For Honor and Liberty’s Cause: Daniel Morgan, Revolutionary Leadership, and Purpose

- **Compelling Question**
  - What about Daniel Morgan’s dedication to his purpose can inspire us to be follow purpose in our own lives?

- **Virtue**: Purpose

- **Definition** – Purpose is my answer to the question "why do I exist?" It is the reason for which I exist; it is my goal, that thing to which my actions are directed. It is our answer to the question “what are you for?”

- **Lesson Overview**
  - In this lesson, students will learn about the life of Daniel Morgan. They will explore his dedication to his purpose through many trials and tribulations and at great personal sacrifice. Through his example, students will learn how they can pursue purpose in their own lives.

- **Objectives**
  - Students will analyze Daniel Morgan’s performance as a soldier during the American Revolution.
  - Students will understand how his example shows a dedication to his purpose.
  - Students will apply this knowledge to the pursuit of purpose in their own lives.

- **Background**
  - There is a prevailing myth about the American Revolution that the colonists fought from behind rocks, fences, trees, and barns. While this was true during the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the Continental Army largely fought in lines like professional European armies. Even the riflemen who fought with more accurate muskets with rifling and were sharpshooters because of their outdoor lives on the frontier fought as light infantry with the regular army.

  The riflemen had a fierce individualism because of the democracy they enjoyed on the frontier, their typical allegiance to an evangelical denomination of Christianity, a separate economy based upon barter, and their generally Scots-Irish heritage. They resisted Eastern authority and taxes as much as they hated British authority. They were among the most patriotically devoted to the cause of individual American liberty.

  Daniel Morgan typified the frontier culture of the American riflemen. He had a Welsh background and was a farmer and wagon driver on the frontier. He fought Indians in the Virginia mountains in the west as part of a group of rangers. He hated the British because of mistreatment he suffered at their hands during the French and Indian War in the 1750s. He became dedicated to the ideals of the American Revolution and fought for them valiantly. He had found his purpose in life and was a natural leader who inspired by words but mostly by example. He would go on to fight in nearly every important battle of the American Revolution and sacrificed his physical and financial well-being to the cause of American liberty and independence.

- **Vocabulary**
  - Prevailing
  - Sharpshooters
  - Barter
  - Authority
  - Typified
  - Welsh
  - Haughty
  - Provincials
  - Indescribable
  - Pugnacious
  - Intrepid
  - Inflexible
  - Brutal
  - Encircle
  - Intrepid
• **Introduce Text**
  o Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

• **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
  o As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
    ▪ What challenges are you facing?
    ▪ What fears or concerns might you have?
    ▪ What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

• **Observation Questions**
  o Who was Daniel Morgan?
  o What was Daniel Morgan's role during the American Revolutionary War?
  o What responsibility to the cause of liberty does Daniel Morgan believe he has? How does this shape his purpose?

• **Discussion Questions**
  o Discuss the following questions with your students.
    ▪ What is the historical context of the narrative?
    ▪ What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
    ▪ How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
    ▪ How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
    ▪ How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
    ▪ What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
    ▪ Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
    ▪ How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

• **Additional Resources**
Handout A: For Honor and Liberty’s Cause: Daniel Morgan, Revolutionary Leadership, and Purpose

Background

There is a prevailing myth about the American Revolution that the colonists fought from behind rocks, fences, trees, and barns. While this was true during the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the Continental Army largely fought in lines like professional European armies. Even the riflemen who fought with more accurate muskets with rifling and were sharpshooters because of their outdoor lives on the frontier fought as light infantry with the regular army.

The riflemen had a fierce individualism because of the democracy they enjoyed on the frontier, their typical allegiance to an evangelical denomination of Christianity, a separate economy based upon barter, and their generally Scots-Irish heritage. They resented Eastern authority and taxes as much as they hated British authority. They were among the most patriotically devoted to the cause of individual American liberty.

Daniel Morgan typified the frontier culture of the American riflemen. He had a Welsh background and was a farmer and wagon driver on the frontier. He fought Indians in the Virginia mountains in the west as part of a group of rangers. He hated the British because of mistreatment he suffered at their hands during the French and Indian War in the 1750s. He became dedicated to the ideals of the American Revolution and fought for them valiantly. He had found his purpose in life and was a natural leader who inspired by words but mostly by example. He would go on to fight in nearly every important battle of the American Revolution and sacrificed his physical and financial well-being to the cause of American liberty and independence.

Narrative

In the late spring of 1755, Daniel Morgan was a wagon driver in British Major General Edward Braddock during his march into the frontier against the French at Fort Duquesne (in modern-day Pittsburgh) in the French and Indian War. A haughty British officer, who thought the colonists were a bunch of provincials beneath the British, insulted Morgan. The six-foot, 200-pound hulking man with broad shoulders who liked to wrestle angrily knocked the officer down in one blow. This breach of military discipline was instantly punished by a court-martial on the spot. It found Morgan guilty and ordered him severely whipped with hundreds of lashes. Morgan took his shirt off and bent over to receive his punishment. The pain was indescribable, but Morgan was determined not to cry out and to keep count the strokes with the drummer. When there was a miscount that added a stroke, Morgan “did not think it worthwhile to tell him of his mistake, and let it go.” After the ordeal was over in which Morgan may have lost consciousness, his back was severely bloodied and his skin hung down in tatters. It was an experience that the twenty-year-old would never forget.

