

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to...



Identify different objects  
Minute Men and the militia  
kept in their sacks.

Understand the importance  
of certain items and identify  
their importance.

## INTRODUCTION:

During the Revolutionary War soldiers had backpacks called knapsacks or haversacks. What the sack was called depended on the person. **Haversacks** were typically used for carrying food or eating utensils and **knapsacks** were used for clothing and personal items.

## ACTIVITY:

Students will have the opportunity to interact with certain items, either replicas or artifacts that revolutionary war soldiers would have carried with them in their knapsacks or haversacks. Depending on access, some of the items recommended may be harder to get, but many of the items can be acquired fairly easily. Go through the attached outline and instruct your students about the different objects soldiers would have considered essential to their survival and comfort. Construct the lesson as if you are with the students as they are in the process of packing their backpack.

## KY STATE STANDARDS

SS-5-CS-U-2  
SS-5-CS-U-3  
SS-5-HP-U-1  
SS-5-HP-U-3

### Recommended Items:

- Various examples of knap sacks or haversacks (normal linen, "hairy" [made from hide], or a painted knapsack. In a pinch a very simple messenger bag made from light-weight fabric will do)
- Blanket (woolen)
- Utensils (Spoon and knife. Crude cup made from a horn or tin. Wooden plate.)
- Journal
- Canteen for water (made out of wood or animal skin.)
- Tin Kettle

Before you begin instruction ask your students:

- If you had to get up and leave your home "in a minute," what items would be absolutely essential to bring with you?
  - Write down some of the responses on the board. Using this as a template, draw similarities between some of the items you will show them.

Also: Mark off a 6x6 foot square with masking tape on the floor close to where you will be delivering the lesson. You will use this space later when discussing the living conditions of the soldiers.



## Outline

### **-What does your backpack look like?**

Revolutionary War soldiers' knapsacks were like large envelopes made of linen or canvas. British soldiers sometimes used goatskins instead of linen and even left the fur on the outside of the knapsacks. Many Patriots copied this "hairy" knapsack style while others painted the outside part of the knapsack to protect it from the weather. This is similar to weatherproofing clothes nowadays.

- *If you have an example of a knapsack, this would be a good place to show it.*

### **- How do you carry your backpack? Do you drag it along; wear it on your back or over one shoulder?**

Haversacks were usually worn under the left arm or slung to the rear with the strap passing over the right shoulder. Some Patriots may also have worn their haversacks just like we do today: on our backs. This copied the latest British fashion.

### **- What do you have in your backpack?**

Patriots put food and eating utensils in the top of their haversack. A knapsack was filled through a slit in the bottom and tied shut with probably a thin piece of leather strap. A soldier carried his blanket slung over the knapsack with the straps underneath.

- *Have a few students come up and try on the backpack. Ask them to remember how it was worn and replicate it. See if they can strap the blanket to the haversack.*



- **Have you ever forgotten your backpack? What did you use to carry your lunch, books, and papers?**

When soldiers didn't have a knapsack or haversack they used a **tumpline**. A tumpline was a strap (like a belt) that was worn around the chest and held a **pack** in place. A pack was a soldier's blanket that was rolled around his clothes and small items. Have you ever rolled up your pajamas in a sleeping bag after a sleepover? That is a modern pack!

- *Have a few students come up and volunteer to put together a pack. If you have many blankets and items, make it a race and see who can do it the quickest!*

- **What did you have for lunch (breakfast) today?**

Every soldier had to have water to drink. They kept their water in a variety of containers that included a wooden or tin "metal" canteen and carried it with them. This is like the plastic water bottles we use today!

The food the soldiers were given to eat were called **rations**. It was paid for by Congress, our government, and by the people who gave money to buy food for the soldiers. An army officer, called the **quartermaster**, was responsible for giving each soldier their share of firewood and rations. At times the men would have contests to see who could gather the most firewood from the forests near camp. Many times soldiers supplemented their rations by hunting, fishing, and foraging in the countryside.

When there was a good supply of food the soldiers were given a **daily ration**, food to eat during the day.

