



Early American Life

Teacher Packet

Schoolhouse of Wonder

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Schoolhouse of Wonder is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing experiential natural and cultural history education to young people.

Introduction

At Schoolhouse of Wonder, we are dedicated to sharing the natural and cultural history of the piedmont area with students throughout the region. We hope you and your students will enjoy the opportunity to travel back in time with us as you experience the everyday lives and dreams of the people who lived on this land long ago.

In this class, we will focus on the lifestyle of the first rugged frontiersmen to enter the piedmont in the early to mid 1700's. These settlers set out on a great adventure to explore and settle the wild frontier. The piedmont pioneers are a part of our local heritage, and they paved the way for centuries of settlement to come.

We hope our class and the following program materials will help you share the wonders of this heritage with your students.

Background

The eighteenth century was a time of tremendous transition in the piedmont. North Carolina was racked by a century of wars and populated with an amazing tapestry of diverse peoples: large tribes of native peoples with different linguistic backgrounds living in traditional ways across the state, English governors, lords proprietors, plantation owners, and rugged Scotch and German farming families pushing the edges of colonial expansion through the piedmont and into the Carolina mountains.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the colony of Carolina consisted of a few coastal settlements and a vast terrain that was largely unexplored by the European settlers. Slowly, in the early to mid 1700's, the piedmont was settled by English, German, Scottish, and African people who traveled from the north and from the east in search of arable land, or to escape indentured servitude or religious persecution. These people brought items like steel for fire building, metal pots, rifles, axes and a few precious ingredients such as cakes of sugar and bricks of tea. They also introduced domestic livestock such as oxen, hogs, and dairy cattle. The pioneers created their livelihoods with these token items and the resources of the vast Carolina wilderness

The pioneers lived in small family farms and settlements with no electricity, running water, flush toilets or motor vehicles. The tasks of everyday life were accomplished by human ingenuity and hard work. During the first years of settlement they lived in small cabins or lean-tos built from hand-hewn logs that were chinked with mud. Food was gathered from the forest or grown in small tracts of farmland.

Life was hard. Daily work preoccupied both adults and children in order for them to sustain their existence. When they had free time, adults and children alike entertained one another with storytelling, music, dancing, and games such as marbles, dice, and horseshoes. These small diversions helped preserve the cultural identity of individual groups of people, and helped establish the beginnings of American culture.

As time progressed, the lifestyle of the piedmont people would change forever. Mills were built along the waterways to grind corn and saw lumber. Near the settlements, forests were gradually replaced with family farms. Log cabins were replaced with brick or timber frame houses. Slaves were brought from Africa to work on the plantations. Skilled craftsmen, businessmen, and merchants flocked to the new towns such as Hillsborough, Raleigh, and Fayetteville. Tiny coves in the mountains were all that remained of the rugged Carolina frontier.

You may wish to introduce the following activities by reading actual explorers' accounts of North Carolina, or by looking at maps made by the state's first cartographers.

Read a full account of an explorer's journey through the piedmont:

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/lawson/lawson.html>

Explorer maps online:

<http://www.rla.unc.edu/Archives/accounts/Lawson/Map.jpg>

(Web sites current as of 8/12/2004)

Activity (K-3)

Explain that you are going to lead the class on an imaginary journey back to the early 1700's. Begin by reviewing a few of the ways the pioneers' lives were different than ours are today. Have the students relax and close their eyes, then read them the following passage, allowing time as you go for them to imagine what you are saying.

Imagine yourself traveling back to a time before your great, great grandparents were born. Travel back to a time before there was a school or even a town here. Imagine that you are just waking up to start your day in the cabin of a pioneer family. You are lying on a mattress of pine boughs and looking up at the rafters of the cabin. You throw off the warm quilt that covers your bed. You notice a pot of hot tea bubbling on the fire, and a wooden bowl full of fresh corncakes sitting on the hearth, waiting for you. As you eat your breakfast, you look around at the objects in the cabin. You see in front of you a fireplace built out of stones from the land nearby. The cabin walls themselves are built from logs. You see strings of fruits and vegetables hanging by the fire to dry. An old flint-lock rifle hangs from a log wall of the cabin. You peer out of the cabin to see a garden filled with cornstalks and vegetables. You notice that the garden needs weeding, the wood needs chopping, the fire needs tending, and the clothes need washing. The fish are jumping in the river and the corn is ready to pick. You take a minute think. What will you do with your day? What will you see and taste and hear? What tools will you use, what games will you play? Let your imagination take you through the rest of your morning(pause for a few moments) Take a moment to remember all the things you did and saw in your day in history and get ready to return to this moment in time.

