

new jersey 350

innovation • diversity • liberty

Morristown: “So Hard a Winter”

Target Age: Elementary School
Time Period: 18th Century
Featured County: Morris
NJ 350th Theme: Liberty



Courtesy of New Jersey State Archives; Department of State

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts:

R.CCR.1: Read closely to determine what a text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

SL.CCR.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL.CCR. 5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

NJ Common Core Standards:

Social Studies: 6.1.12.B.1.a

FOCUS QUESTION: How did the natural resources of Morristown, New Jersey contribute to the fight for liberty during the American Revolution?

BACKGROUND:

In late November of 1779, General George Washington decided that the Continental Army would return to a familiar location for winter camp. He chose Morristown, NJ where they had spent the winter of 1776 to 1777 after their historic victories in Trenton and Princeton. Morristown made strategic sense for a number of reasons. It was between Philadelphia and New York, it was home to several skilled tradesmen, local industries that produced weapons and supplies, and it had a community able to provide enough food to a war-weary army. This first stay had been uneventful. The winter of 1779, however, was anything but. The season was among the harshest on record as 28 snowstorms turned Morristown into a frozen wasteland. “We reached this wilderness, about three miles from Morristown,” wrote James Thacher, surgeon to the Continental Army that winter, “where we are building log huts for winter quarters. The snow on the ground is about two feet deep, and the weather extremely cold.”

In 1776, Washington’s officers had used Jacob Arnold’s Tavern located on the Morristown Green in the urban center as the army’s headquarters; Washington himself stayed in nearby Ford Mansion. But this second encampment was in nearby Jockey Hollow, not far from Morristown, but in the woods. Soldiers were ordered to build log huts rather than billet in the comforts of town. As supplies of food and firewood dwindled, one soldier, Joseph Plumb Martin, wrote that his comrades were “so enfeebled from

hunger and cold, as to be almost unable to perform their military duty or labor in constructing their huts."

Miraculously, Washington's men rallied when spring arrived. In June 1780, the Continental Army claimed victory at the Battle of Connecticut Farms and the Battle of Springfield, the last major engagements of the war in New Jersey.

ACTIVITY:

In a letter dated March 17, 1780 to the Marquis de Lafayette, George Washington wrote "... the oldest people now living in the country do not remember so hard a winter as the one we are now emerging from. In a word the severity of the frost exceeded anything of the kind that had ever been experienced in this climate before." Conditions, in fact, were much worse than the better known Valley Forge encampment of 1777-78 in which nearly 3,000 soldiers perished. Only 100 to 300 soldiers died in Morristown, however, a survival rate credited to vaccinations against small pox, barracks that protected from the damp and cold, and soldiers more experienced than three years before.

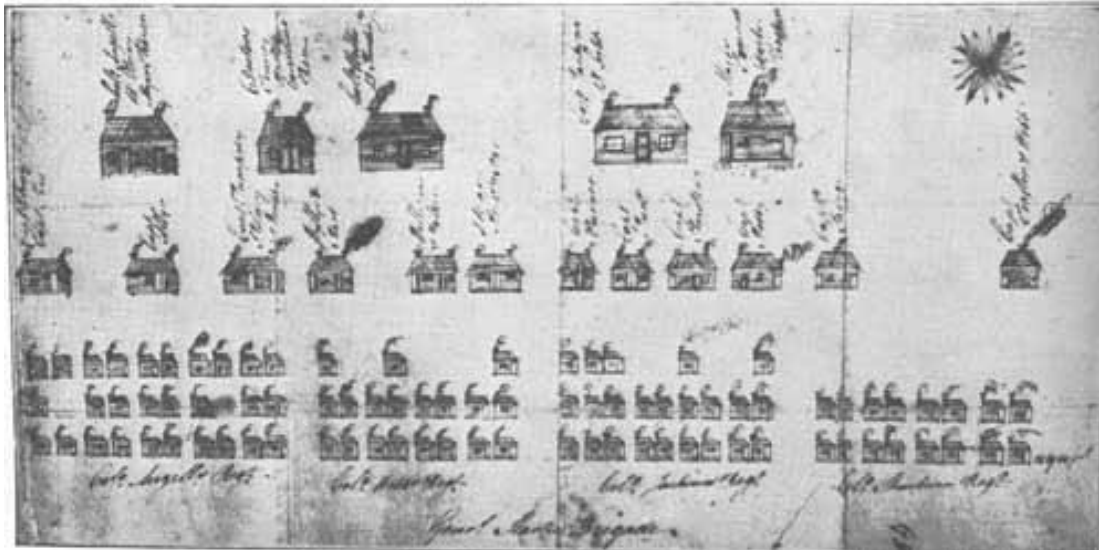
Moreover, even with the harsh weather conditions, Morristown had much to recommend it. Have students examine the details below to determine why Morristown was an ideal place for an encampment. Begin by reviewing the the list of features provided and, if time permits, follow the weblinks to maps and more information about the geographical benefits of the region. Students could also select the two or three most important aspects of Morristown as a campground, and verbally explain their choices.

Then ask students to imagine they are members of General Washington's staff and write a proposal arguing in favor of Morristown, NJ as a winter campsite. They can do so individually, or work in small groups.

