**Ranger-led Tour Reader’s Theater**

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This reader’s theater is for elementary school groups to read as a supplement to a ranger-led tour of the battlefield. Each student will have at least one part to read in order to put themselves into the Revolution and the Battle of Cowpens. There are parts for 47 readers. Smaller groups will need students to read more than one part. All of the characters in the reading were actual participants in the battle according to Bobby Moss’ collections of pension records. Note: The places where quotation marks are used are actual quotes from the participants. The rest of the conversation is a fictional account.

**Characters**

**Gen. Daniel Morgan** – Gen. Morgan was a frontiersman, a teamster by trade and earned the nickname Old Wagoner during this time. He had experience fighting the Indians and had made his name as a successful leader there and in battles like Quebec and Saratoga. He took control of this “Flying Army” in early December under orders from Gen. Nathanael Greene. His orders were to protect the backcountry and to “spirit up the people.”

**The Militia:**

**Col. Andrew Pickens** – Leader of the militia. Early in the war, the British paroled Pickens and he agreed not to choose sides again. Because of his great influence in the backcountry, he was made offers by both British and Patriots to return to the war which he continued to refuse until British Loyalists burned his plantation to the ground. Then, Pickens called back his militia and rejoined the Patriot cause. He was considered one of the partisan leaders of the war along with Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter.

**Jeremiah Files** – Joined Col. Pickens on Christmas Eve 1780. Marched with him to meet Gen. Morgan at Grindal Shoals, where they planned to cross the Pacolet River, and from there to the Cow Pens.

**John Welchel** – First served in 1777. Joined by his father and 3 brothers at Cowpens.

**Thomas Young** – Enlisted May of June 1780 while living at Ninety-Six. This battle will take place on his 17th birthday.

**Dick Pickens (Old Dick)** – African body servant (slave) of Andrew Pickens. According to Pickens’ grandson, he served side by side with the colonel.

**Primus Record** – “Free man of color” from South Carolina. Originally joined the militia in 1777 at the Little River regiment. Taken prisoner twice (Charleston and Battle of Camden) only to rejoin the Patriots each time.

**Lt. Col. William Farr** - Enlisted in 1776 and served as Lt. Col. under Gen. Pickens from Jan. 1, 1781 – June 30, 1782.

**John Savage** – Well-known hunter who was known for his bravery and marksmanship at the battles at Hanging Rock, Musgrove’s Mill, and Blackstock Plantation.

**William Kennedy** – Known as one of the best shots in South Carolina. Originally enlisted when Fort Moultrie in Charleston was attacked.

**The Continentals:**

**Lt. Col. John Eager Howard** – Originally from Maryland, he commanded of the Maryland and Delaware Continentals at Cowpens. Received a silver medal for his conduct at Cowpens.

**Robert Kirkwood** - Commissioned in Delaware in 1776. He led a bayonet charge to capture one of the 3-pounder cannons during the battle.

**Conrad Eartinhousin** – A German who was sent to America to help the British but deserted in 1779 in Virginia and joined the Patriot militia. He is a part of the experienced Virginia militia who will line up with the Continentals because they have so much experience. He does not speak very good English.

**John Bantham** – Enlisted July 6, 1776 in the Fifth Maryland Regiment. He fought in the battles at Trenton, Monmouth, Camden and others before coming with Howard to Cowpens.

**The Cavalry:**

**Lt. Col. William Washington** – A second cousin of Gen. George Washington. He first enlisted in 1776 and was named Lt. Col. for the Third Continental Dragoons in November 1778. He has fought previous battles with Tarleton and looks forward to facing him again.

**George Gresham** – Originally enlisted in 1777. Served in the cavalry in 1779 and took a bullet in the leg that killed his horse at Stono Ferry. He was placed under Washington when he arrived at Cowpens with the militia.

**Richard Crabtree** – Enlisted as militia in Feb. 1776. Served as light horsemen in several battles before joining Morgan at Grindal Shoals.

**Reuben Gilder** – Enlisted in Jan 1776 as a surgeon’s mate. Became a surgeon in the Delaware regiment in April 1777. Later, he transferred as a surgeon to Washington’s dragoons.

