

### III. “Building a Statue” Primary Source Improv Activity

**Historical Context:** The Baron von Steuben statue in Lafayette Park honors Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, a Prussian military officer who came to Valley Forge in 1778 and transformed the Continental Army. Before Steuben arrived, American soldiers were poorly trained and often didn't know basic military skills. Steuben taught them how to march, use bayonets, and fight as a real army. His training was so effective that Baron von Steuben is regarded as the “Savior of the Continental Army” and for defeating the British.

Over 100 years later, Congress passed a resolution to recognize Baron von Steuben for his crucial role in American independence. [Richard Bartholdt](#) (Republican - Missouri), introduced H.R. 14644 on May 22, 1902, the House bill to erect a statue of Baron Steuben in Washington, D.C.. [Abraham Brick](#) (Republican - Indiana), introduced H.R. 16, a bill to erect a statue of the late Brig. Gen. Count Casimir Pulaski in Washington, D.C.. A few weeks after H.R. 14644 was introduced, it was merged with H. R. 16. On July 1, 1902, H.R. 16 was renamed to include both Pulaski and Steuben. H.R. 16 included \$50,000 to build Steuben’s statue and was passed into law on February 27, 1903.<sup>7</sup> The statue was placed in Lafayette Park, directly across from the White House, alongside monuments to other foreign Revolutionary War heroes like Lafayette. When the statue was dedicated in 1910, President Taft and approximately 10,000 people attended the ceremony. The monument is a tribute to how America remembered and thanked the foreign allies who helped the young nation survive its fight for freedom.

#### Fast Facts

- Created by German-American sculptor Albert Jaegers, this statue portrays Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben (1730-1794) as he inspected American troops in 1778 during the American Revolution.
- It shows von Steuben wearing the uniform of a major general of the Continental Army, heavily cloaked against the rigors of the winter at Valley Forge.
- It consists of a 10-foot-tall bronze statue of von Steuben placed atop a 15-foot-tall base of pink granite.
- The statue was erected on the northwest corner of Lafayette Park in 1910.
- Baron von Steuben’s two closest aide-de-camps, Colonel William North and Major Benjamin Walker, are immortalized on the southeast side of the monument.
- The statue was dedicated on December 7, 1910.
- The statue is now owned by the National Park Service.

Source: [General Von Steuben Statue. National Park Service.](#)

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<sup>7</sup> *United States Statutes at Large, Volume 32 (1902–1903), 57th Congress. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902. Page 973, Library of Congress*

**Scenario A Objective:** You will explore the details in the Baron von Steuben statue and discuss the meaning, characteristics, and significance of how Baron von Steuben is portrayed and the possible creative and political conversations and decisions that took place.

**Scenario A: Setting:** *A committee meeting around a large conference table to discuss what the artist should include on the statue, the statue design, and its purpose. The year is 1903.*

- **Albert Jaegers**, the German-American sculptor who created the statue, asks the committee to share the values they think should be included in the statue. What do they know about Baron Von Steuben, and what do they want to recognize? ([Jaegers' obituary in the New York Times](#))
- **Cass Gilbert**, one of the architects who assisted Jaegers with designing the base, speaks about weight and size. What type of material is needed to hold up the statue?
- **Thomas R. Johnson (T.R. Johnson)**, the other architect who worked on the pedestal's design, speaks about the beauty of marble and granite.
- **Richard Bartholdt** (Republican - Missouri), who introduced H.R. 14644.
- **Abraham Brick** (Republican - Indiana), who introduced H.R. 16.
- **Augustus Saint-Gaudens**, sculptor whose opinion "had much to do with the decisions of the commission." ("[Steuben Honored by the Nation He Helped Create](#)." November 27, 1910. The New York Times.)
- **Richard Bartholdt's congressional aide**, who takes notes and interjects with their opinions.
- **Abraham Brick's congressional aide**, who takes notes and asks clarifying questions often.

**Scenario B Objective:** You will explore the details in the Baron von Steuben statue and discuss the meaning, characteristics, and significance of how Baron von Steuben is portrayed and how individuals in 1910 may have reacted during the unveiling of the statue.

**Scenario B: Setting:** *the unveiling of the statue with President Taft, members of Congress, and community members. Approximately 1,000 people were in attendance.*

- **President Taft**, who presides over the ceremony
- **Albert Jaegers**, the German-American sculptor who created the statue, asks the committee to share the values they think should be included in the statue. What do they know about Baron Von Steuben, and what do they want to recognize? ([Jaegers' obituary in the New York Times](#))
- **Richard Bartholdt** (Republican - Missouri), who introduced H.R. 14644.
- **Abraham Brick** (Republican - Indiana), who introduced H.R. 16.
- **New York Times reporter**, who interviews as many people as possible about their reaction to the statue.
- **Washington D.C. Police officer**, who is protecting President Taft.
- **A woman walking by with her dog**, who is shocked at various aspects of the statue.
- **A 15-year-old student** who loves studying the American Revolution and is writing a story for their school newspaper. They have many questions about what is included on the statue.