



## Space in the Home: Enslaved Field Worker's Cabin

### Students will learn...

- The conditions in which enslaved people lived on Washington's farms
- To think about the implications of space as a part of the mental tortures of slavery

### You will need...

- Measuring tape and string
- The [virtual tour](#) of the Replica Enslaved Field Worker's Cabin
- [Map of Washington's Five Farms](#)
- [Five Farms Enslaved Population Infographic](#) and [Population at Mount Vernon in 1799 Infographic](#)
- Space in Your Life Activity Sheet
- *Optional*: Building Comparison Handout

- Now show them the inside. What else do they notice?
- They will probably mention that it is very small. In fact, this cabin is 16X14 feet.
- In the classroom or outside have students measure and mark the size of the cabin.<sup>1</sup>
- Now, tell your students that the enslaved field worker Priscilla, lived in a house this size with her six children. Reflect on what that must have been like.

Remember: A 2018 article revealed that an average studio apartment in America has shrunk by 10% in 10 years to 515 sq. ft. This cabin is less than half that size: 225 sq. ft.<sup>2</sup>

### Opener: Washington's Five Farms

- Show your students the map of Washington's five farms.
- Locate where the Mansion House is and circle or color in the five farms (on an interactive whiteboard or on their papers).
- Now, show your students the infographics (perhaps two students per pair) and analyze the demographics of the people at Mount Vernon and the five farms.

### Task: Mapping out Space

- Show your students the virtual tour of the cabin. Start with just the outside. What do they notice? How was it made?

### Closer: Space and Community

- Talk about the psychological limitations of the building- where people slept, what activities could be done at one time, the lighting, etc.
- Distribute the Space in Your Life Activity Sheet for students to read a little more about the enslaved cabins and then have them talk to a partner to answer the questions .
- Come back together and discuss how the limitations on space were a part of the mental entrapment of enslaved people not just a physical one.
- *Optional*: Show them the Building Comparison Handout and ask them about the discrepancies between Washington's life and his enslaved workers.

<sup>1</sup> Please do not have students reenact the housing situation! This is a highly controversial approach and not advised by George Washington's Mount Vernon.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Research done by RENTCafe and Yardi Matrix 2018

<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-teachers/>

# Space in Your Life

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These logs cabins were coated with mud to keep out draughts and rain and often had outside wooden chimneys that were made of sticks plastered with mud. Washington said that the houses were “chiefly... of their own building,” meaning the enslaved people most likely had to make their own homes. This is a replica of an abandoned building at Mount Vernon that was identified as an enslaved worker’s house.

Cabins often contained one or two rooms, which housed one family per room. Parents would sleep on a “mean pallet” (a makeshift bed, such as fabric on wooden beams) and the children would sleep on the floor. One room was for everything, sleeping, and cooking. So they used creative ways to make more space: hooks, shelves, and holes lined with wood hidden by wooden doors, which they used as a cellar for their food.

Although this cabin is isolated, in the 18th century, the enslaved people at Mount Vernon would have lived in mini-villages on the outlying farms. The largest village was at the Mansion House Farm, where around ninety enslaved workers lived. The others ranged in size from Dogue Run Farm, with forty-five enslaved residents on 650 acres of land, to fifty-seven at River Farm, containing 1,207 acres of arable land, forty-one enslaved workers at Muddy Hole Farm which had 476 acres, and seventy-six at the 928-acre Union Farm.

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Instructions: Think about how the space of their homes and their closeness to others affected the enslaved workers’ lives and the community at Mount Vernon. Now, think about your own life and answer these questions.