Have the students open their eyes and share some of the smells, sounds, tastes, and adventures of their imaginary journey to the past.

Activity (K-3rd grade)

Take a walk through the forest with your students. Ask your students to imagine they are on an exploratory expedition to a new world where there are different animals, different plants, and a different climate than they have ever been to before. Encourage them to explore this new world using their senses to see what they can discover. Have them make up names for the plants they find.

As explorers, their job is to describe what they see. You may wish to have them make a map, write a journal entry, or draw something they found on their journey.

Activity (2-5th grade)

After studying the adventures of the early pioneers, encourage your student to imagine a journey into the heart of the Carolina piedmont. Have your students study the map to decide where they want to settle, what route they will take, what tribes of native people they might meet, and what towns they would pass through.

Explain that the first settlers had to carry with them or cart everything they would need to start their new lives. They might only be able to take one cartload, or a few packsaddles full of tools, food, clothes, and equipment. Have your students choose what items they would have bring with them on their journey. Some important items of the time include:

Flint and Steel (for fire-making)	Feed corn (for feeding animals)
Flintlock Rifle	Butter churn
Gunpowder	Skinning knife
Salt	Axe
Sugar	Draw Knife (for de-barking logs to build a cabin)
Tea	Froe (for making wooden roof shingles)
Spices	Cast Iron Pots
Blanket	
Seed corn (for planting a garden)	

You may wish to discuss with your students the difference between needs and wants and how many of the things we use in our everyday lives were not available to frontier families. Some items such as buckets, spoons, forks, plates, animal traps, furniture, and toys were made using natural materials and the tools they brought with them.

Have your students write a journal describing the adventures of their imaginary journey.

Activity (all grades)

The first frontier families of this area were spread out along the rivers, and often had to travel a long distance before they reached a market where they could restock their supplies. Even at these markets, there was little money changing hands. Instead of money, the settlers traded goods and services with one another. This is called a barter system. (By the mid to late seventeen hundreds the piedmont was filled with corn grinding grist mills like the one at West Point on the Eno City Park. These mills also served as the post offices, general stores, and gathering places for farming families from miles around.

By that time there were fixed standards of exchange, but a farmer might still barter some of his corn crop in exchange for goods and services during his visit to the nearest mill.)

You can create a mock trading post in your classroom by asking your students to each bring in one small used item such as a book or toy that they don't want any more. Have the students lay their items on their desks, then have the class tour and trade their items.

In eighteenth century North Carolina, there were many languages spoken, including German, English, Gaelic, and over 200 different Native American dialects. For an added challenge to the trading post experience, you could have your students communicate only with hand signals.

Going further (4th-5th grade):

Although the wilderness seemed to go on forever when the settlers first arrived, they discovered that nature had its limits. Hunting, trapping, and logging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a devastating effect on wildlife.

As a research project, have your students investigate:

What happened to the Passenger Pigeon, the Woodland Bison, and the Carolina Parakeet?

Folklore

Of all the items the pioneer families brought with them on their journeys, perhaps the most important were the stories and songs they knew. Many of the stories and songs that came to define the frontier experience were brought over the seas from Africa, England, Scotland, and Germany. They mixed together and developed their own backwoods flavor as they were told and sung through time. The Carolina folk tradition included stories of ghosts, witches, devils, tall tales, war stories, and slave tales. Suggested sources for early American stories:

Collections for older students:

North Carolina Legends, by Richard Walser

Grandfather Tales, by Richard Chase

Picture Books for younger students:

Green Gourd, by C.W. Hunter

Sody Salleratus, by Aubrey Davis

Ashpet, by Joanne Compton

Activity (4th—5th grade)

Have your students research and tell a story from one of the books above.

