



Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve
Education Center
6588 Barataria Boulevard
Marrero, LA 70072
504 689-7611 ext. 14

Barataria Preserve Pioneers Teacher-Led

Duration: 1 to 2 hours on-site, 60 to 75 minutes in
classroom

Grade Level: 3-5 and 7-8

Introduction:

The first people in any new environment face great challenges in establishing their homes and lives. Over 2,000 years ago, the first American Indians settled in the southern Louisiana swamps and bayous. In their new homes, the Indians had to learn how to utilize all the new resources at their disposal: they had to learn what plants and animals were safe to eat, what materials were best for building homes and making clothes, and what the weather could do to all of their hard work. Through trial and error, the Indians in the bayous of the Barataria region carved out a living using what was naturally available for whatever they needed.

In the early 1700s, new people began to settle in southeast Louisiana. Some were Acadians, refugees from French Canada who were forced to leave when the British took control of Canada. Others were from Spain, France, Germany, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean...they came from all over the world! They had to learn a new way of life in a new place, depending mostly on what was available to them in the swamps and bayous.

Objective:

This activity will challenge students to think creatively and in as a team. They will produce a shelter, tools, and anything else they think they would need as a pioneer in a new land.



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Goal:

They will learn what it was like to work with limited materials, just as the American Indians and early settlers from Europe, Africa, and Asia did.

Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) covered:

Social Sciences:

- Grade 3: G-1D-E1; G-1D-E2; G-1D-E4; E-1A-E1; E-1A-E6;
H-1B-E1; H-1C-E1; H-1C-E3; H-1C; E4;
H-1D-E1
- Grade 4: G-1B-E1; G-1B-E3; G-1D-E1; G-1D-E3; G-1D-E4;
E-1B-E1; H-1A-E2; H-1B-E1; H-1C-E1;
H-1C-E3; G-1C-E3; H-1C-E4
- Grade 5: G-1B-M2; B-1D-M2; G-1D-M3; H-1B-M2;
H-1B-M3
- Grade 7: G-1B-M1; G-1C-M4; G-1D-M2; H-1A-M2
- Grade 8: G-1D-M1; G-1D-M2; G-1D-M3; E-1A-M1;
H-1A-M3; H-1D-M1; H-1D-M4

Materials Needed:

“Mystery boxes”: boxes with a variety of craft materials.
Suggestions: scissors, tape, pipe cleaners, one pencil, scraps of cloth, paper, wooden dowels, ruler, and anything else that may be available.

Pre-site Visit Instructions:

As part of normal classroom instruction, teacher should discuss pioneer life with students. Social Science curriculum may cover Western frontier pioneer life, but this activity challenges students to think about pioneer life in a swamp. Teachers may want to discuss American Indian groups that inhabited the swamps as well as early European settlers, including Acadians, Canary Islanders/Isleños,



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Germans, French, and Spanish people that settled in the Louisiana swamps beginning in the early 1700s.

Areas like the Barataria Preserve were an amazing and abundant resource. People who lived in such areas enjoyed a varied diet, including shellfish, fish, wild game, and edible plants, all collected from the wetlands. In addition to abundant food sources, the wetlands provided all the necessary materials for early settlers' homes. Indians taught the newly arrived people to construct homes out of dwarf palmetto fronds; Europeans showed Indians how to stuff pillows and mattresses with cleaned Spanish moss. The swamp's vast number of baldcypress and other trees provided the wood for a number of needed items, including pirogues, firewood, and digging sticks.

Before visiting the Barataria Preserve, the teacher should talk to the students about the above information. The teacher should challenge the students to observe closely their surroundings when they go on the nature walk and to think about what material the early people of the swamps could have used to make their new homes.

On-site Activity Instructions:

- The teacher may bring his or her students through the Visitor Center museum if he or she wishes. Students should be given 15 to 20 minutes to explore the museum and ask the park ranger on duty any questions they may have.
- If time permits, the park ranger can show a movie about the history, displacement, and eventual settlement in south Louisiana of the Acadian people. The film lasts 35 minutes.
- The teacher should work with the rangers to choose a trail for the students' nature walk. While on the trail, the students should closely observe their surroundings to see what kind of materials the forest, swamp, and marsh could provide newly arrived settlers. Also, the teacher should engage in a discussion about the early settlers' use of the land. The Bayou Coquille



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Trail would be an excellent trail to use as it has wayside exhibit signs that discusses human use of the land. (60 to 90 minutes)

- The group may picnic at the preserve's Pecan Grove picnic facilities if the group so chooses. The teacher may want to lead a discussion about carving a life as a pioneer in the Louisiana swamp.
- Once the group is finished at the preserve, they should return to the classroom to complete the remainder of the activity.

Post-site Visit Activity:

- Have the students form groups of no more than 5.
- Pass out the "mystery boxes" to each group.
- Explain that they will be acting as pioneers in a new land---they will be dropped off and will not see anyone else for one entire year (this was a common practice during the early European settlement of North and South America).
- Explain that the students must work together as a group to build whatever they think they will need to survive in their new location. Also explain that they may use whatever they have been given in their box and ONLY what they have been given (they may use the box, as well, if they are clever enough to think about it!).
- They will also have to come up with a story for their items.
- The students have 30 minutes to make their homes, tools, barns, weapons, etc.
- The teacher will need to be firm about the time-allotment as well as the materials. One major point of this activity is to help the students learn that the first European settlers were completely on their own. Early on, supply ships could only reach settlers



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every few months or perhaps only once a year. Settlers had to rely on their creativity and each other to solve any problems that arose with only the materials available to them.

- After 30 minutes, tell the students that winter has come and all work must stop because it is too cold to continue.
- Each group will now present the story of their pioneer settlement. They should explain what each item is, what is it used for, and, if they choose, how they built it. (30 minutes)
- The teacher should ask the students what it was like to work in a group and to work with only the materials they were given. He or she should ask about any problems the group had and how the problems were resolved.

Conclusion:

At the end of the activity, ask the students if they liked the exercise. Ask why or why not? If they had more time, what else would they build? What kind of materials do they wish they had? Connect the activity back to the first settlers to the region.