Lesson Activities: African-Americans in the Revolutionary War

1. Look at the stories and depictions in your history book. What do they say about the role African-Americans played in the Revolutionary War? Are these stories accurate? As a class, create a historically accurate American Revolution chapter for a textbook. Use your textbook as an example for formatting. Be sure to consult multiple resources.

2. Watch the movie, *The Patriot*. How does it depict African-Americans in the war? Do you think it is an accurate portrayal? Discuss as a class. If this movie was completely based on the reality of African-Americans in the war, what would have been the same or different? Imagine that you could follow Occam after the end of the war and write a story of the rest of his life.

3. Read the “Declaration of Independence.” Then complete one of the following assignments:
   a) You are a slave. Write a letter to Thomas Jefferson confirming or refuting any points in this historical document that you believe goes against his idea of independence.
   b) Write a “Declaration of Independence” for the slaves of America using this document as a model. Pay close attention to the list of grievances Jefferson uses to make a claim for independence.

4. Analyze Paul Revere’s “The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King Street.” Using multiple sources to inform your work, re-create Revere’s famous rendering to make it historically accurate.
5. The Sons of Liberty and Patriot leaders used propaganda to gain support for the war, but they were careful to not include abolitionist language or the issue of slavery in their pamphlets or newspaper articles. Complete the following two assignments:

a) Create 1-2 pieces of propaganda for the abolition movement during the Revolution.

b) Write a letter to the editor of the Boston Gazette addressing their inadequate coverage of the slavery issue.

5a) Distribute Revolutionary War propaganda to the class. Discuss the use of propaganda and why Patriot leaders would have left Africans out of theirs. Have students group into pro/con groups and debate the exclusion of abolitionist ideas in the propaganda.
6. Research slave population in the 13 colonies pre-Revolutionary War and post-war. Create a population distribution map showing the difference pre- and post-war. Write an explanation for the differences in distribution and what these changes meant for Africans in America.

7. With a partner, stage a debate between a Patriot leader and an African-American (freed or enslaved) on the merits of a nation waging a war of independence while maintaining the institution of slavery. Be sure to address whether each person is pro/con on abolition, the effects of slavery on the nation, and the issue of whether blacks should serve in the military/earn their freedom through service. The debate should last a minimum of 15 minutes.

8. Research the life and work of Phillis Wheatley. Create a visual display on what you find. Include any poems (or parts of poems) in which you believe Wheatley is addressing the Revolution and/or her views on abolition. In honor of Wheatley, write a poem about her and her contributions to the Revolution.

9. Create a pictorial timeline of the Revolution marking the major achievements of Africans in the war. Be sure to include any actual depictions of important African figures as well as any artist renderings that you feel should be placed in the timeline.

10. Put students into groups of 3-4. Have students decide on playing one of 4 roles: white Patriot, black Patriot, white Loyalist, or black Loyalist (can be either a man/woman; can also choose what role this person actually played during the war i.e. soldier, political leader, slave, freedman/woman, etc – encourage a diverse mix to account for as many perspectives as possible). Have students research their role and what experiences their “character” might have had during the war then have them compile their research into first person accounts (diaries, letters, pictures) . Have students use the various perspectives to put together one larger project (webquest, class presentation, poster presentation, student suggestions, etc) that allows students to see how different genders, ethnicities, factions perceived and experienced the war.