



INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK: Guiding Questions and Key Themes

*These **Guiding Questions** provoke critical thinking, press on assumptions, relate to current scholarship and national discourse, and invite connections between past and present. They progress loosely from past to present to future to support fluid transitions from the specificity and temporal distance of the American Revolution as a historical case study, to the immediacy and intimacy of considering one’s own present, to a broader view of hopes for society and the future. Adapt the questions to your needs, perhaps using only a few from each set, changing the order, or designing related questions.*

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Was the American Revolution revolutionary?
- Who did the American Revolution include and exclude?
- What difference did the American Revolution make?
- How does someone know they are living in a revolutionary moment?
- How did New Jersey shape the American Revolution and how did the Revolution shape New Jersey?
- Why learn about the American Revolution?
- How do we know what we know about the past?
- How is the story of the American Revolution told?
- Who has shaped and will shape historical narratives and how?
- Why commemorate the 250th anniversary, and what does it mean to me?
- How do I want the past to shape the future?
- How should future generations understand the past?
- What will my role be in the ongoing American experiment?

*Filter the Guiding Questions through **Key Themes**, which engage many of the vital narrative threads and areas of research characterizing the latest scholarship and public discourse on the Revolution. The themes encourage people of varied backgrounds, identities, experiences, and perspectives to find a way into the anniversary and to consider it critically—while growing comfortable with the innate ambiguity of history and the process by which history is told and researched.*

KEY THEMES

Theme	Keywords
Inclusion/Exclusion	Race and ethnicity; indigeneity; gender; sexuality; ability; class; national origin
Property and Sovereignty	Nationhood; land and water; slavery and freedom; taxation; empire
“Revolutionary Ideals”	Liberty; pursuing happiness; equality; justice; self-determination
Political Participation	Representation; direct democracy; voting rights; civic engagement; census and gerrymandering; protest
Movement of People	Migration, immigration, displacement, slavery, local and global
New Jersey as a “Battleground”	Patriots, Loyalists, and other positions; elections; grassroots activism; civil war(s) and war zones; religion
The Historical Process	Origin myths; interpretive choices; collective memory; dominant narratives’ agency, causality, and contingency; commemoration; “founding”

*Programs are stronger when designed around what you want your audience to take with them. Below you will find recommended **Learning Objectives** (or audience takeaways) that will flow out of the Guiding Questions and Key Themes.*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Audiences of programs, events, and activities planned to mark the U.S. Semiquincentennial will . . .

- **Grasp** what happened in New Jersey during the Revolutionary era, in all its complexity, including commonly marginalized figures, themes, narratives, and events.
- **Understand** who was included and excluded in the stated ideals of the Revolution and how their lives changed—or did not.
- **Connect** the Revolutionary era and the present, learning to factor in historical contingencies and the benefits of hindsight when thinking about the past.
- **Understand** that people create historical narratives through a series of interpretive choices, with dominant narratives typically crafted by those in positions of power.
- **Question** the opportunities and limitations that come with commemorations and national origin myths.
- **Use** what they have learned about the American Revolution and the historical process to sharpen their own ideals and define how they hope to shape the future.