



## Student Reading What Were They Fighting For?

In the mid-1700s, the land west of the Allegheny Mountains was a huge forest. American Indians lived there in villages. French and British traders also moved through the area. There were millions of acres of rich forestland. The American Indians, the British, and the French all had their own reasons for wanting to control the land. Who would gain control of this valuable land?

### American Indians

About 3,000 to 4,000 American Indians were living in the upper Ohio River Valley at the start of the French and Indian War. Some of them had only lived in the area for about 30 years. They had moved to the area to escape British settlement. Their goal was to keep their land, their way of life, and control over their future. By this time they were using guns, gunpowder, knives, lead for musket balls, and cloth. They didn't want to give up these things. So they wanted to continue trading with the Europeans to get them. To keep their way of life, American Indians needed land to grow their crops and woods to hunt in. They hunted both for meat to feed themselves and for skins and furs to trade. Without enough land and woods they could not survive.

The Seneca chief, the Half King, said his people were living in "a country between" the French and the British. One approach used by the American Indians during the French and Indian War was to stay neutral and have the British and the French compete for their cooperation. That way both European countries gave them gifts to try to stay on their good side.

As the French and Indian War went on it was harder to stay neutral. Each Indian nation chose a side based on what they thought was best for their people.



American Indians traded for many items including, blankets, gunpowder and shirts.

**Neutral:** When a nation or person does not support either side.

**Allies:** people or groups that join together for a common cause.

### The French

Explorers had claimed the Mississippi River and its tributaries for France. By the 1750s the French had settlements in Canada, the "Illinois" country (in what is now the mid-west), and Louisiana (New Orleans and land west of the Mississippi River). There were about 70,000 settlers in all of New France.

The French colonial economy was based on trade with the American Indians. The French did not grow enough food and had to buy some of it. Because they depended on the American Indian trade they saw the American Indians as partners and allies.

To connect the French settlements and to reach American Indian towns, the French used the rivers. The rivers were their main way of traveling.

The French wanted to control the American Indian trade in the Ohio River Valley and keep the Pennsylvania traders out. They also needed the American Indians living there to be their allies. Unlike the British, the French did not plan to settle in the Ohio River Valley. But they did want their priests and traders to be able to move freely through the area.

France always worried about Britain. For hundreds of years, the two countries had fought each other in Europe. In North America, France wanted to keep the British east of the Allegheny Mountains.

In 1752, a new governor of New France, the Marquis Duquesne (mar-KEE dyoo-KAYN) arrived. His job was to keep control of the Ohio River – and to keep the British out.

**The British**

The British colonists thought the Ohio River Valley belonged to them. Virginia's charter granted it land all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

At the start of the French and Indian war, the British had more than 1 million colonists. And the population in the colonies was quickly growing.

The British colonies had a strong economy. It was based on farming. They grew plenty of food. As the population grew, colonists wanted more farmland. Most of the farmland in the settled parts of the colonies was already taken. One way to get new farmland was by settling in the Ohio River Valley. The problem with the Ohio River Valley was that it was hard to get to over the Allegheny Mountains. The best way to travel was by river and there were no rivers across the mountains. There were no roads either.

Traders from Pennsylvania were trading with the American Indians in the Ohio River Valley. They used small trails and packhorses to bring their goods back and forth across the Allegheny Mountains. They were making a lot of money and wanted to continue trading with the American Indians there.

Neither the farmers nor the traders wanted to see the French in control of the Ohio River Valley. In 1753, when the French started building forts and trading posts in the area, the British colonists became very upset.



*Beavers were highly sought after for their fur.*