

LESSON PLAN:

# WHICH GRACE? ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL RECORDS

**LEVEL:**

Middle School

**TIME:**

An hour and a half class period, plus outside work.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will use primary and secondary sources to learn about life as an enslaved person at Mount Vernon.
- Students will evaluate primary sources to make a claim about historical evidence and (optional extension) create a secondary source about an enslaved individual at Mount Vernon.
- Students will work in teams on a project that does not have a definitive final answer.

**Related Standards:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| - Research and Evidence Based Analysis                          | - Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created                                   |
| - Revolution and the New Nation                                 |   |
| - Working in Teams  | - Evaluate the relevancy and utility of a historical source based on information such as maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose |
| - Communicating   |   |
| - Application of Knowledge through higher-order thinking skills | - Develop claims and counterclaims while pointing out strengths and limitations of both.  |
| - Reading Standards in Technical Subjects                       |   |

**PREPARATION:**

This lesson works best in classrooms that have completed the following preparatory work:

- Define and model for students a practice of historical thinking strategies and provide context for how analyzing sources, such as the ones included in this lesson, is part of the overall practice of doing history. In developing this activity, Mount Vernon used the C3 Framework's model of historical thinking. [See page 43 of the C3 Frameworks.](#)
- The topic of slavery and discussing the lives of people enslaved in the 18th century is an emotional topic in the classroom. Procedures for ensuring a safe and tolerant environment for open dialogue and engagement should be a part of classroom culture. Students should be reminded of this respectful environment that still encourages inquiry while participating in this lesson. Mount Vernon uses the Four Truths model of acknowledging and validating differing perspectives in our workshops. For more information, [see page 110 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report.](#)
- It is important that students are prepared to encounter unknown results when participating in this activity. Mount Vernon scholars have not determined a conclusive or "right" answer to how many Graces, Isaacs, and Suckeys were at Mount Vernon from 1750-1800. Preparing students for this ambiguous result is instructive for helping students understand the challenges and opportunities in historical thinking strategies.

# WHICH GRACE? ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL RECORDS

## WARM-UP

1. Review ground rules for discussing difficult topics like slavery, previously established in your classroom.
2. Instruct students complete the *Map of Mount Vernon* worksheet or complete a visual analysis using the image *A Map of General Washington's Five Farms* as a class (worksheet and image are both included in PDF). The analysis should focus on identifying the five different farms that George Washington owned. These farms are the locations where the enslaved people he owned also lived.
3. Introduce Priscilla and Joe, two of the enslaved people who lived and worked on Washington's farms. Instruct students to read *Excerpt: Biography of Priscilla* and *Background Information* sheet (included in PDF) which includes links to online articles.
4. Inform students that historians were able to build the biographies of Priscilla, Joe, and other enslaved individuals who left no written record by using research skills that integrate numerous written records with what they know about Mount Vernon from archaeological, architectural, and curatorial work. As a class, you will be looking at the same evidence historians looked at to create our own narratives about the life of someone enslaved at Mount Vernon.

## PROCEDURE:

1. Review previously established steps to historical thinking strategies with students.
2. Show students the document and transcription titled *French's Slave Census 1799* (included in PDF). Historians used this source, along with hundreds of letters, ledgers, farm reports, and other documents dated from 1750 to 1800, to find evidence of individual enslaved peoples' names.
  - As a class, locate Isaac on the census, then look for Grace.
  - Ask students to find Suckey.
    - i. *Note: Grace and Isaac are listed on the census, Suckey is not.*
  - There were numerous enslaved people named Grace, Isaac, and Suckey who lived on Washington's five farms; however, there is no record of exactly how many different individuals with those names there were over the 50 years that Washington held slaves.
3. Divide students into groups and provide each group with a set of sources found in the *Student Source Sets* folder (included in PDF). You can assign each group a complete set for Grace, Isaac, or Suckey; distribute a portion of each set (just the even or odd numbered cards for Grace, Isaac, or Suckey); or evenly divide one set of sources between your groups.

*Note: The Student Source Sets are simplified versions of a larger database created by Mount Vernon to explore the lives of the enslaved community. You can view this larger database here: <http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/slavery-database/>*

4. Review the research question with students and provide starting tips to help the groups use their time with the sources wisely.

