

## Revolutionary War Soldiers

### Lesson #1

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was it like to be a soldier during the Revolutionary War? What did they need to survive in combat and on the march? What were the uses for each of these items?

#### OVERVIEW

The men who joined their state militia, as well as the Continental Army, throughout the period leading up to the war and during the war itself came from all walks of life, ranged in age, had varied professions, diverse beliefs and religions, and came from different geographical areas of the many colonies. Yet, they all shared some of the same experiences during the war, including the supplies they needed to survive, the equipment they needed to fight, the horrors of combat, and the long, exhausting marches.

Many men who joined their state militias were between 16 and 60 years old. They joined for short periods of time, known as enlistments, and came and went to camp when their enlistment started or ended. Militiamen had to bring their own weapons and equipment for battle, such as a musket, bayonet or tomahawk, a canteen or bottle for something to drink, a blanket to keep warm and even a knife.

Other men, instead, after 1776, joined General George Washington's Continental Army. Men that joined the army had longer periods of service, or enlistments, lasting from three years or even the duration of the war, however long it lasted. Men who chose to join the army also received other benefits, such as monthly pay (\$6.67 a month), uniforms and equipment, a monetary bonus just for signing up, and a parcel of land after their service came to an end. Although this was what the Congress offered to men who enlisted in the Continental Army, oftentimes the pay never came or was short, there were few uniforms available, and those that did come wore out quickly. Even daily supplies of food dwindled and many men in the ranks went hungry each day in camp.

African Americans served in militias and the regiments of the Continental Army in integrated units. Some were free men who volunteered to fight, others were enslaved, forced to take their masters' place in the ranks. The 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island Regiment is one of the most famous units with African American soldiers—over half the regiment by some accounts. This unit fought at the Siege of Yorktown which was a decisive American victory leading toward the end of the war. Throughout the Revolutionary War, the British offered freedom to enslaved men who came to their lines; some of these men were recruited into Loyalist regiments and others were employed in other war efforts. Many self-emancipated men and families within the British lines preferred to immigrate

to Canada after the British lost the war, rather than stay and risk being taken into slavery again in the United States.

While many Native American tribes preferred to stay neutral in the conflict, a few allied with both sides during the Revolutionary War, often acting as scouts or detached to operate separately from the regular units. They tended to fight on the frontiers and not with the professional soldiers, marching, drilling, or maneuvering on a battlefield.

Technically, women were not allowed to enlist in the militias or Continental Army. However, some disguised themselves, put on a uniform, and entered the ranks as soldiers. Deborah Sampson is one of the most-well known female American soldiers of the Revolutionary War; she served for over a year and was wounded twice before she was discovered and honorably discharged.

British soldiers, professionally recruited and trained men from Britain, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, arrived by ship to the rebelling colonies certain that their discipline and training would quickly subdue the American rabble. Joining these professional military men, Loyalist units — similar to the militias — formed from the American citizenry still supportive of King George and Britain's rules. The British and their Loyalist units strictly held to European styles of fighting — precise drill, tight formations, and battlefield precision. In some battles, this secured the victory, but as the Americans used guerilla tactics or learned to stand up to the formal warfare, the British faced disadvantages that their training had left them unprepared to face.

For the Americans, uniformity in uniforms in the colonial military units varied greatly. Uniform pieces varied from soldier to soldier. Pieces included: hunting shirts, uniform coats, breeches, stockings, overalls, leggings, shoes, and other parts and pieces. Keeping one's uniform in serviceable condition was a daily challenge for these soldiers. Other parts of the uniform soldiers needed to have were their knapsack to hold their clothing and blankets, and haversack to hold their rations, or food.

Another part of their daily routine, especially in camp, was preparing cartridges for battle. Using a powder horn was a challenging proposition at the height of battle. These cartridges would then be stored in the cartridge box. To fill some of the time in camp, the bullets soldiers made would be converted to things that would occupy their time, such as dice, fish line sinkers, buttons, and many other items.

Part of the daily life for these civilian-turned-soldiers was to learn the art of warfare by drilling. Soldiers often started their morning with drill around 6:00 am every morning while in camp. Drill continued throughout the day, oftentimes not ending until 6:00 pm each evening. Drill included how to march, how to form up for battle, how to load and

fire their weapon, and even how to carry and throw a tomahawk. Drill was almost accompanied by commands relayed by drums or fifes. This gave the soldiers an opportunity to learn what each musical cadence meant when they would later hear it on the march or on the battlefield.

When not on the drill field, soldiers needed to start a fire each day to cook their rations. They often carried with them a small tin with flint or clear quartz, a piece of charred cloth, and some tinder from a tree. Not only could soldiers use the fire to make food, but also to keep warm in the cooler months. They would cook their beef and use their flour with meager tools, a heavy, cast iron skillet and utensils if available, but more than likely a stick or even a bayonet.

