**Compelling Question: Teacher Material**

**Compelling Question:** Why was ice cream an exclusive treat at Mount Vernon long ago?

**Background Information:**

The Washington’s were part of the upper class in the new United States of America. They had high status because of the families both George and Martha were born into, the wealth (in land and enslaved individuals) that Martha brought to the marriage, and the singular status George Washington held as General of the Continental Army in the American Revolution and as the first President of the United States of America. Because of their position in society and their economic wealth they had the obligation and ability to host guests year round. In the summertime, they were able to offer ice cream to their guests. This cold dish, served in the middle of a hot afternoon, was a rare treat.

The first reference to ice cream at Mount Vernon dates back to May of 1784, when a “Cream Machine for Ice” was acquired for one pound, thirteen shillings, and three pence. Additional utensils for preparing and serving ice cream were purchased by George Washington on several occasions during his presidency, including: two “dble tin Ice Cream molds” acquired for $2.50 in May of 1792 and another was added in June of 1795, at a cost of $7.00. One year later, in June of 1796, the Washingtons spent five shillings for an ice cream spoon.

Both the mold and spoon were acquired during the presidency, when Martha Washington served ice cream at her weekly levees. Abigail Adams described one of these events, held each Friday evening at 8 o’clock, where the “company” were “entertained with Ice creems & Lemonade.”A dinner guest at the presidential mansion, Senator William Maclay, recalled that “The dessert was, first Apple pies puddings & ca.; then iced creams Jellies &ca. then Water Melons Musk Melons apples peaches nuts.”

The inventory of Mount Vernon completed shortly after George Washington’s death lists two pewter ice cream pots valued at $3.00, and another eight of tin valued at $1.00, both stored on the second floor of the kitchen. The large number of ice cream pots suggests that this was a favored dessert at Mount Vernon. Since Washington died in December and the inventory was taken almost immediately afterward, it is logical that the equipment for making that summery dessert would have been in storage.

Within a set of white and gold French china purchased by George Washington during the presidency were an icery, as well as several serving trays and small footed cups known as “ice pots.” The 309 piece service set originally included “2 Iceries Compleat,” twelve “ice plates,” and thirty-six “ice pots.” The ice plates and pots were placed at intervals on the table during the dessert course, where they were filled from the iceries. The small cups were a practical way of serving ice cream, which had a more liquid –like consistency in the eighteenth century than its modern counterpart.

**Instructional Information:** This module should last approximately a week. The Compelling Question should be a day, each Supporting Question should be a day, and the Summative Tasks should be about a day. The Take Action Task could be done in class or outside of class.

You might want to go over the definition of the word ***exclusive*** with the class: available to only a few people because of high cost

**Discussion:** Introduce the module by beginning the class with a discussion about what you might eat on a special occasion. Some ideas include your favorite food, and ice cream. Next discuss what it takes to get ice cream today. Talk about how easy it is to walk into a store and pick up a half-gallon of ice cream or go to your local ice cream shop for a cone. If you make it, there is electricity to churn and freeze the ice cream. Discuss what it must have been like to make ice cream long ago. What were some of the challenges? Why do you think it was described at length by guests? Lastly, have students complete a quick analysis task with the ice cream recipe.

**Supporting Question 1: Teacher Material**

**Supporting Question 1:** Where and how were the four ingredients for ice cream cultivated?

**Background Information:**

Plantation Structure at Mount Vernon

“A large Virginia estate,” wrote Washington Irving in his biography of George Washington, “was a little empire. The mansion-house was the seat of government, with its numerous dependencies, such as kitchens, smokehouse, workshops and stables.”

When George Washington began farming at Mount Vernon in 1758, the plantation had around twenty enslaved people. His marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis the following year increased the number to fifty enslaved people above the age of sixteen. The earliest complete census of Mount Vernon’s enslaved people was drawn up by Washington in 1786. Listed were 216 men, women, and children. One hundred five of the enslaved people were from George Washington’s estate, while the remaining 111 enslaved people were from the estate of Martha Washington’s first husband, Daniel Parke Custis and listed as Dower in the census documents.

In July of 1799, the summer before he died, Washington drafted a final census in preparation for freeing some of the enslaved people under the terms of his will. By then the population had grown to 317.

