How the rest of the world learns about the American Revolution in school

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The American Revolutionary War is an intensely proud moment in history for most Americans ([perhaps too proud](http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0611/57907.html)). It’s taught as a major subject in history classes as early as elementary school, and it’s brought up again and again in different contexts in middle school, high school, and college. Along with the Civil War, it fills up more pages in history textbooks than any other event in American history.

In the US, it’s often taught as a heroic struggle for freedom against the tyrannical British Empire, which was unfairly taxing the colonists[without giving them representation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_taxation_without_representation) in government (though in some high school classes, and certainly at the college level, it’s taught with more nuance).

But how is the American Revolution taught in the UK and in other countries around the world? Quartz crowdsourced answers from people on Reddit and Quora to get a sense of how this seminal event in the American historical ethos is taught to everyone else.

Here are some of the common threads we noticed:

* It’s part of the Enlightenment, focusing on the philosophical and political ideas in play, rather than the military action.
* It’s taught as a footnote to the French Revolution and the wave of similar revolutions around the world (even though the American Revolution was, demonstrably, a catalyst for this wave).
* In the UK and some other countries, it’s called the American War of Independence.
* It’s not taught at all.

**United Kingdom**

[We touched on it](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctc93q6) in A level history (UK). We didn’t go into great detail, but it was essentially that you guys ran with the ideas of Locke, Voltaire and Rousseau, and a lot of the reason why you were successful is because you were bankrolled and aided by the French, who wanted to weaken the British Empire.

Again, this was more just general class discussion, we didn’t actually officially study it. We studied the French one instead because in this part of the world it’s seen as a much bigger deal.

[Brit here](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/2o8eoj/how_is_the_american_revolutionary_war_taught_in/cmkr6mm), I don’t remember being taught at all about the American revolution. Almost all of the history I do remember in school was based around Tudors, Edwardians, Victorians, and the two World Wars.

[It’s not taught](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcc8na) here in Northern Ireland. We are taught about the history of potatoes and the Cold War.

[First of all](http://www.quora.com/How-do-they-teach-the-American-Revolution-in-the-U-K), in the UK it is referred to as the American War of Independence.

Second, in the history of the UK, it is one of a series of rather obscure wars we fought with the French in the 18th century—War of the Spanish Succession, War of the Austrian Succession, Seven Years War… most of which the UK won. But it isn’t really any more important to Britain than any of those, and arguably less important than the French Revolutionary Wars. It’s a historical curiosity.

[UK](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctc8i8l)—It was briefly brought up when we studied the English civil war, by way of Hobbes -> Locke -> American independence.

[Brit here](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcbbft). Studied history all through school, university and up to MA level. I have never learned about the American revolution in any formal setting.

There is a very simple reason why the American revolution is not really taught in the UK (or anywhere outside of the USA): it isn’t really that important. As far as the British Empire went, it grew dramatically in the century after the revolution and developed a more global reach. As far as European history goes, the French revolution is far more important as it had far more tangible effects for Europeans. In fact, the American revolution could be looked in the context of British/French colonial rivalries.

[In case you’re curious](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/2o8eoj/how_is_the_american_revolutionary_war_taught_in/cmksv6f), people in the UK generally don’t identify at all with the “British” side of the Revolutionary War in America, and see it as an extension of a somewhat tyrannical British political establishment, not at all representative of the average British person (unlike British views of the World Wars, for example, regardless of the establishment’s real motivations for engaging in them).

So I think most Brits would agree with seeing it as the rebellion against unfair taxation… but from *the British crown*rather than “the UK”.

[When you have](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/2o8eoj/how_is_the_american_revolutionary_war_taught_in/cmkve2f) over 2,000 years of history including monarchical struggle, religious tyranny, our own civil war, attempted invasion, two world wars on our door step etc, then it just mostly gets missed.

**Elsewhere around the world**

[In Poland](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcdvu6) it was mentioned as a sidenote to French Revolutionary/Napoleonic wars.

[Hungary:](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctc7cpc) It is taught as a prelude to the “Great French Revolution.” The most popular part of it is the Boston Tea Party, and I really liked the ‘join-or-die’ snake in our book. But for most of us the American Revolution is the story of an everyday [farmer](http://d1h1icg9nkzvny.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/The-Patriot-1.jpg), who is haunted by his war memories and wants nothing more than to live peacefully on his small plantation with his children… :)

[I’m in Canada](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcvn1n) and our high-school history was primarily history of the aboriginal peoples. (Even other Canadian history was really not mentioned except where it directly informed the aboriginal’s dealings with the colonists.)

The bit of world history they did teach us, however, was all about the French Revolution.

It’s not that it was just a much bigger deal in that part of the world… The American Revolution was a huge event for the United States and continues to inform politics there to this day. But outside of their borders… The French Revolution fundamentally altered the course of Western civilization.

It isn’t.

Source: [Australian](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctc53tz).

It’s not taught [in New Zealand](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctch57w) either.

[Belgium:](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctc6opy) In high school it was pretty basic, you could learn the same thing by watching “the patriot” or playing Assasin’s Creed 3.

In college though, we focused on the ideological part: America the first nation with a constitution, abolishment of the monarchy. The first democracy that created a domino effect in all of europe to follow its lead. We didn’t really focus on “the military” part of it.

Not taught [in South America](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcempv) schools. We are only taught you won, France helped you, and then you helped in the independence war. That’s all. We know more of the French Revolution, which, in my opinion, was more important to us in terms of inspiration.

[In Brazil](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcc95v) I was taught about it, but not extensively. It was usually perceived as an important step to understand the French Revolution of 1789, as a reminder that the Enlightenment could be more than just philosophy and could be transformed into an actual political system. However, as many history teachers in Brazil have fairly anti-US biases they fail to give it proper attention in their own studies.

[Sweden](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctc5jpa). We don’t really care. Think we spent a class on it in high school.

[India](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctcak3m): It’s not mentioned at all. Not even a little bit.

I am [French](https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/3e7b2o/how_is_the_american_revolution_taught_elsewhere/ctch9bw) too and I remember that I had a class about it during middle school, but it was a quick, something like:

-Americans wanted independence, so they made the Tea Boston Party.

-So Britain went to war with America

-French sent troops with Lafayette

-“Join-or-die” snake

-America wins, they have now democracy

-It brings the ideas for the French Revolution

It was more an introduction class to the French Revolution than a class about American Revolution.

