



## ***Be an Archaeologist:*** **Artifacts from Mount Vernon**

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### **Students will learn...**

- To gather primary source information
- To analyze artifacts as a primary source
- About the often under-documented lives of the enslaved people at Mount Vernon

### **You will need...**

- [Archeology Online](#)
  - Artifact Description Worksheet
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### ***Opener: Providing Context***

- Explain to your students that enslaved people left very little written records of their lives. Ask why they think that is.
- Ask what other ways we can find out about their lives. Answer: Washington's ledgers, census lists, and work logs, oral history, and archeological items.
- Tell them about the South Gove Midden Project.

The Midden Project was an archeological dig done on the South Grove midden, or trash pit. Archeologist found many objects related to the Washingtons and the enslaved people who worked there.

### ***Task: Recording Findings***

- Have your students search the Archaeology Online database for an object that inspires them. It could be an artifact owned by an

enslaved person or the Washington household.

- Draw that artifact and then fill the information on the artifact description worksheet- they should not worry if they cannot find out all of the information, just leave those sections blank. However, some of the questions are designed to have them think or use other resources to find the data.
  - *Hint:* Tell them to explore the context and themes tabs for artifacts related to specific areas.
  - *Optional:* Have your students record their information in the form of an infographic. There are websites online that can help.
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### ***Closer: A Classroom Database***

- Put those worksheets together to have a 'classroom database' that students can go back to throughout the unit to reference.<sup>1</sup>
- *Optional:* Continue this project for homework and have them research in more depth. For example; for the bowl, a student could research how bowls were made, what meals may have been eaten at Mount Vernon, popular designs in the 18th century, etc.

<https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/archaeology/archaeology-online/>

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<sup>1</sup> This would be a good activity to begin the unit and reference or add context to the artifacts as the unit continues.

# Artifact Description

Instructions: Pick an artifact from the Archaeology Online Database. Sketch it in the circle below and find the following information.

## Physical Description

What is it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is it made out of? (Materials)  
\_\_\_\_\_

What size is it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does it have a pattern or special design? If yes, what is it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What style is it? Fashionable? Unique?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Common? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Uses

What was it used for? (There can be many uses)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who owned it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who used it? (Think of everyone who would have handled it.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When would it have been used?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Was it restricted to a certain group of people? Who?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Manufacture

When was it made? (Date)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where was it made? (Place of Origin)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who made it?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How was it made? What skills did the maker have to make it? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it still whole or in pieces (Completeness)? Has it been repaired? \_\_\_\_\_

## Wider Context

What does this artifact tell you about the place where it was found? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does this artifact tell you about life at Mount Vernon?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does this artifact tell you about the people who owned and/or used it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Artifact: \_\_\_\_\_