Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. How did Benedict Arnold serve his country in the Revolutionary War?
2. Why did Arnold grow frustrated with his fellow Patriots?
3. Should Arnold have joined with his fellow officers in lobbying Congress to recognize their services? Should he have fought alone for the pension of one man killed in action? When that failed, should he have used his own money to help that man’s family? Explain.
4. Make a list of all the betrayals you note in the story. Were any merely imagined?
   If Arnold had been correct that he had been betrayed, or that the United States had lost its virtue, would those things have justified his actions? (If you have studied the Articles of Confederation and the reasons some Founders believed a new Constitution was needed, you may choose to use that information to inform this part of your discussion.)
5. In your judgment, what is the very worst thing Arnold did? Which of his actions (or inactions) is least understandable or forgivable? Why?
6. In literature, tragic heroes are individuals who could have been great but for one flaw that causes the audience to feel pity and fear. If you were to analyze Arnold as a character in a drama, what would be his tragic flaw?
7. Certain historical markers bear the stigma of Arnold’s treachery. How do these tributes reveal the shame that Arnold brought to his name?
   • A memorial of the Saratoga Battlefield, site of the decisive battle, is now preserved at Saratoga National Historical Park. The memorial names and features monuments to three other generals at the battle; a fourth niche is empty.
   • At the United States Military Academy at West Point, plaques memorialize all the generals who served in the Revolutionary War. One has no name and reads only “major general ... born 1740.”
8. Can we come closer to understanding a virtue by examining its opposite? How did Arnold’s actions evidence dishonor, dishonesty, and cowardice? What virtue(s) does his story help you understand?
9. Do you think Benedict Arnold believed he was acting with integrity?
   • What is to keep people who believe they are doing right from hurting the people they believe they are protecting?
   • Explain the danger of self-deception in relation to civic virtue.
   • What is the importance of integrity in a constitutional republic such as in the United States?
   • Describe a situation in which you be may be susceptible to self-deception about your own integrity.