

# The Old Barracks Museum

## Pre- and Post-Visit Activities Handbook

### Middle 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 Middle 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 write a paragraph explaining the difference between barracks and forts. Then, as a class, make a Venn Diagram on the board comparing the two.
3. Have the students discuss the use of political cartoons in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including how political cartoons were shared and why they were so popular. Then have the students produce another version of Ben Franklin's "Join or Die" political cartoon and share it with the class.
4. Have the students create a timeline with 10 key events of the Revolutionary War. Then have the students do the following: Write when each event took place, write where each event took place, write who was involved in each event, and write a sentence on the historical significance of each event.
5. Have the students write a paragraph outlining the reasons America went to war with Great Britain. Advise the students to consider the outcomes of the French & Indian 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. Divide the students into small groups. Then have the students write skits about a group of young people trying to decide if they should be Loyalists or Patriots. Advise the students, in their conversations to either defend their side or refute their friends' sides, to include the stories of the people listed on the "Meet Your Revolutionary Neighbors" site at <https://revolutionarynj.org/the-people/>. Finally, have the students perform their skits in class.
8. Divide the students into small groups and provide each group with a name of a famous man or woman involved in the Revolutionary War. Then have each group research the life and loyalties of the assigned individual. Finally, have each group present a short skit that displays what that person might have said during a debate on the causes of the war.
9. Have the students complete a WebQuest on the Revolutionary War.



## ***Visit to the Old Barracks Suggested Activity for Middle School***

1. Have the students compare and contrast the surgeon's mate/mistress and the recruiting officer that 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?



### **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 Middle School***

1. 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 battlefield and their own homes. Advise the students to think not only about the *things* that the soldiers lived with, but their day-to-day lives in the barracks as well.
2. 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?
3. After having learned about smallpox at the Old Barracks, one can understand why many people were afraid of the fact that smallpox inoculations might lead to an uncontrolled outbreak. Have the students make a list of the benefits and drawbacks of smallpox inoculations. Then vote as a class on whether the inoculations should or should not be performed.
4. Have the students compose a letter from a soldier's perspective in Washington's Army who fought in the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776. Advise the students to write their letter to a family member or someone of importance.
5. 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 Washington's Army. Advise the students to include their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.
6. 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. Have the students investigate some of those methods on the "Spy Letters of the American Revolution" site at <http://clements.umich.edu/exhibits/online/spies/index-main2.html>. Then have the students write their own secret messages. Finally, have some of the students share and explain their secret messages to the class.
7. Writing letters in which pictures were substituted for words was a popular activity during the Revolutionary War years. Have the students create their own rebus letters and challenge a classmate to decipher their letters.
8. Divide the students into small groups. Then have the students decide on playing one of 4 roles: white Patriot, black Patriot, white Loyalist, or black Loyalist (can be either a man/woman). Next, have the students research their roles and what experiences their "characters" might have had during the war. Then have the students compile their research into first person accounts (diaries, letters, pictures). Finally, have the students use the various perspectives to put together one larger project that will display how different genders, ethnicities, and factions perceived and experienced the war.