# WHICH GRACE? ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL RECORDS

**Research Question:** *How many enslaved individuals named Grace, Isaac, and Suckey were there at Mount Vernon from 1750-1799?*

5. Instruct student groups to review the pieces of evidence and sort their source cards into piles according to the number of individuals they think lived on Mount Vernon with the name they were assigned in their source set (each pile represents an individual and contains the source cards with evidence e.g. 5 piles for 5 Isaacs, etc). Refer to the *Starting and Stumbling Tips for Teachers* handout (included in PDF) for prompts to get students started with this activity.
6. Allow 20-30 minutes for groups to review evidence and fill out their *Student Worksheet* (included in PDF).
7. Instruct groups to present their findings and share with their peers if they reached consensus on the number of individuals with the name they were assigned. If there was no consensus, students should explain why they disagreed using evidence from the source set.
8. Conduct a class discussion centered on the results of the activity.  
Suggested discussion prompts:
  - How much did you trust the sources available to you?
  - Where else could you find more information about the lives of those enslaved at Mount Vernon?
  - How do we find stories about people who did not leave a written record?
  - Do the stories of peoples' lives change even when events of the past do not? What causes a story of the past to change?
  - If more than one group worked on the same document set, ask the groups to compare notes and analysis. Are they in agreement?

One of the most challenging tasks historians tackle is how to start their research. Even with a clearly identified research question (*How many enslaved individuals names Grace, Isaac, or Suckey were there at Mount Vernon from 1750-1799*) students may be daunted by the stack of evidence that lies before them. Providing students with a few tips both in advance of and throughout the activity can help illuminate the challenges of the research process and give students ownership over their own conclusions.

### **Tips to get started:**

- We just looked at the document titled *French's Slave Census 1799* and saw that both an Isaac and a Grace were listed. Groups who were assigned Isaac or Grace, look for the card that lists the *French's Slave Census 1799* as the source. You've found evidence of one individual. Look through your cards and identify if there are other references that connect to this same person.
- Remember the 5 farms map? What farms were part of Mount Vernon (Dogue Run Farm, Mansion House Farm, Union Farm, Muddy Hole Farm, and River Farm). How many unique individuals can you determine based on where they lived?
- Look at pieces of evidence that have dates and ages listed. Can you figure out the year of this person's birth? How many unique individuals can you determine by age?
- Look at the pieces of evidence that list a job skill or mention family relationships. Do these biographical pieces of information help isolate any individuals from others with their same name?

### **Stumbling Blocks:**

- The concept of differentiating individuals with the same name might be a hard one for some students to grasp. Try posing a more concrete version of the same challenge related to your school environment: "How could you figure out what the students at our school were like 25 years ago?" Address the use of sources available (e.g. yearbooks to grade books, as well as teacher memory). Ask students, "If I gave you 3 first names- Tiffany, Scott and Debbie" would you be able to figure out who these students were and what their life was like based upon pieces of evidence gathered from the sources we have?"
- Some of the record cards look identical or have little differences between them. Many also have 18th-century information that can be difficult to interpret. Students may ask for clarification when there isn't a clear answer. This is one of the challenges of looking at sources so removed from their original material. Reference the *Types of Sources Key* (included in the ZIP file download) to help answer some source questions by identifying where specific information comes from.
- Using visual or special organization methods is key to making a claim about these enslaved individuals. If students are organizing the cards by date, have them lay the cards out, like on a timeline. If students are organizing the cards by location, use the 5 farms map to help differentiate the individuals by where they lived.
- Mount Vernon has provided as much evidence as we can about enslaved individuals with each of these three names, but it may be that over 100 pieces of evidence about people named Isaac is too much. To help students digest the information, it may be helpful to instruct them to focus on looking at mentions of their assigned individual for one decade, e.g. the 1790s, instead of the full 50 years covered in each source set.

The rich textual and material evidence that has long supported research and writing about the lives of George and Martha Washington also includes a wealth of information about the enslaved men, women, and children of their Mount Vernon plantation. Because of proximity to the most famous American of his time, the lives of the enslaved people at Mount Vernon can be glimpsed in greater detail than any comparable group of slaves in eighteenth-century America. Indeed, it can be said that George Washington wrote the biographies of Mount Vernon's enslaved people.

