

**BIG
READ**

Nonfiction feature

**DON'T MISS
OUR VIDEO
READ-
ALLOUD!**

Blood,

A Scary Sight

Joseph watches as his fellow fighters take on a group of British soldiers, known as “redcoats” because of their bright-red uniforms.



THINK AND READ

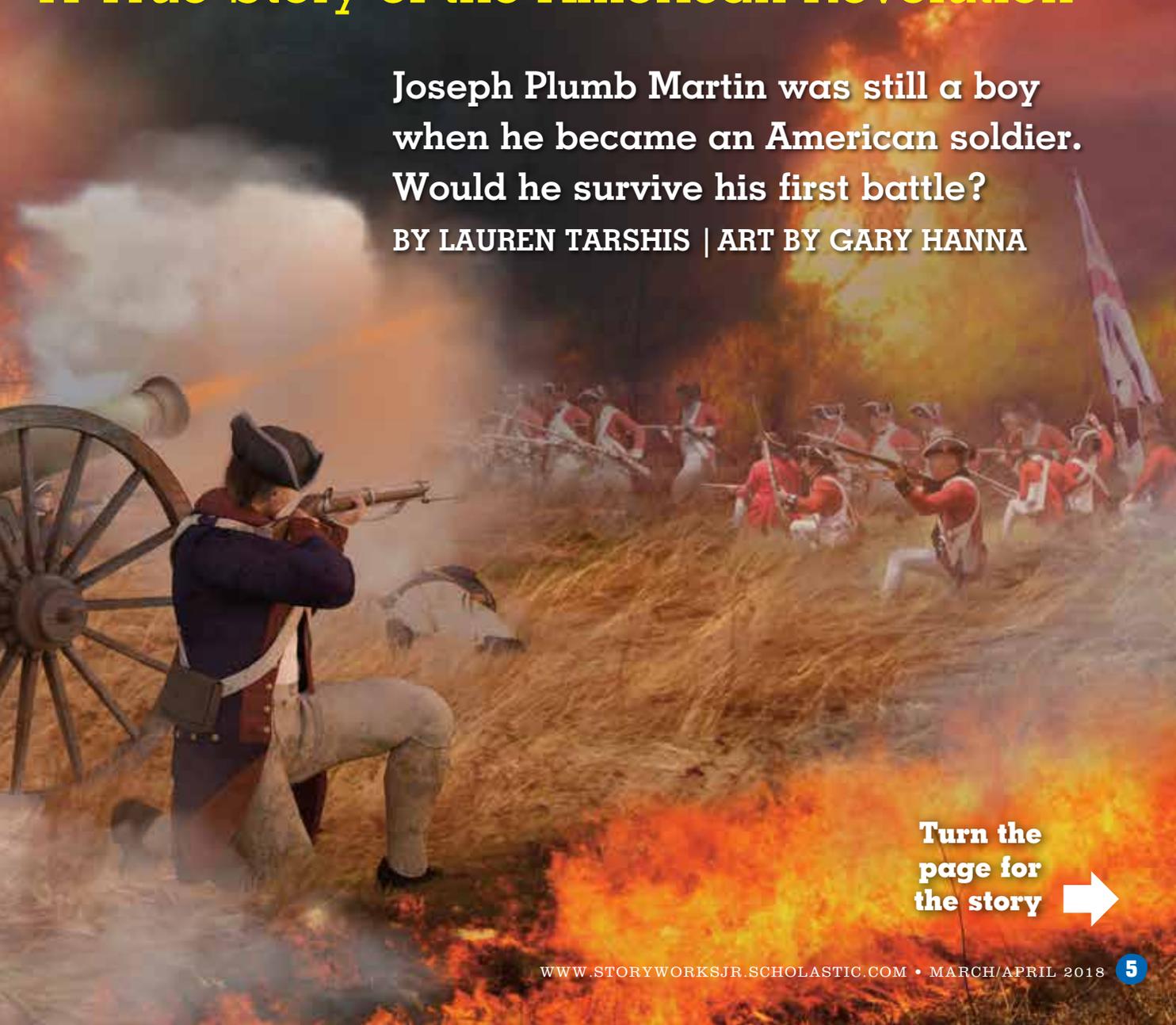
Text Evidence As you read, look for evidence (examples and details) that the author includes to support her description of events.

