

Discussion Questions for King's Mountain

1. *History is written by the winners.* In U.S. history courses, it is often implied that all the American colonists were in favor of the Revolution, and that no sensible person would side with the British. But many colonists of that era did want the British to put down the Revolution and continue to govern America. If you were one of those colonists, having a political discussion with a Patriot, what reasons would you give for wanting to *remain* a British colony?
2. In the Civil War battle of Gettysburg (1863), the soldiers of Confederate General Pickett attempted to climb a steep hill whose summit was occupied by Union troops. The result was a slaughter, with the Federal troops on the hill killing 6,000 of Pickett's men. However, in the Revolutionary War battle of King's Mountain (1780), it was the British regiment that held the high ground while the Overmountain Men were forced to climb the hill in order to attack. But the Overmountain Men *won* the Battle of King's Mountain, losing only fifty of their own men, while Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg has become synonymous with disaster. Superficially, these two military assaults on a hill appear to be the same situation but with opposite outcomes. Why did the Overmountain Men succeed while Pickett's soldiers were defeated?
3. Study the scene in the novel which John Sevier visits Mary Patton to order gun powder for the Overmountain Men. Describe the game Mary's daughters are playing by the creek. What information/foreshadowing does the children's game give us about Virginia Paul? What similarities are there between the game and the activities of Virginia Paul? What other things does Virginia Paul do to confirm this supernatural aspect of her being?
4. If Virginia Sal had not been killed at King's Mountain, what do you think her life thereafter would have been like?
5. In the novel Patrick Ferguson tells the (*true*) story of failing to take a shot at the Continental officer the day before the battle of Brandywine. Do you think that if Ferguson had killed this man it would have changed the course of history, or would someone else simply have take his place, producing the same outcome?

6. Overmountain Men John Crockett and John Sevier married sisters (Rebecca and Sarah Hawkins). John Sevier later became the first governor of Tennessee, and John Crockett's son was "Davy" Crockett, who served as a U.S. congressman. (*i.e. Davy Crockett was the nephew of the governor.*) In the 1950's Disney produced a series of movies about Davy Crockett starring Fess Parker. (*If possible, get a CD of one of these films and watch a bit of it.*) Does the information about Crockett's family background change your image of the "King of the Wild Frontier?" Do you think that Davy Crockett was a poor and humble fellow from a log cabin in the wilderness? Why do people want to think of him that way?

7. In many places the American Revolution took the form of a feud between neighbors with opposing political views, and it was used as an excuse to commit violence—not a military action, but neighbor against neighbor. This situation and many of the atrocities committed in it were described in *King's Mountain*. If you had been one of the officers judging the Tory prisoners in the trials at Bieckerstaff Plantation, would you have sided with Isaac Shelby or with Benjamin Cleveland in recommending what to do with these enemy combatants? Why?

8. World War I hero Sgt. Alvin York was, like many of the Overmountain Men, a Tennessee farm boy. Familiarize yourself with the story of Sgt. York (*or watch the film **Sergeant York** in which Gary Cooper played the title role.*) Does Alvin York remind you of the Overmountain Men? In what way?

9. In contrast to the demure, silk-gowned ladies one often finds in books about colonial America, the women portrayed here (*all real people*) seem to be strong, self-reliant individuals. Choose one of these women from the novel: **Catherine Sherrill Sevier; Nancy Ward; Mary Patton; Virginia Sal; Grace Bowman McDowell**. What did she do that makes her unlike the stereotypical 18th century woman. Find out more about her, including what finally happened to her.

10. Author Tim O'Brien wrote: "...*Story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth.*" Because there were no tape recorders in 1780, and very few diaries, we have no record of word-for-word conversations from the King's Mountain

participants. However, in order to make a readable story, a novelist has to have dialogue—not to invent the point of view or change the facts, but to dramatize it. Find a “story-truth” in *King’s Mountain*.

Time Line for King’s Mountain

Monday Sept. 25 Militia of Campbell begin to arrive at Sycamore Shoals from Abingdon VA.

Tuesday , September 26, 1780- Rev. Doakes’s benediction; Overmountain Men (militias of Shelby, Sevier, and Campbell) departed the Sycamore Shoals muster site; camped that night in a field across the trail from the Sheltering Rock, just before Roan Mountain.

Wednesday, September 27, 1780 – *Morning*: Half of the cattle butchered, because their pace was slowing the march *Afternoon*: Followed Bright’s Trace – Crossed the mountain in the snow, drilled troops at Yellow Mountain Gap; *Evening*: camped near Bright’s Branch at Roaring Creek side part way down the mountain. *Also on this date*, the Surrey County Militia and Ben Cleveland’s Wilkes Militia left Wilkesboro (*Tory Oak Camp*) and followed what is now Rte. 268.

Thursday, September 28, 1780 Overmountain Men followed Bright’s Trace to the Toe River, and camped at Cathee’s place, near Grassy Creek. Meanwhile in the valley the Wilkes and Surrey Militias camps at **Fort Defiance**, home of William Lenoir (*not really a fort*) on Hwy 268 ca. 20 miles from Wilkesboro.

Friday, September 29, 1780 After journeying to the Gillespie Gap, the militias of Shelby/Sevier and Virginia Militias split up for the descent into the Catawba Valley. The Militias of Sevier and Shelby camped at North Cove; the Virginia Militia at Turkey Cove, another route down the mountain. The Wilkes Surrey Militias camped at **Fort Crider**.

Saturday, September 30, 1780 Overmountain Men reunite, and continue on to Quaker Meadows (McDowell home) At evening the Surrey Militia and Joseph Winston’s Militia arrived. All camped in QM fields.

Sunday, October 1, 1780 Left Quaker Meadows; raining; camped in South Mountains: Marlin’s Knob

Monday, October 2, 1780 Raining; camped in South Mountains: Marlin’s Knob . Commanders conferred and agreed and gave temporary overall command of all the militias to Virginia’s William Campbell. In order to get rid of Charles McDowell, McDowell was sent the 200 miles to Hillsborough to ask General Gates to appoint a commanding officer.

Tuesday, October 3, 1780 Cleveland's speech to the troops. Afterward, they traveled along Cane Creek and camped near the home of Samuel Andres, a loyal Patriot.

Wednesday, October 4, 1780 Camped at Gilbert Town, now Rutherfordton

Thursday, October 5, 1780 Tried heading south to Ninety-Six, SC, in pursuit of Ferguson (who wasn't there.) Camped near Gilbert Town at Alexander's Ford; Colonel Lacey rode into camp to contradict James Williams's information about Ferguson's whereabouts

Friday, October 6, 1780 Overmountain Men joined by the South Carolina forces of Hambright, Lacey, and Williams. Rested & ate at Cowpens; left at 9 p.m. to travel all night in the rain; no camp that night. Meanwhile Ferguson's Tory troops make camp on top of King's Mountain, determined to fight there.

Saturday, October 7, 1780 Crossed Cherokee Ford; Enoch Gilmer sings *Barney Linn* and pretends to be a Tory, whom his comrades pretend to arrest. Traveled the last few miles to King's Mountain. Battle took place 2-3 p.m. Slept that night on the battlefield among the wounded and dying.