed tired, but I’ve come too far to stop now. My kids will know I faced the bayonet without fear and fought to break free from tyranny. I hope to see Bloody Ban myself out there tomorrow. I’ll give him a message to take straight to the King!”

**Morgan** (turning now to all the Continentals): “I have full confidence in you, men. You’ve shown great skill and bravery in the dozen other skirmishes we’ve fought together. Tomorrow, victory will be ours.”

**Kirkwood & Bantham** (shouting): “Huzzah!”

**Narrator 2: “**General Morgan then walks to the main militia line and talks to each of them as well.”

**Morgan** (to militiaman Thomas Young): “I heard you lost your brother to the loyalists last year. I’m terribly sorry for your loss.”

**Young**: “Thank you sir. You better believe I’ll do my best to avenge John’s death. He was a good man and didn’t deserve to die.”

**Collins**: “Those darned Kings’ men looted my hometown, shooting my friends in cold blood while their wives and children watched in horror.”

**Morgan**: “Bloody Ban and some of his men have done many terrible things. Tomorrow, we’ll make him pay for those crimes.”

**Morgan**: (turning to all on the militia line) “Just hold up your heads, boys. Give them three fires, and you’ll be free. Then, when you return to your homes, how the old folks will bless you, and the girls will kiss you!”

**Welchel, Harden, Young, & Collins** (shouting): “Huzzah!”

**Narrator 1: “**General Morgan then moves to the sharpshooter line and speaks to each of them as well. He makes certain they understand that if they follow the plan, the British Army will be chaotic and undisciplined.”

**Morgan**: “You boys are the best shots this side of the mountains. Grease your patches and sharpen your flints so you won’t miss tomorrow when you shoot down the officers. We’ll knock them off their tea cups!”

**Kennedy**: “Don’t ya mean horses General?”

**Savage**: “It’s a figure of speech doufus. You know how the British drink tea?”

**Kennedy**: “Oh. Ok. I get it now.”

**Morgan** (to every man on the field, with his fist in the air as he speaks): “We’ll crack our whip over Ban in the morning, as sure as we live!”

**Every Patriot** (shouting): “Huzzah!”

**Narrator 2**: “The men ate and rested until just before dawn. Morgan’s men admired him for taking the time to talk to each of them personally. He seemed to understand them. Militiaman Thomas Young later wrote that he doubted that Morgan “slept a wink that night.”

**Act 2, Scene 1**

**Narrator 1**: “The next morning just before dawn, Morgan rides among the lines when the scouts alert him that the British are approaching.”

**Morgan:** “Boys, get up. Banny is coming! Remember what I told you last night...aim for the officers. Now, let me see who is most deserving to the title of brave men, the boys of Carolina or those of Georgia.”

**Narrator 2**: “Morgan’s words ‘fired up’ the men. Across the distance, the sharpshooters see cannons.”

**Kennedy**: “They’ve got cannons!”

**Savage**: “Awe, those are just little cannons. They can’t be that bad.”

**Gresham**: “Little cannons? They might not be the biggest, but I don’t want to get hit with one.”

**Kennedy**: “Just take out the men on the canons and you don’t have to worry about how far they shoot!”

**Narrator 1**: “Tarleton believed he would win the battle. Between his seasoned troops and the two cannons, he felt there was no chance he’d lose. His Redcoats also expected an easy victory, hoping to end the war in South Carolina and bring the state back under British control.”

**Morgan**: “Aim for the officers boys! You’ll know them by the gold epaulets dangling from their shoulders.”

**Narrator 2**: “Each man on the sharpshooter line shot his rifle, ultimately taking out about two-thirds of the British officers. The British kept charging, trying to get close enough to use their bayonets.”

**Kennedy**: “They’re not even firing at us, but they’re still running up the hill.”

**Savage**: “Those bayonets are aimed straight for us.”

**Gresham**: “And those cannons!”

**Kennedy**: “Remember what Morgan said. Hit the officers! Then retreat back over the hill.”

**Act 2, Scene 2**

**Narrator 1**: “The sharpshooters run approximately 150 yards back to the safety of the main militia line.”

**Kennedy, Savage, & Gresham** (running & shouting): “Huzzah!”

**General Morgan**: “The British are still coming. My friends in arms, this day you must play your parts for liberty’s cause.”

**Narrator 2:** “Remembering how the British burned his home to the ground, Colonel Pickens rallies his men. Yelling ‘Tarleton’s Quarter,’ Young and others recall recent British cruelties, such as Massacre at the Waxhaws, where some Redcoats murdered surrendering Patriot soldiers.**”**

**Pickens** (to militia): “Remember what these Redcoats did to our wives, our children, and our homes. (*shaking his fist*) This is our moment for revenge!”