If the army was moving into more permanent camps, such as during the winter months, they also had to build huts and log houses which became part of their daily life until they were completed. Making sure that temporary campsites, or longer ones like at Valley Forge, did not spread illness and disease, soldiers' daily routine also included keeping the camp and themselves clean. Bathing, acquiring clean linens, shaving, and covering over old sinks (bathroom trenches) and digging new ones were all daily necessities, but some instances depended on supplies available and time to complete.

Soldiers also had some free time while in camp. Some activities soldiers did during their free time included: attending religious sermons, daily prayer time, writing letters, reading, smoking a pipe, sewing, whittling, carving, fishing, hunting, competitive games of marksmanship with rifles and accuracy with tomahawks, and other games such as backgammon and darts.

These experiences during the daily life of a Revolutionary soldier, and the material culture they encountered on a daily basis comprise just a small amount of their full story.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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

1. Knowledge
  - Describe military issued items at each station.
  - Describe personal items at each station.
  - Describe any similarities or differences between the items.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
  - Identify and appropriately describe the items common to soldiers from the Continental Army.
3. Evaluation

- Evaluate and discuss the importance of the issued items for soldiers during the American Revolution.

### TRUNK MATERIALS

- Continental Uniform
- Hunting Shirt
- Shoes
- Tricorn Hat
- Powder Horn
- Haversack

### ACTIVITIES

#### Motivational Activity:

1. Begin by exploring Slides 1-11 in the [Powerpoint](#). Introduce the second set of questions on Slide 12.
2. Introduce [Handout #1](#) – Revolutionary War Soldier Identification.
3. Allow students time to work alone or in groups to identify the uniform pieces and other items common to Revolutionary War soldiers.
4. Bring students back together and collect their worksheets. Students will revisit this worksheet at the end of the lesson. [Handout #1 Answer Key](#) is available.

#### Procedure:

1. Begin by placing each of the following items at designated stations around the room. The worksheets are designed for six stations. You may divide the items into groups as you deem appropriate or in a way that will best suit your class.
2. Give each student a copy of [Handout #2 Exploration Sheet](#) and instruct them to complete the appropriate row at each station. Allow students a set amount of time at each station before rotating.
3. Encourage students to touch and immerse themselves with the trunk items as this will enhance their learning experience. Be sure to address any questions, comments, or confusion students may have.
4. After the allotted amount of time has passed and each student/group has seen each item, review the answers that students completed on the Exploration Worksheet.
5. Use the [PowerPoint](#) to explore more details of soldiers' attire and gear.
6. Redistribute [Handout #1](#) and allow students to discuss their answers and make changes as necessary. They should now be able to label and identify the various uniform parts and personal items found on the worksheet. This could be collected as an exit slip if you choose.

**Summary Activity:**

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will have an opportunity to review what they have learned and complete a reflection worksheet. It should include what they would still like to learn about Revolutionary War soldiers. At this point, you may choose to discuss upcoming lessons and provide feedback. Students should then complete [\*\*Handout #3 - What I Learned.\*\*](#)

**Homework/Assessment:**

If you would like to assign homework, students can portray an enlisted man serving under General Washington. They must include all of the items that were introduced through this lesson and correctly identify and discuss the items. They may choose to write a short story, letter home, or come up with a creative way to incorporate their new knowledge of Revolutionary War soldier accouterments and belongings.

**Writing Prompt:**

Select one item from the lesson and use columns two and three from [\*\*Handout #1\*\*](#) (*How is this item used? Why is this item important?*) to further explore. Why did you select this item as something that you want to investigate further? Why is this item so important to the average Continental soldier? Do soldiers today still use similar items?

**Extensions:**

Collect students' responses to the above writing prompt. A great extension is to have students complete a research project and compare military issued items of the Revolutionary War to military issued items from other American conflicts (i.e. War of 1812, American Civil War, WWI, WWII, etc.)

**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.6-8.7
    - Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

## 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

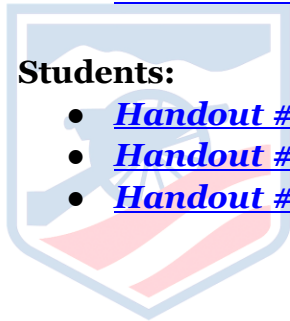
## Resources

### Teacher:

- [Handout #1 - Revolutionary War Soldier Identification](#)
- [Handout #1 - Revolutionary War Soldier Identification - Answer Key](#)
- [Handout #2 - Exploration Worksheet](#)
- [Handout #3 - What I Learned](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

### Students:

- [Handout #1 - Revolutionary War Soldier Identification](#)
- [Handout #2 - Exploration Worksheet](#)
- [Handout #3 - What I Learned](#)



AMERICAN  
BATTLEFIELD  
TRUST ★ ★ ★