Thousands of references in his voluminous papers make it possible to trace the experiences of specific individuals through time and follow family lineages through multiple generations. Visitor descriptions, public records, oral histories, and archaeology fill in some of the blanks. The resulting level of personal history is unparalleled, contrasting with the isolated references and faceless statistics that are all we have to illuminate the lives of the vast majority of eighteenth-century enslaved Americans.

Even with these rich resources, many questions remain without definitive answers. By looking carefully at small amounts of data, new narratives begin to take shape. We want to learn more about any enslaved individuals named Grace, Isaac, and Suckey using the evidence we have where those names are listed in George Washington's records.

For more about George Washington and Slavery:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/>

For more about the lives of those enslaved at Mount Vernon:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/subject/slavery-and-enslaved-community/>

*Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon* exhibit video (7:19):

<https://vimeo.com/185798426>

*Mount Vernon's Slavery Database:*

<http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/slavery-database/>

In early July 1798 at Dogue Run Farm, thirty-five-year-old Priscilla gave birth to Christopher, her sixth living child. She did not resume working in the fields until five weeks later. Priscilla's husband and Christopher's father, Joe, was likely unable to see much of his newborn son. Like many enslaved couples at Mount Vernon, Priscilla and Joe lived separately.

George Washington recognized marriages between slaves but nevertheless dictated that work assignments rather than family units determine their living arrangements. Joe worked at the Mansion House Farm as a ditcher and lived in the greenhouse slave quarter during the week. Priscilla was a field-worker and lived with their children in a cabin on Dogue Run Farm. Joe could visit his wife and children on Sundays or holidays. Sometimes Joe may have walked the four miles to Dogue Run after sunset, returning in time for work the next morning. Washington occasionally complained that his enslaved workers were fatigued from this practice of "nightwalking" to visit their families.

As a result of these living arrangements, Priscilla raised her children largely alone, supported by a community at Dogue Run and, as time went on, her older children. When Christopher was born, Priscilla's older children – Sophia (age thirteen), Savary (twelve), Penny (ten), and Israel (nine) – could help their mother with the newborn and two-year-old Isrias.

To read the full biography of Priscilla, see:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/priscilla/>

Each piece of evidence is a short excerpt from a longer document or record. Each excerpt was selected because it mentions Grace, Isaac, or Suckey. Certain key pieces of information are included to provide context and to help evaluate the relevance and utility of the source in answering the research question: *How many Grace's/Isaac's/Suckey's are there at Mount Vernon from 1750-1799?*

Each evidence card lists the name and card number in bold at the top, as well as six additional pieces of information.

1. **Primary Source:** Indicates the name of the document from which the information is drawn. You can use this information to find the document in its full form. This information helps historians draw conclusions about why the document was created.
2. **Date:** If known, this information tells you when the primary source document your card references was created.
3. **Location:** If known, this information tells you where the document your card references was created, or what part of the Mount Vernon plantation it refers to.
4. **Owner:** If known, this information tells you who owned the enslaved individual mentioned in the record. Most are listed as belonging to either George Washington or the Custis estate (the family estate of Washington's wife Martha).
5. **Text of the Event:** This is the actual text taken from the primary source. If you were to look at the original document, you would see these words.
6. **Record:** This is a reference number created by Mount Vernon historians to help organize the information for historical research.

#### **Primary Source Types:**

- **Lists and Censuses:** These documents were created by the estate periodically to account for the number of people enslaved at Mount Vernon and the type of work they do.
- **Ledgers/Storebook:** These documents were created by managers and secretaries on Mount Vernon's farms and tracked the work done or items purchased that needed to be accounted for. Enslaved individuals are mentioned in these records if they were part of the work done or were paid for an item they sold.
- **Farm Reports:** These documents were created by managers and overseers on Mount Vernon's farms and reported the work that was completed at each farm. These records also record reasons why work was not completed (bad weather, illness, etc).

LESSON PLAN: WHICH GRACE? ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL RECORDS  
KEY TO RESOURCES

- **Diary/Observations:** These documents were created by individuals recording their own lives. On occasion these records mention enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon when their lives overlapped.
- **Letter/Memorandum:** These documents were created by individuals who were corresponding with other literate individuals for business, personal, or political reasons. On occasion, letters of this type made reference to enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon.