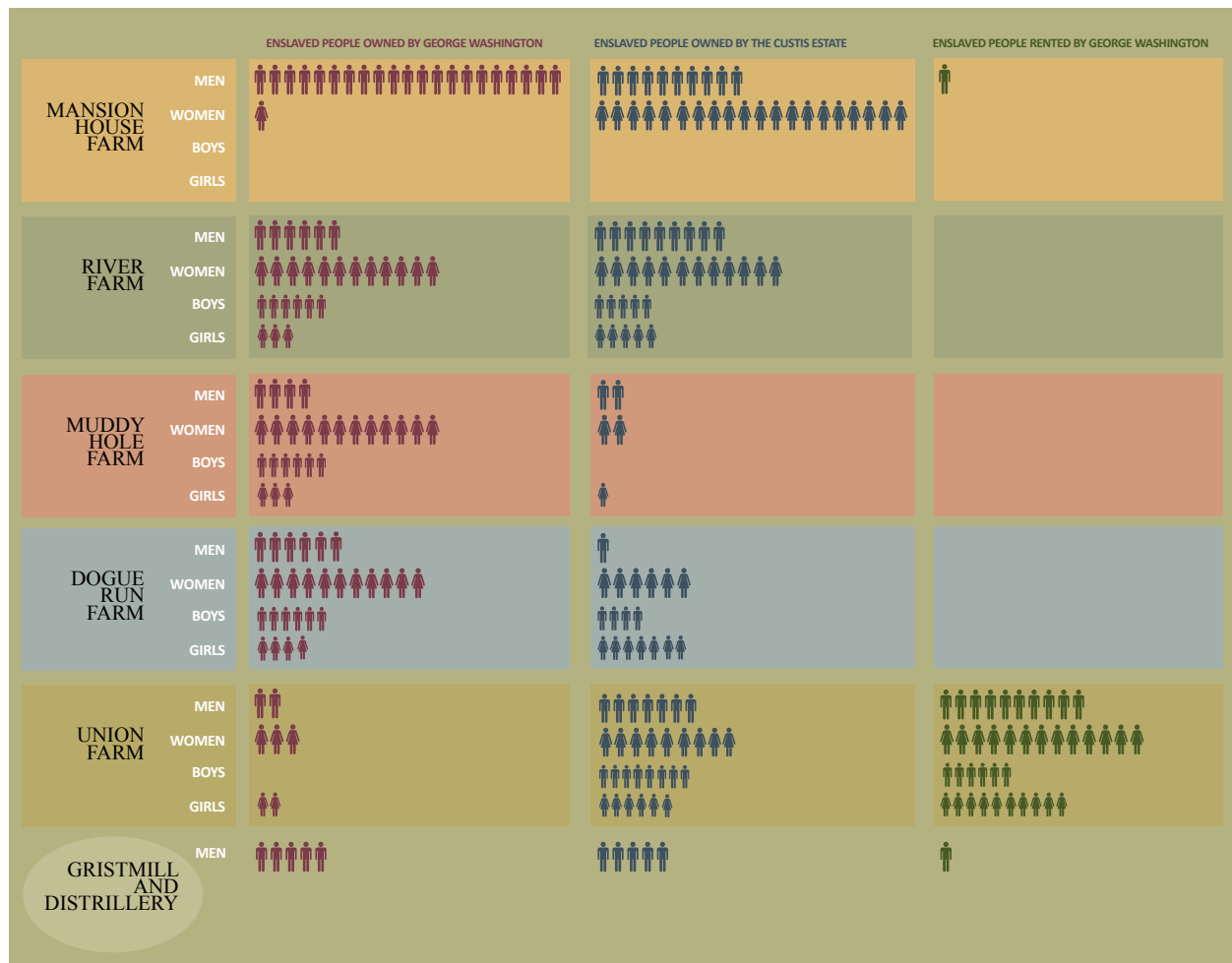
1. How does the physical space of your house affect the activities you do?
2. What things can you do and when depending on the space of your house?
3. Does the amount of space you have enhance or limit your daily activities?

# Mount Vernon Map

George Washington (1732–1799). A Map of General Washington's Farm from a Drawing Transmitted by the General. Removed from Letters from His Excellency General Washington to Arthur Young. London: W. J. & J. Richardson, 1801.



