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Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Above is the title page of a Thompson 7th grade Power Point for an American History team project researched with artifacts from the students' own town. Pictured is the Murray Farm House from colonial times, maintained in Poricy Park as a historical museum.

Middletown Students Learn American History from artifacts in their own Backyard

“Seeking the protection of Middletown’s hills on the 29th of June 1778, the day after the Battle of Monmouth, the main British army under General Sir Henry Clinton withdrew along this road toward Sandy Hook, whence they embarked for New York a week later.”

Placard sign on Middletown Lincroft Road

Middletown: On major thoroughfares throughout Monmouth County, historical placards stand high above the traffic that wiz by them everyday. Seldom does anyone dare navigate the busy roads to read these emblazoned signs. Along the stretch of Middletown Lincroft Road into Kings Highway and on out to Sandy Hook they declare: *British Retreat Route* or *Site of British Encampment*.

Thompson 7th grade social studies teacher MaryAnn Drury regularly walks her neighborhood. Like many others, she never looked up at those signs. One day, she read in the local newspaper that Monmouth County decided to declare King’s Highway a historical byway. Her educator’s gears began turning realizing what an historical gem and teaching opportunity her own town presents. With the help of Middletown’s literacy coach, Kelly Ford, Thompson librarian Rachel Raymond and teachers Matthew Krol, Ann Lanza, and Tara Flynn, a 7th grade Project Based Learning unit was devised. One of Ms. Ford’s missions under the new LEADS model of instruction is to develop and facilitate integrated projects where Language Arts and other disciplines collaborate to study a particular topic. Soon several of Thompson’s seventh grade history teachers were engrossed in teaching American History by way of Middletown history. Ms. Ford even brought in a revolutionary re-enactment group from the Monmouth Historical Society to demonstrate for the entire 7th grade class.

Mary Ann Drury states, “The kids were very enthusiastic about the project because they could choose what aspect of the American Revolutionary period they would study as well as the format to present their work.”

Those formats included power point presentations, posters, dioramas of battlefields and painstakingly compiled scrapbooks. While they may have utilized their text books and on-line encyclopedias for their research, a recent student presentation to the Middletown Board of Education and district administration verified that the main student resource was their own town’s historic sites and

museums. Parents drove the middle schoolers all around Middletown's 42 square miles. Students would emerge from their car to photograph the historic placard that would find its way into their project.

They visited and reported on Marlpit Hall—the home of the loyalist Taylor family. Another popular stop, not far away and nestled on the bucolic Poricy Park property, is the historic Murray Farmhouse. There patriot farmer, Joseph Murray was murdered by a loyalist's bullet as he worked his cornfield. One scrapbook shows his headstone in the Old First Church on Kings Highway. Soon the student's could visualize their colonial era hometown where neighbor fought neighbor depending on one's loyalty to an old royal order or yearning for an independent country.

Students spoke about strong revolutionary personalities including Joshua Huddy, the captain of the New Jersey militia, who wreaked havoc on the local loyalists, and was twice captured by the British and once escaped. After his second capture, he was hung in Sandy Hook, a warning for all patriots to heed. According to the seventh graders, this created the first international incident of the war, and Joshua Huddy is forever known as the “the Hero Martyr of Old Monmouth.” Mary Hays McCauly, a.k.a. Molly Pitcher, was also proclaimed as an American Revolutionary hero. The wife of a revolutionary soldier, she followed her husband and his fellow soldiers into battle offering water and first aid.

Seventh Grader Grace McIlvain reported, “Molly's husband was wounded while manning a cannon, but he was not allowed to get help because he needed to stay with the cannon. Molly took his place at the cannon despite the risk. For being brave she was later named *Sergeant Molly*.”

Students visited and photographed historic headstones they discovered in the two colonial churches located across the street from one another on Kings Highway. They explained that during Sir Henry Clinton's retreat from the 10-hour, 100-degree Battle of Monmouth, both those churches, Old First Church and Christ Church, were transformed into hospitals for British soldiers. The Battle, which inspired a few student dioramas, was reported to be the longest battle of the Revolution and the most important in New Jersey.

Other students highlighted the allegory of the era. In particular, they related stories of British ghosts which purportedly haunt Middletown cemeteries and the Old Spy House. In the latter location British soldiers drank liquor and spilled secrets which the innkeeper dutifully reported to the Patriot militia. Other students concentrated on the soldier's life including specifics on his weaponry, clothing and food rations.

Superintendent Karen Bilbao, who was invited to the seventh grade historical presentation, was very pleased with the student enthusiasm as well as the quality of their work.

She remarked, “The relevance of this project is that this is not just the history of our country, but the history of Middletown. That is why they are so interested in it.”

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The Thompson Middle School seventh grade Social Studies teachers pictured (left to right) recently introduced their students' Middletown history project to a gathering of VIPs and fellow seventh grade students. Pictures left to right are, Ann Lanza and Mary Ann Drury, social studies teachers, Kelly Ford, literacy coach and social studies teacher Matt Krol.

Thompson Middle School's seventh grade class recently studied American history utilizing the resources of their own historic town of Middletown, a retreat route for the Battle of Monmouth, among other important historical revolutionary events.



Students were given the freedom to choose any aspect of the revolution to highlight for their projects as well as the method to make their presentation. Left is pictured a diorama of the Battle of Monmouth. Other students (below) chose to express their research in scrap book form. The projects were very creative, with some students choosing to burnish the paper the report was printed on to achieve an old historic effect.



Pictured below and left to right, Nia Deliso and Julia DeSanctis display their poster of the historic signs in Middletown that identify what event took place on the road or at the site during the Revolutionary War.



Pictured below and left to right are Thompson Middle School seventh graders Paige Gyurindak, Veronica Zega, Lyssa Dussman, Kelly Rogers, and Tara Smyth making a presentation to the Middletown Board of Education members and district administration on their American History projects based on Middletown's revolutionary history.

