



# Colorado Book Club Resource

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR 1776 BY DAVID McCULLOUGH

1. McCullough begins his novel with a detailed description of Britain's King George. Why do you think he does this? Throughout the book, McCullough also gives details of General William Howe. This was a deliberate choice—do you think it adds to the novel? Why or why not?
2. The beginning of the novel provides a disparaging description of the American army, which McCullough tells us lacks artillery and is very low on gunpowder. However, Nathaniel Green's worry went beyond weaponry: "when you consider how raw and undisciplined the troops are in general, and what war-like preparations are going on [in] England" (24). McCullough recounts that the British and Loyalists taking refuge in Boston referred to the American troops as "the rebels" or "the country people"—not worthy of the descriptors of "American" or "Army" (25). This portrait of a slipshod American army, made up of young, inexperienced men seems like an important point that McCullough makes, repeatedly. Why is it important to consider the actual men who made up Washington's army during the year 1776? Why do you think McCullough makes such a point of providing details about them?
3. When Washington writes to General Thomas, he explains that the object of fighting the British was "neither glory nor extent of territory, but a defense of all that is dear and valuable in life" (55). McCullough makes a point of saying that the word "independence" was not yet uttered. Discuss the significance of the word "independence" as it pertains to this historical period and why it may not have been utilized until the tensions between the Americans and the British rose to a fever pitch.
4. Discuss Colonel Henry Knox's decision to recover the abandoned British canons from Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. What did this endeavor entail in terms of leadership and courage? Considering the risks involved, why did General Washington agree to such a scheme?
5. Throughout this entire historical novel, communication and time are completely arcane concepts. Consider our modern cell phones and means of travel, for example. The British are driven from Boston by the Americans on March 27th, and news doesn't reach London until six weeks later, on May 6th, to criticism and shock.
6. Discuss the concept of communication during the year of 1776—both its challenges and its (perhaps less obvious) advantages.



***This discussion sheet is property of the Colorado State Library's Book Club Resource. Please return this sheet along with all of the books in the book bag to the Colorado State Library – Courier Code C912. Contact [bookclub@coloradovirtuallibrary.org](mailto:bookclub@coloradovirtuallibrary.org) with questions or concerns.***



# Colorado Book Club Resource

7. The Brooklyn Heights was the location of a crushing defeat of the Americans at the hands of the British. Over 40,000 men took part in the Brooklyn Heights battle and, as McCullough describes, the fighting ranged over six miles. What circumstances contributed to the American's defeat during this battle? How did General Washington react?
8. The sneakiness of the retreat of the Americans after the Brooklyn Heights defeat is considered one of the greatest feats of this American army. In all, 9,000 troops were evacuated across the East River to Manhattan right under the British army's noses. Discuss this event and the circumstances that were necessary to its success.
9. What did you learn about General George Washington by the end of this novel? What qualities do you believe made him such a successful leader during this time? How did he convince these American troops to keep going, even after a crushing defeat?
10. Discuss what you think may have happened if Britain had maintained control over the colonies.
11. McCullough's last line, "Especially for those who had been with Washington and who knew what a close call it was at the beginning—how often circumstance, storms, contrary winds, the oddities or strengths of individual character had made the difference—the outcome seemed little short of a miracle" draws attention to how the outcome could have been different, if the situation had just been altered a small amount (294). Discuss this closing paragraph and the role of weather and personalities throughout this novel.

***Discussion questions provided by the Idaho Commission for Libraries Thanks!***



***This discussion sheet is property of the Colorado State Library's Book Club Resource. Please return this sheet along with all of the books in the book bag to the Colorado State Library – Courier Code C912. Contact [bookclub@coloradovirtuallibrary.org](mailto:bookclub@coloradovirtuallibrary.org) with questions or concerns.***