- *Ask your students, what foodstuffs do you think they gave the soldiers? Did they give them meat? What kind? What about spices? If you have time, reveal the items as they are guessed, writing them up on the board before you begin, like in Family Feud!*



-In Boston, the soldiers could have been given the following:

- One pound of bread
- Half pound of beef, pork, and once a week 1 ¼ salt fish
- One pint of milk or **gill** “a ¼ of a pint” of rice
- One quart of good spruce or malt beer
- One gill of peas or beans
- 6 ounces of butter per week
- One pound of common soap **for 6 men per week!**

**- Where did you get your food? Did it come from home, the grocery store, school, or did you go hunting? What did you catch?**

Many times food was not available and the soldiers had to **scavenge** and find their own food. They did this by hunting for **game** such as rabbits and squirrels. They also went fishing in nearby streams and rivers. Sometimes the people living on farms and in the city would give food to the soldiers to eat. When there wasn't any food or supplies, Patriots ate berries from the forest or whatever they could find. Sometimes soldiers just went hungry.

George Washington wrote in his journal that during the winter at Morristown, soldiers sometimes went 5 or 6 days without bread or meat. Once or twice, the men had no food for 2 or 3 days.

**- Did you make your lunch (breakfast) today?**

The food or rations were given to each soldier instead of to a group. Rations were **raw** which means you had to cook them first before you could eat them. Each soldier had to cook their own food. Sometimes a small group of men, a **company**, would have a few men cook for the group. This could happen during the cold winter months. Usually the food was cooked over a campfire.



**- Are you a good cook? Do you know someone that makes food taste good?**

Just as you know someone who is a good cook, you may know people that cannot cook very well. The food tastes funny or it may be runny or burnt. This is how it was for the soldier. If he was a good cook, they had good food! If they were a bad cook, their meals would have been hard to swallow.

**-How do you cook your meals? Maybe you cook outside over a campfire or inside using your fireplace?**

Out in the field many soldiers would quickly stick their meat on the end of their knife and cook it over the campfire. To make their bread they would mix the flour with water. Soldiers placed the dough in the campfire ashes until it was baked and ready to eat!

Sometimes bakeries were sent up to make bread instead of giving the soldiers flour to make their own.

- *If you have the time, this may be a good time to pass out small portions of very simple bread. This depends on the class or the students.*

The quartermaster would give one iron kettle to 6 or 8 men to use for cooking. Many times the men would combine all their rations into one pot, like a stew, and share the meal.

**- Do you set the table at meal time? What dishes are on your table?**

During the Revolutionary War, the state of Maryland gave each soldier a bowl and spoon. This was unusual and most men supplied their own eating utensils. These items were very simple and included:

- A wooden plate or bowl
- A cup made out of tin or a cow's horn
- A simple knife and fork





The army did not have a “mess hall” or dining room with tables and chairs for the soldiers to use.

- *If you have them, pass around examples of the different utensils while you are discussing how they were used. The more variety you have the bigger picture the students will get.*

### **- What does your house or apartment look like? Do many people live there?**

A Revolutionary War soldier's home or shelter depended on where he marched and the season. In the cold winter months at Valley Forge, Washington's men built wooden huts. They cut the logs themselves, used wood from nearby sawmills or farmers' fence rails. When the logs were in place, they filled the cracks with clay, moss, and straw. Rock and mud fireplaces were used to heat the huts and cook the food. The fireplaces were not like the ones today. When in use they filled up the wooden huts with smoke.

In warm weather the Army gave the soldiers tents sometimes made of weather proof material. These tents could be made in the Colonies but also came from the French or captured from the British. In a 6 (foot) by 6 (foot) shelter 6 men, maybe 10 considering conditions, would huddle inside. The tents were so heavy that they were carried on supply wagons to the camps. Unfortunately, sometimes the supply wagons were not around when the soldiers were marching or having finished a battle.

- *In the marked off 6x6 foot square, select 6 students to sit in the square. Then fit in 4 more. With 10 total students, challenge them all to sit inside. Section off multiple squares with groups of ten and see who can do it the fastest.*



### **- How many of you have a favorite blanket?**

A wool blanket was a soldier's prized possession. Unlike the tent, soldiers carried their blankets with them so they had it when they wanted to rest. Blankets had many uses such as for shade, privacy, shelter from the weather; wrap their belongings in addition to providing warmth. Yet the blanket could be the first thing the soldier would leave behind in a hurry or if it was cumbersome.

- *Pass around the wool blanket, or if you don't have one, pass around some wool that has not been spun into softness. Let them feel how heavy it is. Smell it when wet, comment on the texture. It was impossible to keep clean. Wool blankets also held diseases from their owners. If a soldier retreated from a battle, they might leave the blanket behind so the opposing side would catch the illness.*