WHICH GRACE? ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL RECORDS  
WORKSHEET

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who are your sources about? Circle one:

Grace

Isaac

Suckey

2. List the evidence card numbers assigned to your group: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

3. Circle the different types primary sources used in your assigned set

List/Census

Ledger/Storebook

Farm Report

Diary/Observation

Letter/Memorandum

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. How many sources are written by Grace/Isaac/Suckey?
5. Provide the name of one author of the primary sources assigned:

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Use the space below to write notes from your assigned primary sources that can help identify unique individuals. Pay particular attention to *dates, ages, behavior, skills, family relationships, location, health, etc.*

7. How many individuals did you identify? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Compare the number of individuals you identified with your group. Is your group in agreement?

Yes

No

9. Briefly explain your group's reasoning for agreeing or disagreeing on the number of individuals named Grace/Isaac/Suckey.

[illegible]

# MAP OF MOUNT VERNON



Source: 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.

1. What type of primary source is this?

2. Who created this document? How do you know?

3. After looking at this source, create a list of things that you notice:

4. How many farms are a part of Mount Vernon? \_\_\_\_\_ List them:

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5. The Potomac River forms which boundary of Mount Vernon?

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6. The *fishery* can be found on which farm?

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7. The Mount Vernon estate can be found on which farm?

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8. Why was this map created? Be ready to defend your answer with evidence from this document.

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9. Write down one thing that you learned from reading this document.

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A list of Negroes the property of M<sup>rs</sup> French, in possession of George Washington, by virtue of a Contract which is to terminate with the life of the former. —

Names	Ages &c.	Remarks
Will	Old-but hearty	Looks after the Stock - repairs the Fences - and keeps them in order. —
<del>Abraham</del>	In his prime	<del>A good Ploughman - Cradler and Mower of Grass - a good seedsmen &amp; a good Stock.</del>
Paschah	In his prime	A very good Mower, both of Grain & Grass - and an excellent Ditcher. —
Tom	About 28.	A good Mower - and an excellent Ploughman - but unfortunately, from some tumour in his head, it is feared that blindness, partial if not entire, will ensue. — He has been constantly attended by Doc Craik - and has been visited by two other Doctors. —
Isaac	about 29	an excellent Scytherman, a good Ploughman - and handy at any other business on a Farm. —
Moses	about 26	A good Ploughman, and Carter
James	about 24	A stout young fellow & Cradler - has been employed mostly at the Distillery



# Continued

Names.	ages &c.	Remarks
Julius. . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 23	a very good Carter, and can do any other work, although defective in shape from his Infancy.
Spencer. . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 20	a good Carter and Mower, and able at any business.
Women.		
Tabine. . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 60	a good working woman, notwithstanding her age.
Lucy. . . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 55	Lame, or pretends to be so, occasioned by rheumatic pains, but is a good knitter, & so employed. —
Daphne. . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 40	Ploughs very well, and is a good hand at any work.
Delia. . . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 35	Equally good at the Spinn <sup>g</sup> wheel or Hoe, but has been kept chiefly at the form.
Grace. . . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 28	a very good Plougher — and equally so at all sorts of Work. —
Tips. . . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 25	Ploughs well — and can Milk & Churn. —
Milly. . . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 18	a full grown woman, and lively; — has been used to common work only. —
Nancy. . . . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 16	The same — in all respects.
Hannah. . .	ab <sup>h</sup> . . . 14	Nearly at her full growth and a woman in appear.



# Continued.

Names.	ages.	Remarks
Boys & Girls who work in the Crops		
Daniel	ab <sup>h</sup> 16	
Isaac	14	
Matilda	13	
Betty	13	
Brisey	12	
Grace	12	
Children		
Mately	10	Son to Lucy
Rennay	6	Daugh <sup>r</sup> Ditto
Raison	3	Ditto Ditto
Morgan	2	Son Ditto
Phanex	1	Ditto Ditto
Polly	9	Daughter to Laphne
Maria	2	Ditto to Ditto
Jack	7	Son to Delia
Julia	4	Daughter Ditto
Nelly	2	Ditto Ditto
Antrose	1	Son Ditto
Bob	10	S <sup>c</sup> to Grace
Sal	8	daugh <sup>r</sup> Ditto
Judy	4	Ditto Ditto
Augusta	1	Ditto Ditto
Nancy	10	daughter to Sabine
Men	9	<div> <div> The negroes contained in this list, with the remarks on them, are given with accuracy, and their ages are entered from their </div> </div>
Women	9	
Work Boys & Sir	6	
Children	16	
Total	40	



their own accounts of them. — They are a  
parcel of very likely & healthy people, —  
and since the going off, of a fellow called  
Paul (four or 5 years ago) are as orderly,  
and as well disposed a set, as any equal  
number in the Country. —