**Collins** – 14 year old waiter, servant and bugler (believed to a slave) for William Washington. He is credited with saving Washington’s life when they chased Tarleton after the battle.

**Part 1 – Setting the Scene**

Narrator 1 – Here we are in cold wet January 1781 on a large field known to many here in the backcountry as simply the Cow Pens. General Daniel Morgan has chosen this most unlikely location as a place to stop and face his pursuer – Col. Banastre Tarleton. Tarleton has been in hot pursuit of Morgan for some time now and Morgan has decided it is time to fight.

Narrator 2 – Gen. Morgan has brought his well-trained Continentals with him. Morgan is joined by Lt. Col. William Washington and his Light Dragoons – trained soldiers on horseback armed mainly with pistols and sabers.

Narrator 3 – Gen. Morgan also has Col. Pickens’ militia with him as they take on Tarleton. He has reached out to many of the local militia who are familiar with this field either from bringing cattle here to feed or because they stopped to camp here with the Overmountain Men on their way to the victory in October 1780 at King’s Mountain.

Narrator 4 – Tarleton is hated by most of the Patriots. He has been very successful at defeating them. In fact, as a commander he is undefeated. But it is the way his troops handled themselves at the Waxhaws (a previous battle) that has become the rallying point for the Patriots. Most of the militiamen know people who have suffered at the hands of “Bloody Tarleton” or “Bloody Ban” and his ruthlessness. And so they have all come to join in the fight.

Narrator 5 – Morgan has asked all of his troops to camp this night in their battle lines. He spends most of the night moving through the lines speaking to the men individually as he goes.

**Part 2 – Morgan’s Camp**

Narrator 6 – We now join Gen. Morgan as he camps on the night of January 16, 1781. He moves among the lines stopping to talk to individual soldiers along the way. His first stop is with the regular army, the Continentals.

Morgan (to Continentals) – “My friends in arms, my dear boys,” you know that I have complete confidence in you. You have proven your heroism on at least a dozen battlefields so far. I have no doubt that tomorrow will be more of the same.

Howard – Now men, Gen. Morgan has us camping here where we will be stationed to begin the battle tomorrow, waiting for Tarleton and his troops.

Continental 1 – That makes sense to me, but what about all of these militiamen? What will they be doing? Turning tail and running?

Morgan – Well, yes they will be retreating, but under my orders. They will be set up a ways in front of you and will meet and perhaps confuse Banny’s troops before they reach you. If things go as planned, they will take out a few officers along the way as well.

Continental 2 – Let’s hope the Old Wagoner knows what he’s doing. We all know those militiamen are no match for the British bayonets.

Continental 1 – That’s for sure. They are mostly known for running away, right?

Howard – We shall see in the morning,. You do know that Gen. Morgan knows what he is doing, right? Hasn’t he proven himself by now?

Narrator 7 – Now Morgan moves up to the main militia line. It is here that he spends most of his time. He knows he must convince these 1000 men to stand and fight. He knows they are afraid of Tarleton and the British regulars with their bayonets, especially the dragoons. He knows that what he says tonight will determine how the battle goes.

Files – Who’s there? Oh, General Morgan, I’m surprised to see you walking about.

Morgan – I just wanted to come and speak with you boys. Keep cooking your dinners. I won’t be long.

Young – Well, thank you sir. It is an honor to have you.

Morgan – I want to thank you all for coming to support the Continental army in this fight. Have you left your families safely at home?

Files – Yes, sir. I came with my father and 3 brothers. We know that this is our time to finally beat Banny.

Morgan – Yes, it is, and that is why you all are an important part of the battle tomorrow. I need you to fire 2 or 3 shots each - always aiming for the officers. I know it will be hard, but wait to fire until they are within killing distance.

Welchel – Won’t that mean we will be awfully close to those bayonets? You know we can’t win against those.

Morgan - “'Just hold up your heads, boys, three fires, and you are free, and then when you return to your homes, how the old folks will bless you, and the girls kiss you, for your gallant conduct!" You will be heroes at home!

