

Understanding the Military Journal of James Thacher, M.D.

History is made up of more than just dates and places. It recounts the stories of our human forebears, the things they did, and what they believed. One of the best ways to learn about the people who lived during a certain time is to read the records they left behind, typically letters and journals.

These personal accounts provide first-hand experiences and opinions, helping historians discover what actually happened way back when or what motivated people to do the things they did. To understand a document, historians ask questions such as who is the author? What is the objective of the piece? Who is its audience? Do we have reasons to think that this piece is accurately describing events? How does it match with other documents one has from the era?

For this activity, imagine that you are a historian who recently discovered the journal of James Thacher, a doctor who served in the Revolutionary War. It is your job to read it and determine which parts are factual. You also want to figure out how he feels about the American Revolution (*To help you do that, your teacher may also have you look at a well-known text from the era, the Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress, which was released in 1774, the year before Thacher's journal entries here. If so, also answer the italicized questions below.*)

There are three boxes on this worksheet:

- In the first, write down which events that you believe to be true.
- In the second, write down the opinions he shares.
- *In the third, write down connections to the Declaration and Resolves.*

Once you have completed the exercise, be ready to discuss the following points:

- Why did you list certain events as factual and others as opinion?
- Do you think that Thacher's opinions affect the way that he writes? Why or why not?

A writer's opinions influence what he or she writes. Do you think Thacher left certain facts or stories out? If so, what facts or stories would they be?

- Based on what you have read, what conclusions can you draw about life during 1775-1776?
- *How are his opinions similar to, or different from, the Declaration and Resolves?*
- Does Thacher's journal reinforce what you have already learned about the American Revolution? If so, how?

Facts:

Opinions:

*Connections to the
Declaration and Resolves:*