

Revolutionary War Camp Life

Lesson #4

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Camp life was a large part of each Revolutionary War soldier's experience. Although some camp experiences could be pleasant, some, such as the winters the Continental troops spent at Valley Forge and Morristown, were far from it. How did soldiers of both sides during this war pass the time when they were not in combat or on the march? What was it like to be in winter quarters at Valley Forge or Morristown?

OVERVIEW

The average soldier during the Revolutionary War spent more time marching and in camp than on the frontline during combat. When an army went into camp, there was much to be done. Tents would have to be pitched, firewood gathered, campfires built to cook with, and so much more. If the camp remained for several days, soldiers would be required to drill, practicing the maneuvers they would need for moving across a battlefield. In the little downtime soldiers did have, they would write letters home, repair clothing and equipment, play games, and even sing songs. In their haversack or knapsack, soldiers would often carry playing cards, small dice, and other small games. Sitting around the campfire would afford them the opportunity to gamble, sing and play music, and ultimately form bonds with their comrades. When the good-weather campaign months were over, armies of both sides needed more permanent quarters for the winter months. It was an arduous task, requiring far more work than a camp while on campaign. The first task for a winter camp was finding a location that met the needs of a large army.

A winter campsite needed to have clean, fresh water as well as firewood, both in ample supply. The campsite also needed plenty of space to accommodate the large number of men and animals in the army. At Valley Forge, quarters were established by George Washington in December of 1777. With nearly 12,000 soldiers in camp, Washington's quartermasters struggled to provide even enough basic necessities to the men in the ranks, such as appropriate clothing and food. The harsh winter months of 1777 and into 1778, required soldiers to build shelters as quickly as possible. While this was accomplished, the severe lack of necessities, clean water, and poor sanitary conditions led to a large number of the men becoming plagued with various diseases. After a long six months, and a loss of nearly 2,000 men, the Continental army finally left their winter quarters in June of 1778.

During the winter of 1779 and into the late spring of 1780, the Continental army set up their next winter camp at Morristown, New Jersey. Chosen as another strategic encampment for its location and resources, Washington's men made this plot of land south of the town proper their new home for the next nearly six months. Of the estimated 10-12,000 soldiers Washington brought into camp, all experienced periods of starvation, lack of supplies, and disease. With the lack of fresh meat and even basics such as flour, many men would not eat for days on end. Records indicate that the winter of 1779-1780 brought record setting low temperatures and extreme amounts of snow.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
 - Describe how soldiers designed and built huts at both Valley Forge and Morristown to withstand the harsh winter months.
 - List ways that soldiers passed the time in camp.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Identify and appropriately discuss items common to soldiers in Washington's Continental army while they were in camp at Valley Forge and Jockey Hollow.
 - Read and discuss primary source documents.
3. Evaluation
 - Evaluate and discuss the importance of the issued items for soldiers during the Revolutionary War.

TRUNK MATERIALS

- Haversack
- Tin Cup
- Playing Cards
- Hardtack
- Tin Candle Holder
- Candle
- Continental Army Uniform
- Shoes
- Currency (document folder)



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ACTIVITIES**Motivational Activity:**

1. Upon settling into a winter camp, soldiers needed to build semi-permanent housing to face the weather of approaching winter months.
2. Allow students to work with a partner to complete sections 1 & 2 on the worksheet. They will first compile a list of items that they think would be necessary to build winter huts and then brainstorm features that would be common to huts. Give each student within the group a copy of [***Handout #1 - Constructing Huts.***](#)
3. After you have given students time to complete the first two sections on the worksheet, facilitate a class discussion and compile a comprehensive list. Encourage students to explain their rationale, which will help to further the class discussion.
4. Next, have the students complete section 3, sections A & B.

- a. You will provide the dimensions of each hut which can be found on [Handout #1 - Constructing Huts - Answer Key](#).
- b. Students may find it helpful to sketch out their hut to find the overall dimensions and number of logs used for each hut.

Procedure:

1. Next, have the students discuss items that were utilized by soldiers in camp. You may choose to have the student's jot down their ideas or compile them as a class.
 - a. How did soldiers pass the time around the fire and in their huts?
 - b. What games and other pastimes did soldiers partake in?
 - c. What was food prep like while in camp?
2. After reviewing the list of items, explain that you are now going to look at one of the most common ways soldiers in camp passed their free time.
3. Distribute [Handout #2 - Revolutionary War Letters](#). This handout includes transcripts of various letters that soldiers and officers wrote home.
 - a. You may choose to give each student one letter to review or have the students work with a partner and compare each of the letters.
 - b. There are two letters focusing on uniforms and supplies and two letters focusing on food and rations.
 - c. Both sections of the letters include excerpts from an officer and an enlisted soldier. Again, you may choose to have students compare the letters in a variety of ways.
4. Allow students to discuss with a partner or small group what was included in the letter(s). You may choose to have students highlight specific items discussed, appropriately cite items used, or compile a list to then share with the class.
5. Another way to compare the letters is to look at the similarities or differences found in the letters written by enlisted men as compared to those written by officers.
6. Next, have students begin drafting a letter to a loved one or friend. Have the students portray the role of a soldier or officer. Their letter should include the following, but not be limited to:
 - a. What is camp like?
 - b. How is the food?
 - c. How do you spend your free time while in camp?
 - d. Is anyone singing or playing instruments around the fire?
 - e. Did you play games with your fellow soldiers?

Summary Activity:

At the conclusion of this lesson, you may choose to have students share their letters with the class. If you would like, have the students send their letter to the "loved one" addressed to in their letter. This will also provide an opportunity for students to recall information learned at the beginning of the lesson and be able to appropriately discuss it with someone outside of the classroom.

Homework/Assessment:

Students can finish and edit the writing portion of their letter.

Writing Prompt:

Some personal items found in a soldier's haversack or pack are still used in some form today. Have students choose an item that is still used today and research it further. They can explore the maker/manufacturer, when the game or item was invented, or if it has evolved into something we still use today.

Extensions:

Students can create a bar graph based on their opinion of the most important item in camp for a Revolutionary War soldier. They then can write an argumentative essay discussing and defending their findings.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards- ELA & History/Social Studies

- Key Ideas and Details:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Craft and Structure:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Social Studies - National Council for the Social Studies

- Theme 1: Culture
- Theme 3: People, Places, or Environments
- Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

Resources

Teacher:

- [Handout #1 - Constructing Huts](#)
- [Handout #1 - Constructing Huts - Answer Key](#)
- [Handout #2 - Revolutionary War Letters](#)

Students:

- [*Handout #1 - Constructing Huts*](#)
- [*Handout #2 - Revolutionary War Letters*](#)



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