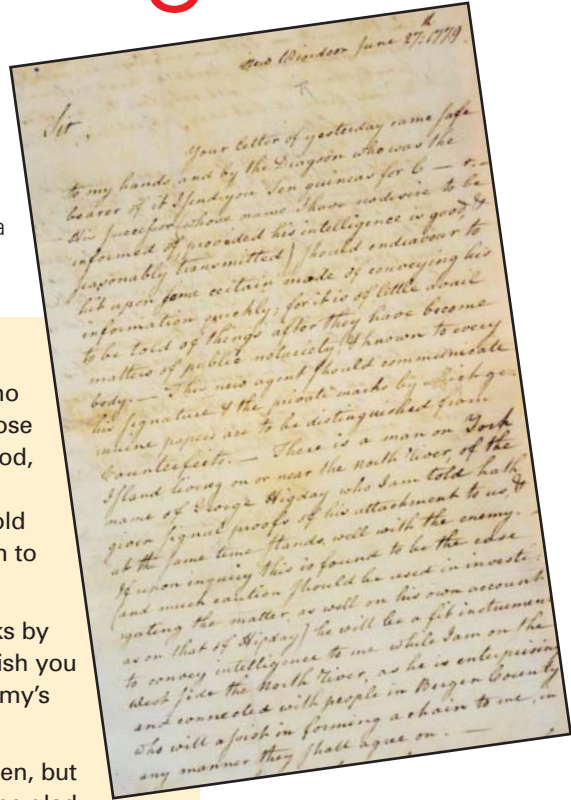


Signature History

A signature has power. The simple act of putting one's name on paper can mean many things—a promise, a victory, a defeat, or even an act of bravery.

During the Revolutionary War, George Washington's spy network wrote many letters filled with information about enemy plans and troop positions. The signatures on these dangerous letters confirmed that the information was accurate, although it placed the spy's life in great danger. The excerpt below is a letter from George Washington to a trusted spy. Read it carefully; then answer the questions.



Sir,

Your letter of yesterday came safe to my hands, and by the **Dragoon** who was the bearer of it, I send you Ten **guineas** for **C—r**. His successor (whose name I have no desire to be informed of, provided his intelligence is good, & **seasonably** transmitted) should **endeavour** to hit upon some certain mode of conveying his information quickly; for it is of little avail to be told of things after they have become matters of public notoriety, and known to every body.

This new agent should communicate his signature and the private marks by which genuine papers are to be distinguished from counterfeits. . . . I wish you to use every method in your power . . . to obtain information of the enemy's situation—and, as far as it is to be come at, designs.

C—r speaks of the enemy's force up the River as not exceeding 8,000 men, but as I know he is mistaken if he comprehends their whole force, I should be glad if his successor was cautioned against giving positive numbers by guess. This is **deceptious**—let him **ascertain** the particular corps which can be no difficult matter to do, & he will soon by taking a little pains, indirectly, come at the strength of them, & where they lie.

I am Sir with esteem and regard, Your Very Humble Servant,

Go. Washington

The original letter* written by George Washington during the Revolutionary War.

*Source: William L. Clements Library, "Spy Letters of the American Revolution," <http://www.si.umich.edu/SPIES/index-people.html>.

Words to Know:

Dragoon: a soldier armed with a short rifle or musket
Guineas: British money formerly used in the United States

C—r: abbreviation for "Samuel Culper," the code name for Washington's spy ring

Seasonably: timely

Endeavor: try

Deceptious: deceptive

Ascertain: figure out

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

1. Who is the author of this letter and why did he/she write it?
2. What requests does the author make?
3. The author asks the reader to "communicate his signature and the private marks by which genuine papers are to be distinguished from counterfeits." What does this mean?
4. What characteristics about the author have you learned from reading this letter?
5. How does this source provide a better understanding of the Revolutionary War?
6. Which holds more value: one signature or multiple signatures? Why?

Contest!

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 in supplies for your school!

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 Deadline: December 31, 2007