Activity (k-3rd grade)

Explain that the settlers brought stories from Europe when they came to America. Some stories changed as they were told in the New World. Read Ashpet, by Joanne Compton. Have your students compare the American version of Ashpet with the European story of Cinderella.

Activity (all grades)

Folklore often changes to suit the region in which it is used. In North Carolina, we have a number of regional stories such as *Devils Tramping Ground*, *Brown Mountain Lights*, and *Lost Colony*. These stories often describe or explain the reason behind regional phenomena. Challenge your students to create a story of their own to explain phenomena in the classroom or school grounds.

Activity (K-3rd grade)

Read a story from one of the books listed above. Have your students act out the story as you read it.

Food and Cooking

Early American food came directly from the land on which the settlers lived. They hunted deer, bison, and wild turkey from the forests. They gathered wild roots, fruits, and berries from the fields and woods. They tended gardens of corn and beans. Some families had chickens, cattle or hogs. Special seasonings such as salt and sugar were valuable commodities.

Ingenuity and memory were the only cookbooks in most settlers' homes. Meals consisted of combinations of a few simple ingredients such as cornmeal, lard, grits, eggs, salt, molasses, sallyratus (baking soda), and smoked or salted meat. Cooking took place in iron pots over a hearth fire.

The colonists preserved their food by hanging strings of fruits to dry, smoking their meat, and pickling their vegetables. Sometimes, they would preserve their fruits and vegetables by storing it in salt, ashes, or sand.

Activity (all grades)

Have a frontier foods day at your school. You can enjoy simple foods that early Americans ate. Some of these could include: popcorn, hominy grits, dried apples, cornbread or johnnycakes, apple cider, sassafras tea, or black tea.

Going Further (4th-5th grade)

In the frontier, there weren't many doctors. However, each colonist was versed in herbal remedies. Many had their own herb garden to season their food and treat a number of diseases. Some of these plants were often brought from overseas and served as reminders of home. Other plants from the New World were hailed as miracle cures for a number of problems. As a class, you could research colonial treatments from common plants. Some plants to consider include:

Rosemary
Sage
Violets

Elderberries
Sassafras

Crafts

Imagine stitching together a quilt with a needle and thread by the light of the fire after a long day of work. Imagine weaving a basket from grapevines that grow wild in the forest. In early America there was no electricity, so crafts were made with the simple powers of iron, fire and human hands. Most of the objects in the everyday life of a settler were crafted from the natural world or from objects that would otherwise be thrown away. Many crafts originated from creative uses for excess materials. Smoking pipes were made from corncobs, brooms and dolls were made from cornhusks, baskets were made from tree bark. Hot coals were used to burn wood to make buckets, bowls, and spoons.

Activity (2-5th grade)

Although many families in the early to mid eighteenth century could not read or write, old fashioned quill feather writing pens are still a fixture in American history. Quill pens wrote the constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the earliest poems and stories of our country. Simple versions of these old fashioned pens can be made by cutting the tip of a goose or turkey feather at a 45 degree angle with a pair of scissors. Encourage your students to write their own class constitution or declaration of independence with a feather pen and a bowl of India or berry juice ink.

Activity (all grades)

In early America, quilting was not only a necessity, but an art form. Often families got together for “quilting bees” where they would work on one quilt together. These quilts brought people together to stitch, tell stories, and trade designs. Try hosting a “quilting bee” in your classroom. Have each student bring in scraps of cloth from an old item of clothing. Provide needles and thread, or glue for younger children. Allow each student to create a design with his or her scraps then sew the scraps to a sheet or glue it onto a large piece of paper. This completed “quilt” can be hung in your classroom as a symbol of working together that everyone can enjoy.

Going Further (4th-5th grade)

In the late eighteenth century, as skilled craftsmen brought their trades to the piedmont, children could apprentice with a master craftsman and learn a trade of their own. Have your students research a trade they might have learned as an apprentice. Trades included:

Tanner	Brick maker
Blacksmith	Cobbler
Weaver	Trapper
Cooper	Pewterer
Potter	Baker
Wood Worker	

A good resource for your students to use in their research is [Colonial Craftsman](#), by Edwin Tunis.