Narrator 8 – Morgan continues to speak to each of the militiamen in person. Helping them with their weapons, joking about their sweethearts, and assuring them that victory is certain. Then he walks up a bit further to speak with the sharpshooters.

Morgan – Halloo boys. I hear you are the best shots around.

Kennedy – You hear right, General. And tomorrow I plan to prove how good I am by shooting a few Brits.

Savage – You’d better be quick then. I am planning to use the officers for target practice myself.

Morgan – Well, let me see which are most deserving of the title of brave men. I’m sure there will be plenty officers for both of you to take. Rest well and remember to shoot for the officers by looking for their epaulets in the morn.

Narrator 9 – Morgan continued walking among the troops late into the night. Thomas Young later said, “I don’t believe he slept a wink that night.”

**Part 3 – Morgan’s Troops**

Narrator 10 – Before we join these men on the morning of the battle, let’s take a look at the different troops that Gen. Morgan commanded here.

Narrator 11 – Continental soldiers were the trained professionals in Morgan’s army. They were Maryland and Delaware regiments led by Lt. Col. John Eager Howard. They were battle tested and had shown their bravery many times. Most had served throughout the war. They were joined by about 800 Virginia militia who were very well trained and battle tested.

Narrator 12 – The Continental soldiers carried muskets that had bayonets on the end. These weapons only fired accurately to about 150 yards but could be reloaded quickly. The bayonets were key in hand-to-hand battles.

Narrator 13 – About 150 of Morgan’s troops were the 3rd Continental Light Dragoons under William Washington. These troops were trained to fight on horseback with sabers and pistols.

Narrator 14 – The largest part of Morgan’s army was made up of the militia. Militia are untrained local troops who only agree to fight for short periods of time. They are much more likely to fight close to their homes.

Narrator 15 – The militiamen all brought their own weapons with them. Most of them had hunting rifles since they would use them on a daily basis at home. These rifles shoot accurately at up to 300 yards but are very slow to reload. The militia feared the bayonets of the British because their rifles could not be fitted with bayonets. They would only have hunting knives or tomahawks.

Narrator 16 – Morgan’s front line was made up of a select group of sharpshooters who were known for their marksmanship. Their orders were to try and take out as many officers as possibly in order to confuse the British troops.

**Part 4 – The Militia & Sharpshooters**

Narrator 17 - Now we move to Morgan’s frontline - the line of sharpshooters who are ready to aim for the officers just like Morgan instructed them while they were in camp last night.

Farr – Now men, remember that Morgan wants you to shoot for the epaulets. I heard him asking you last night, “Let me see which are most entitled to the credit of brave men, the boys of Carolina or Georgia.” Here’s your chance to show him.

Kennedy – Well, you know, I am known as the best shot in South Carolina. In fact, when the boys hear the crack of my rifle, they always say, “There is another Tory less.”

Savage – Well I’m from Georgia, and I’ve proven myself plenty of times as a soldier and a hunter. We’ll just see who comes out on top.

Farr – Look ahead boys, I see a fancily-dressed British officer prancing his horse in front of the advancing troops. Who can take him down? (*Farr looks to Savage who gives him a nod*)

Savage – (*thinks to himself*) *Here’s my chance. I’ll lean my rifle here against this tree and* **CRACK!** Well, I’ll be – there’s a horse without a rider wheeling from the advancing column! Guess we know who’s the best shot now!

Narrator 18 - And so the battle begins. The sharpshooters do their part to take out as many officers as possible. They fire their shots and retreat.

Narrator 19 - Now we move back 150 yards and come to the militia line led by Col. Andrew Pickens. They have their orders from Morgan as well to fire two or three shots and then retreat.

Pickens – The Brits will be here soon, boys. Now remember your orders men, hold your fire until they are within killing distance. Your goal is to fire 2 or 3 rounds before retreating through to the Continental line.

Files – Yeah, boys. Remember Morgan’s words when he came by our camp last night. “'Just hold up your heads, boys, three fires, and you are free, and then when you return to your homes, how the old folks will bless you, and the girls kiss you, for your gallant conduct!"

Young – I tell you, I can’t wait to meet Old Banny. He killed my brother last year and I swore I would not rest until I avenged his death. Today just might be the day I make good on that promise.