**Collins**: “Remember Tarleton’s Quarter!”

**Pickens**: “Hold your fire until you can see the whites of their eyes.”

**Harden**: “Try to get off two shots, three if you can. Then run for cover through the Continentals.”

**Narrator 2**: “ The British continue to advance, screaming as they come, toward the main militia line.”

**Morgan** (yelling from the slope behind the militia): “They gave us the British haloo, boys. Give them the Indian haloo!”

**Welchel, Harden, Young, & Collins** (almost howling): “Haloooooo!”

**Pickens** (*shouting and pausing between each command):* “Shoulder Arms! Make Ready! Take Aim.”

**Young** (grabbing his cartridge box and talking to himself): “Guide my bullets, dear brother, then rest in peace.”

**Pickens**: “Wait for my order...Fire!”

**Narrator 2**: “Gunfire and drums boom all across the battlefield. Smoke from the guns makes it hard to see. The two brass cannons continue to fire towards the Patriots.

**Harden**: “Keep it up men! They’re falling like leaves in September.”

**Collins**: “May you NOT rest in peace, you bloody Brits.”

**Welchel**: “The bayonets are coming! Follow Morgan’s plan - get to the Continentals!”

**Act 2, Scene 3**

**Narrator 1**: “The battle is in full force now. Both the sharpshooter and militia lines have fired shots, while the British continue to advance forward, despite considerable losses.”

**Narrator 2**: “Seeing the fleeing Patriot militia, and assuming victory, Tarleton ordered his dragoons to charge, ‘swords drawn and ready.’”

**Washington:** “I see the British dragoons. Head straight for ‘em. Charge!”

**Narrator 1**: “The British dragoons were shocked at the arrival of Washington’s cavalry. Swords clanged for a brief moment, then the British dragoons were gone. Washington’s cavalry returned behind the Continental line.”

**Narrator 2**: “The militia were now safely behind the Continental line giving them time to reload and regroup. Morgan needed these men to stay and fight.”

**Morgan**: “Form! Form my brave fellows! Give them one more fire and the day is ours. Old Morgan has never been beaten.”

**Narrator 1**: “All the while, the British continued their march forward to face the Continentals.”

**Howard**: “Hold Steady Men! Bloody Ban and his men shall be upon us soon.”

**Kirkwood**: “I hope this time the militia dropped some of those Brits before they fled the field.”

**Bantham**: “I’m sure they did! Even though they run like cowards from the bayonets, those Backcountry boys rarely miss a shot.”

**Narrator 1**: “Volleys are exchanged. Tarleton orders his best Scottish troops, the Highlanders, to attack the Continentals around the American right. Furthermore, he tells them to ‘take no quarter’ – meaning take no prisoners and show no mercy.”

**Howard:** “Refuse the flank! Refuse the flank!”

**Narrator 2**: “‘Refuse the flank’” was a battlefield command which involved having a group of soldiers turn to the side.”

**Kirkwood**: “Walk the plank?”

**Bantham**: “Don’t be foolish! He said refuse the flank!”

**Narrator 1**: “In the midst of battle, however, the Patriot soldiers misunderstood the order. Thinking they were told to ‘about face,’ meaning turn around, many turned away in perfect orderly fashion and began retreating.”

**Morgan** (to Howard): “Are you beaten?”

**Howard**: “Of course not! Look at how straight that line is! What are your orders?”

**Morgan:** “Have them walk ten paces, reload while you walk, then turn and fire on your command!”

**Narrator 1**: “All the while, the British had lost the structure of a proper army in battle. Most of their officers were gone and there was no order to their charge.”

**Howard** (to the continentals): “Turn and fire!”

**Narrator 2**: “Shots were fired point blank into the oncoming mob of British causing heavy casualties.”

**Morgan** (to the continentals): “Charge bayonets!”

**Narrator 1**: “Washington’s cavalry came in from the left side, with militia on the right. The Redcoats were surrounded in the rare but supremely effective ‘double envelopment.’ The British tried to retreat.”

**Kirkwood**: “Give them Tarleton’s quarter!”

**All Patriots** (angrily): “Give them Tarleton’s quarter!”

**Morgan**: “No! They are husbands, sons, and fathers merely following orders. We will let the enemy live. Take them as prisoners. Then, tend to the wounded.”

**Narrator 1**: “The surrounded British soldiers had no choice, but to surrender. Tarleton attempted to rally his dragoons and charge, but the majority fled the field. Abandoned by his reserves, Tarleton chose to flee the battlefield.”

**Narrator 2**: “Colonel Washington and some of his men pursued Tarleton and engaged him with swords. Moments later, however, Tarleton escaped, only to later rejoin Cornwallis.”

**Narrator 1**: “In less than an hour, the Battle of Cowpens was over. Thanks to General Morgan and all his brave men, the Patriots won the battle, which changed the course of the war.”

**Narrator 2**: “In October of the same year, General Washington trapped General Cornwallis, Tarleton, and their entire British army at Yorktown, Virginia, and forced them to surrender. The Revolutionary War was nearing the end and the thirteen colonies were one step closer to full independence.”

**All characters**: “Long live the United States of America.”