WHAT DID MORRISTOWN HAVE TO OFFER:

1. It was 31 miles from New York City—a two day march
2. The Continental Army could move in any direction (south to Philadelphia, north to New York, and even further north to New England)
3. Generals and staff officers could live in local homes
4. The region was geographically protected by the Watchung Mountains, the Ramapo Hills, the Hudson Highlands, and the swamplands to the east
5. Nearby forests and rivers offered plentiful resources of wood and water
6. Only a few roads crossed through Morristown during the revolutionary era, so it was defensible (and less chance of a surprise attack)
7. A region southwest of Morristown, called Jockey Hollow, offered:
 - a. Approximately 600 acres of forest cut down to build one thousand huts
 - b. Washington designed the huts- 14 x 15 feet, 6 x 6 high, sealed with clay to protect from cold, and a fireplace.
 - c. Each log house could provide shelter for 12.

BONUS QUESTION: If Washington's troops built 1,000 huts, and each hut could house 12 men, how many men were in Washington's army at Morristown, NJ?



The "hutting" arrangement for General Stark's Brigade, 1779—80. From an original manuscript once owned by Erskine Hewitt, of Ringwood, N. J.; Courtesy of National Park Service

If you have the time, consider having students use the sketch above to help recreate a three-dimensional model of the Morristown encampment using miniature log cabins. Each brigade camping in Jockey Hollow occupied a sloping, well-drained hillside area about 320 yards long and 100 yards in depth, including a parade ground 40 yards deep in front. Above the parade were the soldiers' huts, eight in a row and three or four rows deep for each regiment; beyond those, the huts occupied by the captains and other mid-level officers, and higher still the field officers' huts.

Materials:

- A piece of white paper
- A piece of brown paper
- A bag of large Pretzel Rods

1. Lay a sheet of white paper down on the table. This is the snow to build your log cabin on.
2. Open up the bag of pretzel rods and begin building your cabin with them. Lay the rods down on the green paper in a criss-cross fashion to form a square cabin. When you've built it as high as you want, fold a brown piece of paper in half, open it up, and put it on top to make the cabin roof.

Older children could use the pretzel rods to make a much more sophisticated cabin. Use a small milk carton as the base, and then hot glue pretzel rods together to form walls. White glue would also work, but it would take a long time to dry. If you want to make the project fully edible, peanut butter and chocolate frosting also make great "glue."

This would also make a good cooperation project if you have teams of children work together to make their cabins... then dismantle them for snack!

Source: Adapted from (and images provided by) <http://www.freekidscrafts.com> and <http://www.funfamilycrafts.com>)

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND MAPS ABOUT THE MORRISTOWN ENCAMPMENT:

Follow this link and scroll down to the map of Morristown and Related American Outposts of the Revolutionary War.

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/7/hh7b.htm

Follow this link to the NPS map of the Map of Morristown

http://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/revwar/image_gal/morrimg/mapmorr.html

FOLLOW-UP:

Ask your students to imagine what life was like at Morristown during the winter of 1779-1780. Then ask them to write either a diary entry or a letter home, describing their living arrangements and the cold. Below are two examples of soldiers' accounts.

Private Joseph Plumb Martin: "We are absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals into my mouth for four days and as many nights, except for a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood. I saw men roast their old shoes and eat them." His uniform was "what laughingly could be called a uniform, and possessed a blanket thin enough to have straws shoot through it without discommoding the threads."

General Johann de Kalb wrote that it was "so cold that the ink freezes on my pen, while I am sitting close to the fire. The roads are piled with snow until, at some places they are elevated twelve feet above their ordinary level."

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Places to Visit

Morristown National Park, National Park Service: <http://www.nps.gov/morr/index.htm>

More Classroom Activities

Morristown National Park, National Park Service (site includes a range of materials, including guides for planning field trips, K-12 curriculum materials, and information about the historic site's traveling museum; look in the section "For Teachers"): <http://www.nps.gov/morr/index.htm>

New Jersey State Archives (the state archives offers several lesson plans about New Jersey's role in the American Revolution, three of which focus specifically on Morristown; scroll down to the "American Revolution" section): <http://www.state.nj.us/state/historykids/teachersGuide.htm>

George Washington's Mount Vernon (an excellent primary source lesson plan about George Washington's views on Morristown designed for older students; incorporates a range of digitized

materials from Mount Vernon's collections): <http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/encyclopedia/morristown>

"New Jersey History Kids" (developed by the New Jersey Historical Commission in 2005 for grades K-4; includes a brief video history of Morristown National Park, as well as a video question sheet, online interactive activities, and a lesson plan about the mutiny at Morristown), to access, visit:

<http://nj.gov/state/historykids/>

Click on "Enter"

Click on "Continue"

Click on "Continue"

Click on "3-American Revolution-George Washington at Morristown"

Click on "Comparing Two Accounts of the Mutiny at Morristown"

These materials are also available in print form at "NJN Public Television Teacher's Guide to Morristown National Park:" <http://www.state.nj.us/state/historical/pdf/morristown-guide.pdf>

For More Information

"The Morristown National Historical Park," in the *Around and About New Jersey* television series, co-produced by NJN Public Television and the New Jersey Historical Commission, 1995.

Melvin J. Weig and Vera B Craig, *Morristown: A Military Capital of the American Revolution* (National Park Service, 1950, reprinted 1961), available online at:

<http://archive.org/stream/morristownmilita00weig#page/n1/mode/2up>

National Park Service, *Morristown National Historic Park: Guidebook* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, 1950), available online at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/7/hh7toc.htm

CREDIT INFORMATION:

- p. 1: Reconstructed revolutionary cabins, Courtesy of New Jersey State Archives; Department of State.
- p. 3: The "hutting" arrangement for General Stark's Brigade, 1779—80. From an original manuscript once owned by Erskine Hewitt, of Ringwood, N. J., National Park Service, Morristown.

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