

American History Document Based Question
The Battle of Bunker Hill
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Grades 8 and above

Directions:

- Answer the corresponding questions following each document, written or visual.
- After answering the questions for documents 1-8 you should then respond to the essay prompt using the information from the following documents.
- This essay prompt is designed to test your ability to construct a well-written, informative essay based upon historical documents.
- Your score will be based on your ability to integrate and utilize relevant information from the documents provided to create a well organized essay.

Essay Question: Describe the Battle of Bunker Hill, with special emphasis on the difficulties that faced the soldiers on both sides, and how the battle came to an end.

Historical Background and Context: Following the outbreak of the Revolutionary War at Lexington and Concord, British forces were effectively trapped inside the city of Boston by thousands of American militia troops who arrived from neighboring towns and colonies. On the night of June 16th, 1775 American troops climbed atop Breed's Hill, originally thought to be Bunker Hill by soldiers on the scene, and fortified their military positions. British commanders in Boston felt that this American position was too close and quickly prepared to attack the American positions. Although the British technically won the battle as the forces the Americans to retreat and the British were able to control the territory, the British paid a heavy price in terms of killed and wounded.

Document 1: From the diary of Amos Farnsworth, one of the American defenders at Bunker Hill

Notwithstanding we within the intrenchment.....sustained the enemy's attacks with great bravery and resolution, killed and wounded great numbers, and repulsed them several times; and after bearing, for about 2 hours, as sever and heavy a fire as perhaps ever was known, and many (soldiers) having fired away all their ammunition, and having no reinforcement.....we were overpowered by numbers and obliged to leave.....I did not leave the intrenchment until the enemy got in.....

1. At what point did Farnsworth finally retreat from the enemy troops?
2. Explain why the American defenders were forced to retreat from their positions?

Document 2: This account is an eyewitness narrative prepared nearly two weeks after the battle took place.

The provincials (Americans).....reserved their fire till the enemy had come within about 10 or 12 yards and then discharged (fired their weapons) at once upon them. The fire threw their body (the British troops) into very great confusion, and all of them.....retreated in very great disorder down (the hill).....

At this time their (British) officers were observed.....(to) use the most passionate gestures and even to push forward the men with their swords. At length by their exertions the troops were again rallied and marched up to the entrenchments. The Americans reserved their fire and a second time put the regulars to flight who once more retreated.....

3. How did the British soldiers react to the first volley of rifle fire from the American forces?
 4. Explain how the British officers were able to get their soldiers to once again march up the hill towards the Americans.
 5. What happened during the second advance by the British force?
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Document 3: This is a portion of a letter written by William Prescott, one of the commanding officers of the American militia at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

The enemy advanced and fired very hotly on the fort, and meeting with a warm reception, there was a very smart firing on both sides. After a considerable time, finding our ammunition was almost spent (gone), I commanded a cessation till the enemy advanced within thirty yards, when we gave them such a hot fire that they were obliged to retire nearly one hundred and fifty yards before they could rally and come up again to the attack.

Our ammunition being nearly exhausted, could keep up only a scattering fire. The enemy, being numerous, surrounded our little fort, began to mount our lines and enter the fort with their bayonets. We was obliged to retreat through them, while they kept up as hot a fire as it was possible for them to make. We, having very few bayonets (knives attached to the end of a soldier's rifle), could make no resistance.

6. Why did Prescott order his soldiers to slow down or cease their firing of the muskets/rifles?
 7. Describe what happens when the American ammunition supply is almost exhausted and how the enemy is able to take advantage of this development.
 8. Explain why the Americans were unable to resist the British soldiers.
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Document 4: The following excerpt is from a letter by Sir William Howe, one of the British generals commanding troops during the attack by British forces against the American defenses, in the days following the battle.

But I now come to the fatal consequences of the action-92 officers killed and wounded-a most dreadful account.....I freely confess to you, when I look to the consequences of it, in the loss of so many brave officers, I do it with horror. The success is too dearly bought. Our killed, sergeants and rank and file, about 160, 300 wounded and in hospital, with as many more incapable of present duty. The Rebels (Americans) left near(ly) 100 killed and 30 wounded.....

9. According to Howe, the British lost how many officers killed or wounded?
 10. Why does Howe look upon the British victory in horror?
 11. How many British soldiers were killed and wounded?
 12. How many killed and wounded at the scene of the battle?
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Document 5: This is an early engraving depicting the attack on Bunker's Hill from a rather safe distance. Answer questions 1-3 by referring to the picture.