Smoke, and Freedom

A True Story of the American Revolution

Joseph Plumb Martin was still a boy when he became an American soldier. Would he survive his first battle?

BY LAUREN TARSHIS | ART BY GARY HANNA



Turn the
page for
the story



Boom! Boom! Boom!

The ground shook. Explosions boomed. The air was smoky. Joseph Plumb Martin was lying in the dirt. He tried to stay alive.

It was August 27, 1776. The Revolutionary War had started. America and England fought each other. The two armies were in New York. Joseph, age 15, was in the American army. He thought America would win.

But now the Americans were

doomed. Hundreds of soldiers were dead. Men were hurt.

It seemed Joseph had two choices: **surrender** or die.



PAUSE AND THINK: How was being a soldier different from what Joseph expected?

A New World

Joseph was born in 1760. The United States wasn't a country yet. It was still mostly **wilderness.** Some people

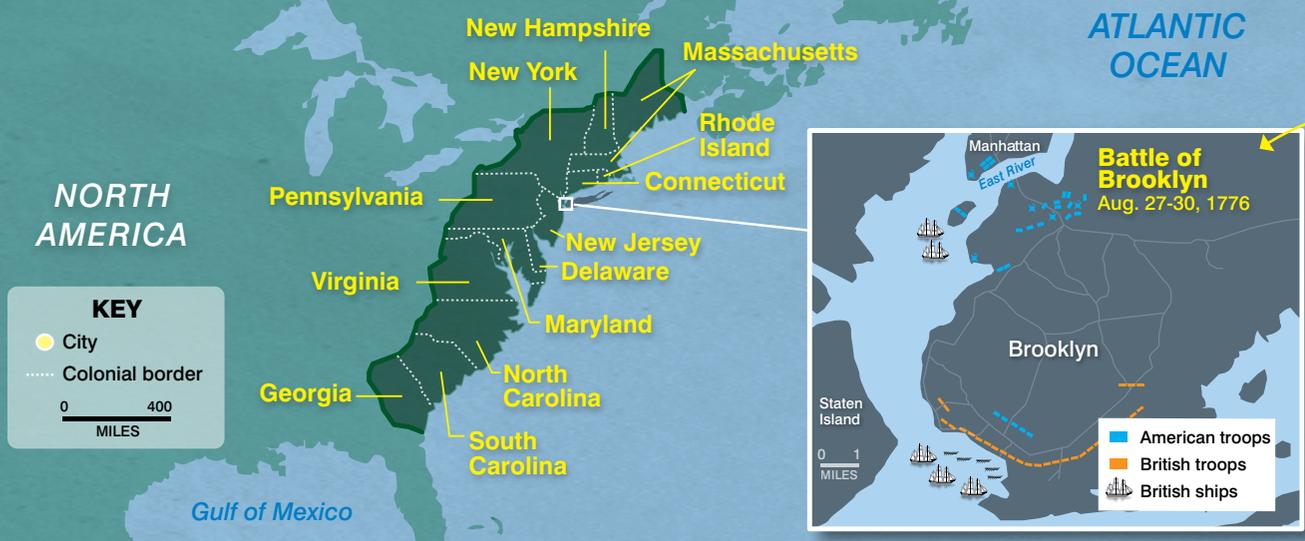
doomed: going to fail

surrender: give up or stop fighting because you know you won't win

wilderness: a wild, natural area where few people live

The 13 Colonies

See how much of the U.S. didn't exist back in 1776?



lived on the East Coast. That land was ruled by England. It was divided into 13 areas, or colonies. Joseph lived in the colony of Connecticut.