15<sup>th</sup> July 1799

G. W. Ashington



## Census of Slaves Rented by George Washington from Mrs. Penelope French, 1799 (Page 1 of 4)

A list of Negros the property the property of Mrs. French, in possession of George Washington, by virtue of a Contract which is to terminate with the life of the former. –

Names	Ages &ca	Remarks
Will	Old, but hearty	Looks after the Stock _ repairs the Fences and keeps them in order. _
Abram	In his prime	A good Ploughman, Cradler and Mower of Grass _ a good Seedsman, & ca Stack
Paschall	In his prime	A very good Mower, both of Grain & Grass, and an excellent Ditcher. _
Tom	About 28	A good Mower_ and an excellent Ploughman _ but unfortunately, from some tumour in his head, it is feared that blindness, partial if not entire, will ensue. _ He has been constantly attended by Docr Craik, and has been visited by two other Doctors. _
Isaac	About 29	An excellent Scythesman, a good Ploughman, and handy at any other business on a Farm. _
Moses	About 26	A good Ploughman, and Carter
James	About 24	A Stout young fellow & Cradler, has been employed mostly at the Distillery.



**Census of Slaves Rented by George Washington from Mrs. Penelope French, 1799 (Page 2 of 4)**

Continued

Names	Ages &ca	Remarks
Julius	Abt 23	A Very good Carter, and can do any other work, although defective in Shape from his Infancy.
Spencer	Abt 20	A good Carter and Mower, and able at any business
Women		
Sabine	Abt 60	A good working woman, notwithstanding her age.
Lucy	Abt 55	Lame, or pretends to be so, occasioned by rheumatic pains; _ but is a good knitter, & so employed. _
Daphne	Abt 40	Ploughs very well, and is a good hand at any work
Delia	Abt 35	Equally good at the Spinnng Wheel or Hoe, but has been kept chiefly at the formr
Grace	Abt 28	A very good Plougher _ and equally so at all sorts of Work. _
Siss	Abt 25	Ploughs well _ and can Milk & Churn. _
Milly	Abt 18	A full grown Woman, and likely; _ has been used to Common work only. _
Nancy	Abt 16	The same _ in all respects.
Hannah	Abt 14	Nearly at her full growth and a woman in appeare



# Census of Slaves Rented by George Washington from Mrs. Penelope French, 1799 (Page 3 of 4)

Boys & Girls who work in the

Crops

Names	Ages &ca	Remarks
Daniel	Abt 16	
Isaac	14	
Matilda	13	
Betty	13	
Briney	12	
Grace	12	
	Children	
Stately	10	Son to.....Lucy
Renney	6	Daughr.....Ditto
Raison	3	Ditto.....Ditto
Morgan	2	Son .....Ditto
Phoenix	1	Ditto.....Ditto
Polly	9	Daughter to.....Daphne
Maria	2	Ditto.....to.....Ditto
Jack	7	Son.....to.....Delia
Julia	4	Daughter.....Ditto
Nelly	2	Ditto.....Ditto
Ambrose	1	Son .....Ditto
Bob	10	Do.....to.....Grace
Sall	8	Daughr.....Ditto
Judy	4	Ditto.....Ditto
Augusta	1	Ditto.....Ditto
Nancy	10	Daughter.....to.....Sabine

Men	9	}
Women	9	
Workg boy & Girs	6	
Children	16	
In All	40	

The Negros contained in this list, with the Remarks on them, are given with accuracy; \_ and their ages are entered from



**Census of Slaves Rented by George Washington from Mrs. Penelope French, 1799 (Page 4 of 4)**

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a parcel of very likely & healthy people; \_  
and since the going off, of a fellow called  
Paul (four or 5 years ago) are as orderly,  
and as well disposed a set, as any equal  
number in the Country. \_

15<sup>th</sup> July 1799

Go Washington

