

# The Old Barracks Museum

## Pre- and Post-Visit Activities Handbook Elementary School



The Old Barracks Museum is not only a State and National Historic Landmark but is a center for education in the field of colonial and early American history. Thousands of students pass through the museum annually, and each one receives a top-rated first-person introduction to Revolutionary War military life.

The Old Barracks Museum  
101 Barrack Street Trenton, NJ 08608  
1-888-BARRACK | [www.barracks.org](http://www.barracks.org)



This information has been designed to supplement programs at the Old Barracks Museum, Trenton, NJ, and is not intended for any other use.

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### ***Pre-Visit Classroom Suggested Activities for Elementary School***

- 1.** Have the students locate the 13 Atlantic-coast English Colonies on a map, and discuss the reasons for England to colonize this area. Then have the students locate Colonial New Jersey, the Delaware River, and Trenton on a map. Finally, have the students list the colonies that bordered New Jersey.
- 2.** Have the students explain the difference between forts and barracks by doing the following: Draw a picture of each and make a list of what supplies might be needed to live inside a fort or barracks.
- 3.** Have the students discuss the use of political cartoons in the 18th century, including where they were printed and who was seeing them, by doing the following: Produce another version of Ben Franklin's "Join or Die" political cartoon and share it with the class.
- 4.** Divide the students into small groups. Have the students create a timeline with 10 key events of the Revolutionary War. Then have the students do the following: Explain why each event was important, write when and where each event took place, write who was involved in each event, and draw a picture for each event. Finally, have the students compare their events with one another and create a class timeline.
- 5.** With the students, make a list on the board of the reasons America went to war with Great Britain. Be sure to include events that happened during the French & Indian War. Then divide the students into small groups and have the students decide if their group is going to be a group of Loyalists or Patriots. Finally, tally up the number of each and see which side has the majority. Would your class have gone to war?
- 6.** Have the students choose one of the Loyalists on the "Meet Your Revolutionary Neighbors" site at <https://revolutionarynj.org/the-people/>. Then have the students compare the lives of their families to the lives of their "Revolutionary Neighbors." Finally, advise the students to consider the following questions: Would you want to be a Loyalist? Why or why not? If your friend was a Loyalist, would you still be his/her friend?
- 7.** Have the students outline the major causes of the Revolutionary War, including the French & Indian War. Then have the students link the major causes with direct effects and include specific information about people and places. Finally, have the students answer the following questions: What causes do you agree or disagree with? Would you be a Loyalist or a Patriot?
- 8.** On a map, have the students follow George Washington's route from McConkey's Ferry, Pennsylvania to Trenton, New Jersey on December 25, 1776. Have the students locate where the Old Barracks was in relation to where major engagements of the battle took place. Then have the students follow Washington's march to Princeton and then Morristown. Finally, assign each student to write a sentence or two on a part of the Battle of Trenton (i.e. the march to Trenton, the surrender of the Hessians, etc.).
- 9.** Print out the sheet "What Were the Trenton Barracks?" and have the students take turns reading the history of the Old Barracks. Then have the students complete the word search for the bolded words.
- 10.** Divide the students into small groups and provide each group with a name of a famous man or woman involved in the Revolutionary War. Read description cards of the famous men and women to the class and have the students pick which description they think applies to their famous man or woman. Allow the students to exchange their description cards with their classmates until they find their correct matches.
- 11.** Have the students complete a WebQuest on the Revolutionary War.

## ***Visit to the Old Barracks Suggested Activities for Elementary School***

1. Have the students compare and contrast the surgeon's mate/mistress and the recruiting officer they meet at the Old Barracks. Then have the students consider the following questions: What are the duties of their jobs? What types of equipment are needed to perform their jobs? Which person do you feel would provide you with better resources for survival?
2. Have the students take a look around the parade ground of the Old Barracks and imagine what might look different. Then have the students answer the following questions: What sounds would be different? What buildings would not have been there in 1777?
3. Have the students ask the Loyalist questions about his/her family and friends, and if he/she lost any friends because of his/her political views.



### ***Quick Facts about The Old Barracks Museum***

- Built in 1758 as winter quarters for British troops in the French & Indian War
- Used by both Continental and British armies during the Revolutionary War
- Became a military hospital in February 1777 under the order of General George Washington. The hospital served primarily as a smallpox inoculation hospital to protect soldiers and camp followers from the world's deadliest disease. This was very likely the first mass medical procedure in the West.
- Became a museum in 1903, has represented New Jersey at 3 World's Fairs, and is a symbol of New Jersey's history
- Hosts the annual Battle of Trenton Reenactment the Saturday after Christmas every year as part of Patriots' Week celebrations

## ***Post-Visit Classroom Suggested Activities for Elementary School***

- 1.** Have the students verbally state and explain the main reasons why Great Britain and America went to war.
- 2.** After having learned about smallpox at the Old Barracks, have the students trace the history of the disease up to its eradication in 1977. Then have the students answer the following questions: Would you want to be an 18th century doctor? Why or why not?
- 3.** Have the students grade how well the Old Barracks served as a place to live. Then have the students compare it to life on the battle field and their own homes.
- 4.** During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, soldiers carried powder horns, hollowed out cattle horns used to store the black powder for their muskets. Soldiers carved their powder horns to personalize them with poems, drawings, or maps of where they had been. You may have seen a carved powder horn if you took the Guided Gallery tour at the Old Barracks. Have the students search for more powder horns at [www.nyhistory.org](http://www.nyhistory.org) on the "Collections" page. Then have the students cut out a powder horn on oak tag and design their own personal powder horns.
- 5.** Have the students compose a letter from a soldier in Washington's Army who fought in the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776. Tell the students that the recipient can be anyone—a family member, a friend, or even George Washington!
- 6.** Have the students calculate the distance between their school and the Old Barracks. Then have the students answer the following questions: If you were a soldier, how long would it take you to walk from your school to the Old Barracks? If it would be an overnight trip, where would you sleep and how would you protect yourself overnight?
- 7.** Have the students visit "Meet Your Revolutionary Neighbors" site at <https://revolutionarynj.org/the-people/>. Then have the students compare the life of the soldier they met to the life of their Revolutionary Neighbors. Finally have the students answer the following question: Would your Revolutionary Neighbor have been friendly or hostile toward the soldier you met?
- 8.** Have the students write a letter to a Loyalist explaining why they agree or disagree with him/her. Then have the students consider the following: If you disagree with the Loyalist, try to convince him/her to join the Army. Advise the students to include their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.
- 9.** Have the students draw a picture of what they think the Old Barracks would have looked like in 1777. Advise the students to use their imagination and what they have learned about life during the Revolution.
- 10.** During the Revolutionary War, British and colonial soldiers frequently intercepted enemy mail, so the combatants used various ways of disguising messages that traveled across enemy lines. Show the students an example of a secret message on the on the "Spy Letters of the American Revolution" site at <http://clements.umich.edu/exhibits/online/spies/index-main2.html>. Then create a secret message together as a class.
- 11.** Writing rebus letters in which pictures were substituted for words was a popular activity during the Revolutionary War years. Show the students an example of a rebus letter and create a rebus letter together as a class.
- 12.** Ask the students to critically think about the following: If you were an enslaved African American there may have been occasions where the chaos of war provided you with the opportunity to take control of your own fate. Then have the students choose one of the following three choices: Run away, join the Continental Army, or join the British Army. Next, advise the students to analyze the benefits and drawbacks of each decision. Finally, have the students make a decision and share with the class.