



Suggestions for using the Meet Your Revolutionary Neighbors biographies

These suggestions are meant to be idea generators rather than step by step lesson plans. We hope they will help you develop your own plans for the subjects, standards, and grade levels with which you work.

Vocabulary Development

Glossaries have been included with each biography to help readers understand technical terms and also general vocabulary that may not be familiar to them.

Even though we have provided a suggested definition for words highlighted in bold face, they can be explored further in print and online dictionaries to attain a richer understanding.

Separate pages explaining military terminology relating to the Revolution and the terms used to “label” people during the Revolution are available for download and printing, or viewing digitally. Links to these pages may be found on the Meet Your Revolutionary Neighbors home page.

Geographical understanding

Students can be asked to:

Find where the places mentioned in a biography are located on a map of New Jersey; or another appropriate map for places outside the state.

Compare the map of New Jersey during the Revolution with a map of today – especially noting the changes in counties. The locations identified with each “Neighbor” may well have been in one county during the Revolution and that location is now part of a different county.

Compare different “Neighbors” by location.

Map a group of “Neighbors” and include general information on the Revolution (battle locations, troop movements, incidents, meetings, etc.) to put the “Neighbors” situations in context.

Create maps for different time periods during the struggle to focus on centers of activity and how “Neighbors” were effected.

Create maps to learn and show how events in New Jersey were influenced by events taking place in neighboring areas – especially the New York City/Staten Island area and Philadelphia/eastern Pennsylvania area.



Map the movements of individual “Neighbors”— sometimes to areas outside the State. Include information on the map that helps explain why movements were made. “Neighbors” who basically stayed in one place can be mapped to show how, and from where, other people and events came to them and influenced their lives.

Writing activities

Use information from the biographies (and when possible from additional sources) to:

Write fictional diary entries to describe a situation and speculate on what the individual “neighbor” thought about it.

Write a fictional letter to a family member, another “neighbor”, a “famous” person, etc. to describe an event in their life, how they might have felt about it, and how it might have effected their views on the Revolution, etc.

Write a fictional letter to a close family member describing the possible thinking process the “Neighbor” went through when making a crucial decision he or she was confronted with. What were the pros and cons of the alternatives?

Develop a series of questions to ask the “Neighbor” to collect information for an oral history statement.

Write an essay on the topic “I would have liked to be there when ___ so I could find out ___.” The student fills in the first blank with a statement about something in the life of “Neighbor” and the second blank with a question about it. For example, “I would have liked to be there when Abraham Hunt entertained Hessian Colonel Rall so I could find out why he did it.”

Write a fictional letter to descendants speculating on what lessons the “Neighbor” would say he or she learned from living during the Revolution.

Working from the biography assign students an audience and a set number of words (perhaps 100 or less) and then write a statement of what they believe is the most important thing that everyone should know about the “Neighbor.” Then repeat by writing about what they believe is the most interesting thing about the “Neighbor.”

Pick an issue in the news today and write a fictional letter from the “Neighbor” giving advice on how to deal with it based on his/her experiences in the Revolution.

Oral activities



Students can learn a “Neighbor’s” story and then assume the role of that “Neighbor” for a debate on a topic associated with the Revolution. Students can help select the debate topic and which “Neighbors” to include in the debate after studying the “Neighbors” and looking for groups of “Neighbors” involved with similar or diverse situations.

After becoming familiar with the “Neighbors”, have students select a neighbor on which to prepare and present an oral presentation. The presentation can focus on why the story of the “neighbor” is valuable to know, why it is interesting, what can be learned from it, or another topic chosen by the student or assigned by the teacher.

Questions to explore individually, in groups, or by the whole class

In exploring the following questions it will be important to recognize the difference between factual evidence and speculation. Speculation should not be discouraged, but it must be recognized for what it is and the evidence behind the speculation needs to be identified. Students must always ask why it is reasonable to conclude something.

What things in the life of the “Neighbor” did he/she have some control over and what things were beyond his/her control?

What decisions confronted the “Neighbor” during the Revolution?

How did the “Neighbor” deal with adversity?

How did the “Neighbor” accept or reject personal responsibility for his/her actions?

How did the “Neighbor” contribute to or hinder building a sense of community?

How would the “Neighbor” define his or her community?

In what ways, if any, did the “Neighbor” perform public service?

How did the “Neighbor” demonstrate the value he/she placed on public service?

In what way(s) did the “Neighbor” demonstrate the ability to be an innovator?

What appears to be the “Neighbor’s” concept of liberty? How did the “Neighbor” demonstrate his/her concept of liberty?



It is easier for us to envision what the concept of liberty was for those who supported the Revolution, but could those who wanted to stay part of Great Britain or who were neutral also value the concept of liberty?

How does the collection of “Neighbors” help us understand the diversity of the New Jersey population during the Revolution? Diversity in ethnic origin, gender, age, occupation, religion, wealth, education, etc.

For English teachers: Do your students encounter characters and stories in literature that parallel in some way one or more stories of the “Neighbors”. If so, can the stories be used to illuminate each other?

Dealing with conflicting information

When doing additional reading or research it may be noted that sources do not always agree on some things. Also, individual sources may give only partial information. This provides an opportunity to evaluate sources and how the research was done for each. There may be times when two researchers found the same sources, but interpreted them differently. These are all “teachable moments” and can be used to help students understand how we learn about the past, why we cannot know everything about the past, and why history is both an art and a science.

Research sources for the various “Neighbors” differed widely in the availability of primary source material as well as secondary sources. Some “Neighbors” have become as much the subject of local tradition as the subject of documented history. These can get easily confused so it is always important to question the source of understandings about the individuals and information about the events of their lives.

Additional Ideas

How have you used the “Neighbors” biographies with your students? Please let us know and we may include your idea in a revised edition of these suggestions.