Two decades later, when the colonists resisted British taxes and rebelled, Morgan was profoundly devoted to the cause of liberty and found his great purpose in life. He was a pugnacious and brave frontier fighter and raised a unit of Virginia riflemen who were fierce individualists and fought to preserve their liberty. During the summer of 1775, he marched his men to fight the British who were besieging Boston after the Battle of Bunker Hill. The riflemen acted as snipers but sought greater adventure and wanted to influence the outcome of the war. Therefore, Morgan and his riflemen marched hundreds of miles through the New England and Canadian wilderness toward their target of Quebec. They rowed canoes over dangerously swollen rivers, marched overland in rain and snow carrying their canoes for miles, went hungry when they lost their supplies and ate leather and soap out of desperation. Finally, in late December, they assaulted the fort at Quebec in a blinding snowstorm and Morgan was grazed by grapeshot in the face and fell off a barricade onto his back before being taken prisoner. In great pain, he refused to surrender his sword to a British officer and handed it to a priest he saw. “Not a scoundrel of those cowards shall take it out of my hands,” he said.

General George Washington praised Morgan for his “intrepid behavior” in the assault and his “inflexible attachment he professed to our cause…which he perseveres in.” In January, 1777, he raised another unit of riflemen where he was given command of 500 light infantry and sent to upstate New York. His riflemen played big part in the Battle of Saratoga that fall killing many British officers and artillerymen that resulted in the American victory that bagged more than 5,000 British prisoners. His commander, General Horatio Gates, praised the
Virginian: “Morgan, you have done wonders.” Gates informed Congress: “Too much praise cannot be given to the Corps commanded by Colonel Morgan.”

Although he was granted leave and missed the worst part of the Valley Forge winter, he arrived in time to witness Baron von Steuben’s training of the American Army and took part in the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse that demonstrated the ability of the newly-disciplined Continental Army. Morgan led from the front in all of these battles and never asked his men to do something he was not willing to do. One time, as an officer watched as two riflemen strained to move a boulder blocking a road, Morgan asked why the officer was not helping. When the officer said it was beneath his status, Morgan railed, “I beg your pardon. I did not think of that,” and personally bent down to roll the obstruction away.

Morgan was broken physically by a bad back which left him in constant pain and his finances were strained by the time he spent away from his farm. Nevertheless, he had a fierce dedication to the American cause and left for North Carolina as the war shifted south and the Americans lost the important port of Charleston, South Carolina. The army needed a leader of Morgan’s caliber and his indefatigable character. Congress promoted him to Brigadier General and stated Morgan had “great merit” and had “uniformly distinguished himself as an active, brave, and useful officer.” Nathaniel Greene, who assumed command of the American effort in the South, gave Morgan great autonomy due to his “prudence and discretion.” Greene’s trust was well-placed when Morgan won his greatest victory over the British at Cowpens.

Chased by the British troops led by General Tarleton, who was known as a brutal butcher who gave prisoners no quarter, Morgan encouraged his men: “I will ask you to encounter no dangers or difficulties, but what I shall participate in.” Morgan decided to stand at Cowpens, even though the terrain favored the British, because it would suit the disposition of his troops, most of which were generally unreliable militia. Morgan had a brilliant plan to deploy his troops in three lines with the militia comprising the first two lines. They would fire their muskets once or twice before being allowed to retreat back to the third line comprised of better-disciplined Continental troops on which the British lines would break.

On January 17, 1781, in the chill air and grey light just before dawn, Morgan roused his men and challenged them: “Let me see which are entitled to the credit of brave men, the boys of Carolina or those of Georgia.” He also inspired them with a call to patriotic service. “My friends in arms, my dear boys, I request you to remember Saratoga, Monmouth, Paoli, Brandywine, and this day you must play your parts for your honor and liberty’s cause.” They were ready to fight and lined up as planned. The plan went off according to plan, and the Americans encircled the British, with Morgan encouraging his men, “Form, form, my brave fellows...Old Morgan was never beaten.” Morgan noted after the battle that his men had given the enemy “a devil of a whipping.” Abigail Adams called him the “rising Hero in the South,” and the Continental Congress gave him a gold medal and thanked him for his “complete and important victory.”

Morgan had to return home in physical agony with great pain in his back, hemorrhoids, and a very high fever. He tried to return to the service but admitted, “I have been broke down in the services of my country.” His tactics at Cowpens were copied by Greene at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, and Washington won the penultimate victory of the war at Yorktown shortly thereafter. Greene’s purpose led him to fight bravely in the front lines and his intrepid leadership inspired his soldiers during most of the key battles of the Revolutionary War. Although he is mostly forgotten today, his fellow generals recognized his great contribution to the cause of liberty by his unflagging purpose. Greene said, “Great generals are scarce—there are few Morgans to be found.”