

Pre-visit Primary Source Activity

Lesson Overview: Historians use primary sources to learn about the past. Sometimes these sources, such as letters and diaries, are difficult to decipher. This lesson asks students to make sense of place names in diaries of Revolutionary War soldiers in the Champlain Valley.

Standards: This activity addresses the following standards –

- 6.4 Historical Connections
- 6.6 Being an Historian
- 6.7 Geographical Knowledge

Background: Many soldiers wrote home to their families about their experiences in the American Revolution. Other soldiers kept journals about their daily lives. These written sources help historians learn about the past with their stories of individual people.

Sometimes they wrote about exciting things:

A gen'l alarm thro' the camp. A party of regulars & Hessians land'd before noon at 3 mile Point, but retreated again in the evening without attacking us. (*Henry Sewall*, October 28, 1776)

Some days were not so exciting:

Saturday october 5th Nothing Meterial to day hapned in camp (*Jonathan Burton*, Oct. 5, 1776)

These documents are primary sources and contain information recorded about an event by a person who was there or living at that time. Lack of punctuation and misspellings can make them difficult to read. Messy or fancy handwriting also are challenges to students trying to use these texts, but with help they can use these history building blocks.

Place names are a challenge in many primary sources. Often the soldiers only heard the names and never saw them written down. This leads to a wide variety of spellings, especially with place names of French or Native American origin. This activity asks students to interpret some of the inventive spellings and match names in the document to names on a modern map.

Procedure: Ask students how they might spell some unfamiliar names, like Chateaugay, Ticonderoga, or Richelieu. How many spellings does the class come up with? Pass out the worksheet with place names taken from various Revolutionary War diaries. Ask students to use modern maps that show Lake Champlain, the Richelieu River, and the St. Lawrence River, to locate where soldiers traveled as they retreated from Quebec to Mount Independence. If necessary, suggest that they say the names out loud and look for matches along the rivers. (The answer key shows the current accepted spelling and the approximate locations.) Discuss why it is important for historians to match place names in diaries with their corresponding locations. How does this detective work increase our understanding of the Revolutionary War? What happens if historians cannot figure out place names or words in primary sources?

Connections: Ask the students why these locations are along rivers and lakes. During the Revolutionary War, the water routes were often easier to travel than the land routes. Can the students figure out why the army built Mount Independence on Lake Champlain?

Where Are We?

Can you imagine how confusing it would be if everyone spelled words differently? In letters and diaries from the Revolutionary War, soldiers often used many spellings for place names, especially those from French or Native American words.

Ile aux Noix (the Island of Nuts) was particularly challenging to spell. All of these are examples of inventive spellings!

Isle anon

Isle aux Naux

isle anoix

isle anoy

isle oneoix

Oile of Noix

Oil oix noix

Island of Noe

Isle la Noix

Listed below are some place names that are spelled differently in the primary sources than they are on current road maps. Use a modern map of Vermont and Quebec, and some detective work, to figure out where the soldiers camped during the Northern Campaign. (☆ Hint ☆ All the places are along the shores of Lake Champlain, the Richelieu River, and the St. Lawrence River.)

1. Tiontiroga
2. Independant point
3. Shoram
4. Isle Emot
5. Mescisco bay
6. St. Johns
7. Shambalee
8. Sirrell
9. 3 Rivers
10. Deshambo
11. Qbec

Where Are We? Answer Key



1. Ticonderoga (New York)
2. Mount Independence (Vermont)
3. Shoreham (Vermont)
4. Isle La Motte (Vermont)
5. Missisquoi Bay (Vermont)
6. St. Jean sur Richelieu (Quebec)
7. Chambly (Quebec)
8. Sorel (Quebec)
9. Trois Rivières (Quebec)
10. Deschambault (Quebec)
11. Quebec City (Quebec)

Where Are We? Sources for Place Names

Note to educators: To read more some of these resources are available by searching online.

From the diary of Sergeant Timothy Tuttle

(Wickman, Donald. "The Diary of Timothy Tuttle." *New Jersey History*. Vol. 113, nos. 3-4: 61-80.)

May 24, 1776	Tiontiroga fort
June 7, 1776	Qbec
June 12, 1776	sirrell Encampment
June 17, 1776	isle anoix
June 20, 1776	isle anoy
July 2, 1776	isle oneoix

From the journal of Colonel Jeduthan Baldwin

(Baldwin, Jeduthan. *The Revolutionary Journal of Col. Jeduthan Baldwin, 1775-1778*. Bangor, ME.: The Deburians, 1906; reprint, Ayer Publishers, 2005.)

May 13, 1776	Island of Noe, St. Johns
May 14, 1776	Shambalee Fort
May 23, 1776	Deshambo
June 6, 1776	3 Rivers
June 16, 1776	Oile of Noix
June 20, 1776	Oil Oix Noix
August 18, 1776	Independant point

From the journal of Reverend Ammi Robbins

(Robbins, Ammi R. *The Journal of the Rev. Ammi R. Robbins, A Chaplain in the American Army, in the Northern Campaign of 1776*. New Haven: B. L. Hamlet, 1850).

May 19, 1776	Isle Aux-Noix
Sept. 13, 1776	Shoram

From the journal of Bayze Wells

(Wells, Bayze. "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington, May 1775-February 1777." Connecticut Historical Society Collections, Vol. 7, 1899: 241-296.)

June 17, 1776	Isle anon
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From the journal of Dr. Lewis Beebe

(Beebe, Dr. Lewis. "Journal of a Physician on the Expedition Against Canada, 1776." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. Vol. LIX, Oct. 1935: 321-361.)

June 27, 1776	Isle aux naux
June 30, 1776	Isle Emot, Mescisco bay

From the diary of Reverend Enos Hitchcock

(Hitchcock, Enos, D.D. "Diary of Enos Hitchcock, D.D." *Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, N.S. Vol. VII, April 1899, No. 1, 87-134; continued in later volumes).

June 9, 1777	Isle la Noix
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Where Are We? Sources for Maps

Use the provided PDFs or the online sources as described below.

Vermont State Map

Vermont Town and County Outline Map PDF
(Source: State of Vermont)

Quebec Province Map

Quebec Province Map PDF
(Source: Natural Resources Canada www.nrcan.gc.ca)

On-line Sources for Maps include:

Vermont Interactive Map Viewer
from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI)

http://maps.vermont.gov/imf/imf.jsp?site=VCGI_basemap

Google Maps (for Vermont and Quebec)

<http://maps.google.com/>

The Atlas of Canada

<http://www.nrcan.gc.ca>