# Enslaved Population at Mount Vernon, 1799 Infographic



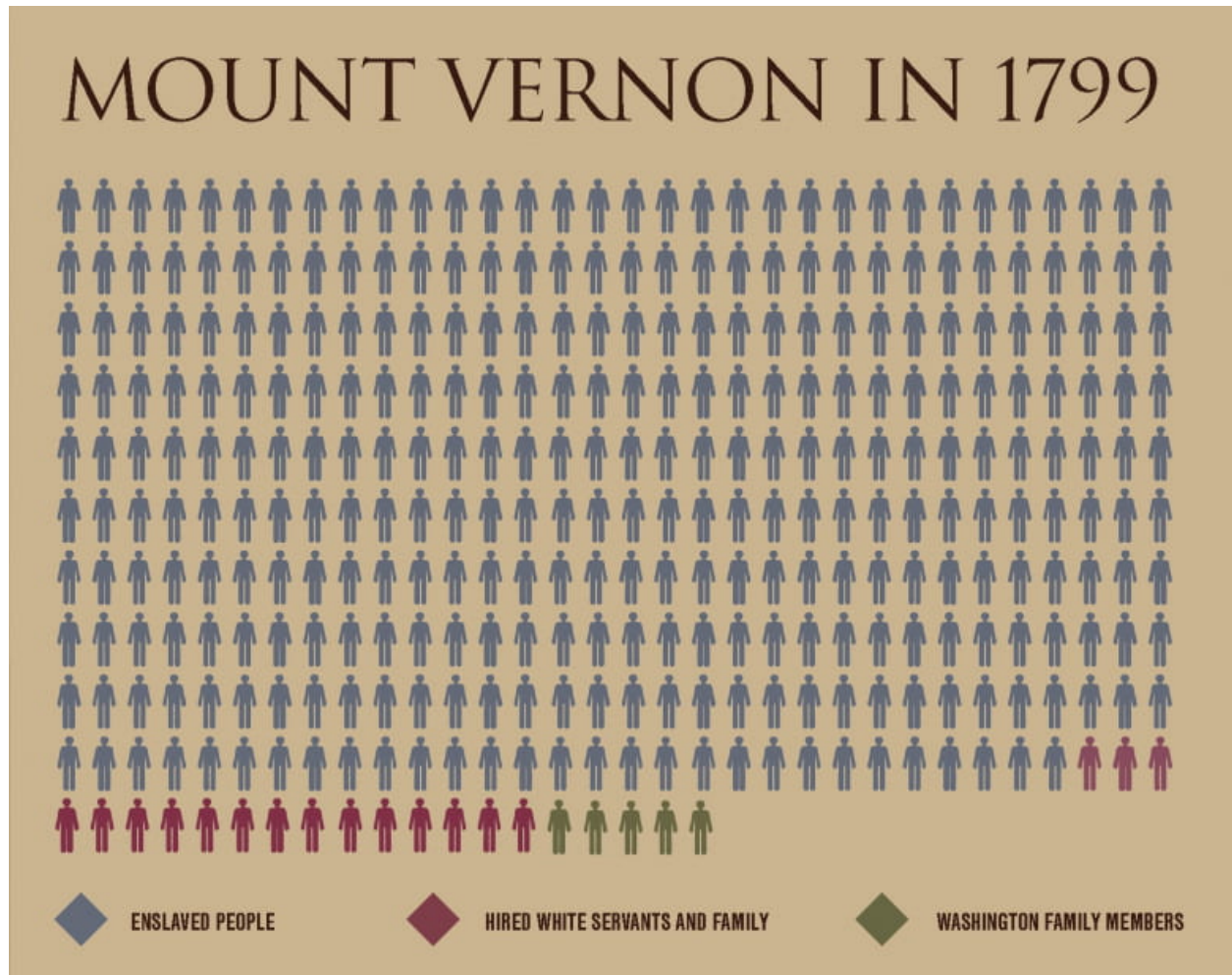
Source: Mount Vernon's Ladies Association, taken from George Washington's List of Enslaved People, 1799.

Mansion House Farm: 88 people  
 River Farm: 57 people  
 Muddy Hole Farm: 41 people  
 Dogue Run Farm: 45 people  
 Union Farm: 75 people  
 Gristmill and Distillery: 11 people



## Population at Mount Vernon in 1799

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Source: Mount Vernon's Ladies Association, taken from George Washington's Last Will and Testament, Mount Vernon, 9 July 1799

Enslaved People: 317 people

Hired White Servants and Family: 17 people

Washington Family Members: 5 people

## Building Comparison: Mount Vernon and the Enslaved Worker's Cabin

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This is a size comparison between the square footage of an enslaved worker's cabin and the first floor of the Mansion at Mount Vernon. The replica cabin at Mount Vernon represents a building that one or two enslaved families would have lived in. It contains one room and a small loft totaling to about 225 ft<sup>2</sup>. George Washington lived in the Mansion House, which is 11,028 ft<sup>2</sup>. It is two and a half stories tall with 21 rooms. The biggest room was the "New Room," which was used for dining, concerts, and dances is about 694 ft<sup>2</sup> and can fit three replica cabins.