Colonial Games and Toys

When colonial children weren't hard at work on their chores, they often made up their own games. These involved imagination, problem solving, and old fashioned fun. Like their crafts, children's toys were made from imagination and objects that would otherwise be wasted. Many toys were handmade by the children themselves. Dolls were made from dried apples, tops were made from scraps of wood, jacks were made from sheep's knucklebones, and balls were made from animal skins.

Although we use different materials now, some colonial games are still played today. Ask your students how many of these early American games they play at home:

Yo-yo	Kite flying
Hopscotch	Jacks (or knucklebones)
Puzzles	Jump Rope
Marbles	Jack Straws (or pick up sticks)
Leap Frog	Spinning Tops
Tag	Hide and Seek

Activity (3rd – 5th grade)

Early American kids had to make up their own games. Split your class into teams. Provide each team with a few simple materials such as corncobs, rope, chalk, marbles, and other everyday items. Challenge them to make up a game of their own with some of the materials they are given, then teach their game to the other teams.

Activity (all grades)

Your students can make a simple colonial toy from buttons and string. Encourage each student to bring a button from home. Give the students 2 ½ foot sections of kite string. Have them thread the string through the holes, then tie it together to make a continuous circle of string with the button suspended in the center. Students can make their “whirligig” spin by holding both ends of the string and twirling the button until the string is twisted tight, then alternately pulling and loosening the string.

Resources

Book Resources

Frontier living by Edwin Tunis

Colonial Kids: An Activity Guide to Life in the New World by Laurie Carlson

A Sampler View of Colonial Life: With Projects Kids Can Make. By Mary Cobb

Colonial Days: Discover the Past with Fun Projects, Games, Activities, and Recipes (American Kids in History series). By David King

Local Resources

Schoolhouse of Wonder

We offer cultural and natural history field trip programs on site at West point on the Eno City Park. We also offer summer and intersession day camps for children ages 5-15.

Bennett Place

This simple farmhouse was situated between Confederate General Johnston's headquarters in Greensboro and Union General Sherman's headquarters in Raleigh, North Carolina. In 1865 the two soldiers met at the Bennett Place, where they signed surrender papers for Southern armies in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Today James Bennett's reconstructed farmhouse, kitchen, and smokehouse give visitors a glimpse into the life-style of an ordinary Southern farmer during the Civil War years. Guided tours are available. These include an audiovisual program, a tour of the museum, and the buildings. Make reservations in advance. *For more information contact:*
4409 Bennett Memorial Rd.
Durham, NC 27705
Phone: (919) 383-4345

Duke Homestead

See the early home, factories, and farm where Washington Duke first grew and processed tobacco. The tour includes Duke's restored home, an early factory, a curing barn, and a packhouse. The Tobacco Museum exhibits trace the history of tobacco from Native American times to the present. Special events throughout the year focus on farm life of the nineteenth century. Hands-on activities are available in the spring for scheduled groups. Guided tours are scheduled at fifteen minutes after each hour throughout the day. They ask that groups make reservations in advance.

North Carolina History Museum

Educator resources include educational notebooks, audiovisual resources, and guided tours of the museum's collections. The museum also offers free rentals of a kit of educational materials on colonial life in North Carolina. Call (919) 715-0200 ext. 316, or e-mail jerry.herring@nsmail.net to reserve a kit.

Historic Stagville

Historic Stagville is one of the largest slave plantations of the pre-Civil War South. Buildings include a historic house, barn, and slave Quarters, all built between the late 1700's and the late 1800's.

PO Box 71217

Durham, NC 27722-1217

Phone: (919)620-0120

Alamance Battleground

On this site in 1771, an armed rebellion of backcountry farmers – called Regulators – battled against royal governor William Tryons' militia. Visitors can tour the eighteenth-century Allen House and battlefield monuments. These features, together with the visitor center's multimedia orientation program, offer an account of this colonial battle, as well as an account of the pressures of colonial policies that precipitated the revolt. This site includes a historic log cabin from the late 1700's

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If you would like more information on this packet, our field trip or summer camp programs, or other activities to supplement your curriculum, please contact us!

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