Teacher's Guide: **The Sun Never Sets on the British Colonial Wars**

Overview: Students discuss what information is needed to test the hypothesis that the British navy was overextended and therefore unable to send enough ships to fight the French fleet in Chesapeake Bay. Inability to break the blockade and either get much-needed reinforcements and supplies to Cornwallis' army or help them escape from the peninsula ultimately led to the "defeat" of the British army at Yorktown.	Grade: 5-8
	Related Discipline: Math
	CC Standard: 5.OA-3
	Time: 10 m, homework, 10 m

Preparation: Provide a blank world map and access to the internet. Alternatively, provide the data about fleets in the form of a table – but that approach misses one of the major objectives of this lesson, which is to learn how to "mine" a website like Wikipedia for specific information that can be used to test a hypothesis about military capability in the early 1780s.

Setup: Show students one or more pictures of naval fleets engaged in battle during the early 1780s. Follow the links in the year-by-year lists at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1781_in_Great_Britain

Good paintings are reproduced (and explicitly declared public domain) for naval battles at Chesapeake Bay, Dogger Bank, Granada, Saintes, Cape Spartel, Porto Praia, Gibraltar, and Trincolamee (one of four battles near India). See the powerpoint for samples.

Ask: "Did the British send their largest or best fleet to fight in the American Revolution? Or did they have to fight a lot of battles in different places, more or less at the same time? Can we phrase those questions as hypotheses to be tested? If so, how can we gather information to test either hypothesis?"

Click on the links in the list to show the webpage for the Battle of Chesapeake Bay. Scroll down to find the list of fleets, ships, and commanders. Continue the discussion until students agree that they should be looking for the number of ships in each fleet and the commander of the fleet (as one way of checking that the fleets were indeed different, not the same fleet going from one battle to another.)

Procedure: Click on the link for each naval battle in late 1781 and early 1782. Tabulate the number of ships of the line (the major fighting ships in the late 1700s). Note the commander, the date, and the countries involved. Note also that the British were keeping a sizeable fleet in the English Channel to guard against an invasion from the mainland (look up the Wikipedia article for the Armada of 1779). Finally, note that Britain also had ships (and sailors) running an active slave trade and doing some global exploration (Captain James Cook, for example, went to Hawai'i about this same time).

Mark the locations of battles on a world map. Choose a symbol to show the number of British ships involved. Calculate the total as a first estimate of the total number of ships. Check the commanders to identify fleets that might have had some of the same ships. As an independent line of evidence, note that there is a separate list of British ships of the line, which numbered more than 120 at the time. Finally, note that a 74-gun ship-of-the-line had a crew of 600-700 plus some marines for boarding or landing parties. Now you can "do the math" to see how many sailors were needed in the British navy.

Answers: 120+ ships with crews of 600+ adds up to at least 70,000 sailors; plus a lot of soldiers.

Debrief: Put these numbers in context – the population of the British Isles was about 6 million around 1780. The United States currently has about 1.4 million active duty military personnel, out of a total population of 315 million. "Do you see why the British practices of quartering soldiers in homes and impressing sailors were high on the list of colonial grievances against British rule?"

Vocabulary: siege battle ship of the line   overextended   active duty   impressment   quartering

Extension: Make a similar estimate of the army soldiers needed. Also, check Washington's diary at:

http://www.thehistoryreader.com/modern-history/british-surrender-george-washingtons-diary-articles-capitulation/