People had come to the colonies from England. They also came from other parts of Europe. Rules were too strict there. In the colonies, people had more choices. But they still had to follow England's rules.

Not everyone in the colonies had a good life. Many Native American people died. They died of diseases brought by Europeans. They were killed in fights over land. They starved after being forced from their homes. African people

were dragged to America. They were forced to be **slaves**.

Americans were mad at England. They didn't want to follow England's rules. It didn't seem fair.

America's anger **smoldered** like a fire. In April 1775, that anger turned into war. The American Revolution had begun.



PAUSE AND THINK: Why did people leave England and other countries to come to the colonies?

Getting Ready to Fight

At first, war scared Joseph. But he got brave. He joined the army. Joseph went to New York City. The city was **bustling**. It had been turned into an American army camp.

"I was now what I had long wished to be," he later wrote. "A soldier."

But Joseph wasn't a soldier yet. And neither were most of the nearly 20,000 people with him. Some could barely fire a gun. Their leader was General George Washington. He had never led an army



Inset: where Joseph and his fellow soldiers fought in the summer of 1776

slaves: people who are owned by other people and must work for them for free

smoldered: burned slowly

bustling: fast-moving, busy



before. He tried to turn his men into fighters.

Joseph didn't complain. He ate the bad Army meals. He coped with the summer heat. He dealt with the stink of trash. He was excited to be a soldier.



PAUSE AND THINK: What did Joseph and others need to learn to become soldiers?

Surprise Attack

The British planned an attack on New York. They had ships full of weapons. Joseph could see the soldiers on those ships. They were like caged beasts. They were hungry for blood.

They struck early one morning. It was still dark. British soldiers arrived in Brooklyn. Brooklyn was a village. It was across the river from New York City. American soldiers were living there. They didn't expect the British to come for them.

Washington sent men to Brooklyn to help. Joseph was one of them. He saw a scary scene. Men were lying in the grass. "Some with broken arms, some with broken legs, some with broken heads," Joseph wrote. He and other soldiers tried to keep the British away from the American **forts**.

forts: buildings for troops that are strengthened to protect against attacks

The Two Georges

These leaders were enemies—but they were similar. Both men were popular and cared about their countries. Both were farmers. And both were more than 6 feet tall, in a time when most men were much shorter.



U.S. General
George Washington

But the British forces were too strong. Many Americans were killed or hurt.



PAUSE AND THINK: What did Washington do when the British attacked Brooklyn?

Secret Escape

George Washington stayed calm. He had a plan. He would sneak the American army out of Brooklyn at night.

He sent an **urgent** message. "We need boats in Brooklyn now!" It was dark and foggy. His soldiers were able to sneak back to New York City. This included Joseph. In the morning, the

urgent: very important



King George III of England

IF YOU HAD LIVED IN 1776 . . .

Life was different back in Joseph's day.

Here are just a few reasons why:

Kids loved eel pie.

Eew! These slimy snake-like fish, baked in a pie, were an American favorite.



Schools were just one room.

A single teacher taught children of all ages— together.



New shoes were really painful.

Shoes were expensive and hard to get. There were no left or right shoes, and it took months to break in a new pair.



There was no toilet paper. People used corn cobs to clean themselves. (Ouch!)



British attacked the forts. The forts were empty!

The Americans lost that battle. But their army survived. They would keep fighting.

The American Revolution lasted for eight years. Towns were burned down. Soldiers were killed. Americans felt scared. But in 1783, the war ended. The

British surrendered. America won the war.

Joseph fought for the entire war. He later moved to Maine. He got married. He raised five kids. He died at age 89. He always remembered the terrors of war. But he was proud that he helped America win its fight for freedom. ■



PAUSE AND THINK: How long did the American Revolution last? Who won?

THINK AND WRITE

Pretend you're Joseph in 1776. Write a journal entry explaining how hard it is to be an American soldier. Include at least five details from the story. Send it to "War Contest" by May 15. Five winners will each receive *I Survived the American Revolution, 1776*, by Lauren Tarshis. See details on page 2.

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