Old Dick – And don’t forget, Morgan promised that we would not have to face the Redcoats in hand to hand combat. If we follow his orders, we will be safely behind the regulars before they can reach us with those terrible bayonets.

Files – And to think, we were all cursing the Old Wagoner for waiting so long to turn and fight. We all have reason to want to beat Bloody Ban!

Primus – That’s right. But the general said he would “crack his whip over Ban in the morning.” Well, it’s morning now.

Pickens – All right men, at the ready, here come the sharpshooters with the Redcoats hot on their heels. Now ready yourselves, and remember, do not fire until you can see the whites of their eyes! Listen for my order and listen hard over the yelling of the Brits!

Morgan – They gave us the British halloo boys, give them the Indian halloo by God.

All militia – *Howl like wolves*

Narrator 20 - The militia does exactly as they were asked. They all fire at least once before retreating in the face of the British soldiers and their bayonets. When the British finally face the Continentals, they are without 2/3 of their leaders.

**Part 5 - The Continentals**

Narrator 21 - Now we come to the spot where Morgan had his Continentals lined up and waiting for the British. We know that Morgan has complete confidence in these troops. He has fought with them before and knows their bravery and abilities.

Morgan – Remember Saratoga, Monmouth, and Brandywine. “This day you must play your parts for honor and liberty’s cause.” Here come the militiamen. They are not running away, they are following my orders. Now it is your turn to fight!

Howard – Here they come boys, ready your muskets!

Narrator 22 - The Continentals exchange fire back with the British. The battlefield fills with smoke and shouting. Soon the Continentals look up and see the Highlanders coming in on the right.

Howard – Refuse the Flank! Change the Front!

Kirkwood – What did he say? About face and fall back?

Eartinhousin (*in broken English*) – Abot face? What? Fall back?

Narrator 23 - As the command passed around, it became confused in the noise and smoke of the battle. The Continentals on the right begin to about face and retreat in an orderly fashion. The rest of the line sees this and believes they have missed an order. They, too, turn and begin a retreat.

Morgan (riding up to Howard) – Are your men beaten?

Howard – Look how orderly they are. They are not retreating. They are marching in lines.

Morgan – Then give them the order to reload as they retreat and then give the order to turn and fire.

Narrator 24 - Of course, the British believe now that they have won and begin to run towards the Continentals. They have their bayonets ready and are screaming for Patriot blood.

Howard – About face and fire!

Bantham – Here we go!

Kirkwood – Surprise Brits!

Howard – Charge bayonet!

All Continentals – Huzzah!

Narrator 25 – The trap is sprung. After being fired upon at point blank range, British soldiers began to throw themselves to the ground in surrender.

**Part 6 - The Cavalry**

Narrator 26 – Keep in mind that Washington and his cavalry were kept in reserve at the back of the battlefield. When the militia began to retreat and were chased by a group of British dragoons, they rode out to fight the British. Now we join them as they see the British moving in towards the Continentals who have their backs turned.

Washington – The Brits are moving in like a mob. Let’s charge in and help our boys out.

Gilder – Let’s charge in at full speed!

Crabtree – And hollering all the way like madmen!

All Cavalry: Huzzah!

Gresham – Look! The militia is coming back to help!

Washington – Close them in, boys. It looks like we are about to have this won!

Narrator 27 – And so the British troops are surrounded and surrendering. Some are laying down their weapons and holding up their hands.

Crabtree, Kirkwood, Files – Show no mercy!

Savage, Bantham – Yeah! Give them Tarleton’s Quarter!

Morgan – No, we will honor their surrender. Take them prisoner and help the wounded if you can.

Washington –Tarleton is fleeing down the field. Let’s ride! I am off to chase him down and end him for good!

Crabtree, Collins – We are with you!

Narrator 28 – The battle was over in less than an hour. In the end the British army lost 110, had 229 wounded, and 600 either captured or missing. Morgan only lost 24 men and had 104 wounded. Morgan did as he was asked by “spiriting up the people.” He was quoted later as saying that he had given Tarleton “a devil of a whipping” at the Cow-Pens!