13. When did the battle take place?
14. What is happening to Charles Town?
15. What is the purpose of the ships and the small boats in the water?



Document 6: This picture depicts British soldiers as they march up the hill towards American defenses.

16. What obstacles must the soldiers step around or over on their way upwards to the American positions?
17. Why might the British soldiers be hot, tired, and possibly thirsty as this attack continues?
18. What advantages do the American forces have over the British attacking force?
19. What evidence can you see that suggests that this is not the first attack up the slope of the hill?



Document 7: Picture of the hand to hand combat atop Breed's Hill as British soldiers finally break into the American defenses on the third attack up the hill.

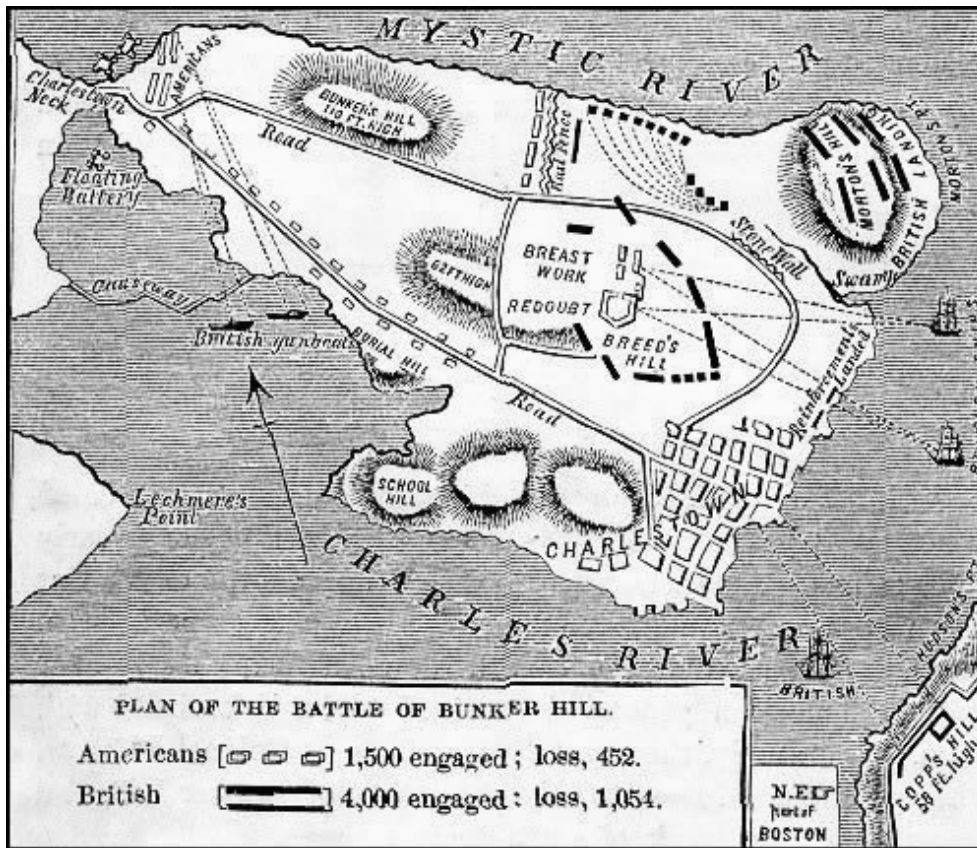


Answer the following questions/prompts by observation of the picture above.

Notice that the British soldiers are wearing the uniform while the American militia soldiers appear to be wearing their civilian clothes.

20. Why does it appear that the British have the advantage at this point during the battle?
21. How are the Americans attempting to fight back?
22. Explain why many of the American militia troops appear to be running away.

Document 8: An overview map of the Battle of Bunker Hill. Analyze this map to answer the following questions.



23. Name the two rivers that surrounded the peninsula.
24. What town existed on the peninsula?
25. Explain how the British ships will endanger American forces located on Breed's Hill.
26. Name the only area of land that the Americans will be able to use as a possible escape route.

Part 2: Essay Response: Refer to documents 1-8 and your responses from the associated questions as much as necessary to prepare, construct, and write a well-organized and informative essay.

As you prepare and write your essay you should remember to:

- Include an introduction paragraph or thesis statement
- Use information from the documents, both written and visual, to include supporting details and examples to develop your ideas.

Essay Prompt:

Describe the Battle of Bunker Hill, with special emphasis on the difficulties that faced the soldiers on both sides, and how the battle came to an end.