Mount Vernon was essentially a self-contained community; nothing was purchased that could be produced on the estate. Most of the work done on the plantation was provided by enslave labor. Many of the enslaved people lived on and operated the outlying farms, where they also engaged in a variety of agricultural work. It was not unusual for the overseers in charge of several of the farms to themselves be enslaved. Around one-third of the able-bodied enslaved people were skilled craftsmen, including blacksmiths, carpenters, gardeners, shoemakers, painters, brickmakers, and herdsmen.

Other enslaved people were house servants or coachmen. Women at the Mansion House Farm served as spinners, weavers, and seamstresses, as well as cooks, dairy maids, and house servants. There were also millers and coopers who lived at and operated the mill, located about two miles from the mansion, as well as boatmen, who operated Washington’s fishing industry and his river ferry. The spinning house was the most important structure on the north lane of Mansion House Farm. At Mount Vernon ten or more enslaved people were constantly spinning and knitting to create clothing and other supplies for the household, primarily for fellow enslaved people. The wool and flax fiber that they worked with were grown on site.

*From:* <http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/plantation-structure>

**Instructional Information:** To shorten the time of this activity and/or provide differentiation you can divide the class into groups of five students. Each student will take one ingredient and report out the information on the chart. Students will then work together to fill out the chart.

It may necessary to have students look up and define the word ***cultivated***: to grow or raise under conditions that you can control.

It may also be useful to go over the definition of ***exclusive****,* as it is used in this context, with the class: available to only a few people because of high cost.

**Supporting Question 2: Teacher Material**

**Supporting Question 2:** What were the conditions like for the enslaved people as they prepared the ice cream?

**Background Information:** The Mount Vernon estate was divided into five separate farms, each of which was managed by an overseer. These overseers were often supervised by a farm manager who reported to Washington on a weekly basis.

Enslaved people at Mount Vernon typically operated the estate from the time the sun rose in the morning until it set in the evening, with about two hours off for meals in between. During the winter, enslaved people toiled for around eight hours each day, while in the summer the day might have been as long as fourteen hours. Sunday was usually a day off for everyone at Mount Vernon, both free persons and enslaved people. Throughout the year enslaved people were also given a few holidays off, including Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

Enslaved people at Mount Vernon found a variety of ways to fill their limited time off. Evenings were frequently spent with activities to benefit themselves and their families. On a daily basis, in addition to their day's work, enslaved people had their own housekeeping chores such as tending chickens and garden plots, cooking, preserving the produce of their gardens, washing and mending clothing. With little free time and control over their everyday life, Mount Vernon's enslaved people attempted to exert some free will and choice when it came to their private lives.

Most free time was spent managing their own homes, supplies, and families. Some enslaved people at Mount Vernon spent their free time visiting with one another. In some instances, enslaved people visited other plantations where their spouses lived. Some enslaved people at Mount Vernon also found time for games and sports in their free hours. A Polish visitor to Mount Vernon described what may have been a game like tag played by some enslaved people on one of their Sundays off in the summer of 1798. He recorded seeing a group of about thirty enslaved people divided into two groups. They were playing a game he described as "prisoner's base," which involved "jumps and gambols as if they had rested all week."

George Washington occasionally permitted enslaved people to leave his home or plantation to attend special events in the surrounding area. In the fall of 1784, for example, Washington gave six shillings so that his "Servts." could "go to the Race." Two years later, he permitted enslaved people to attend the Alexandria races with restrictions, under the stipulation that some remained on each of his farms, while the others were free to stagger their attendance over the several day event.*From:* http://www.mountvernon.org

**Instructional Information:** Students will be writing an informative paragraph for the analysis activity. If time allows, share the writing rubric with students. Help them understand that using a rubric helps them identify and focus on areas that might need further work. Work with the class to review the points on the rubric.

Circulate or conference with individual students to help them as they write their paragraph. (This is an effective strategy that supports the student and gives the teacher insight into students’ progress/thinking/writing.) Ask the following questions to help make concrete suggestions for revision:

* What conditions are you writing about?
* Where are you now in your paragraph?
* What details can you add to strengthen your introduction?
* What details can you delete or rearrange to make your writing more organized or focused?

**Supporting Question 3: Teacher Material**

**Supporting Question 3:** Who ate the ice cream and how was it served?

**Background Information:** A number of sources provide insight into food and food service at Mount Vernon. Chief among these documents are George Washington's carefully maintained financial records, his diaries and correspondence, and the weekly reports received from his farm managers and overseers. In addition, visitors to Washington’s home occasionally recorded their dining experiences.

The first meal of the day at Mount Vernon was breakfast, taken at around seven in the morning. By that time, George Washington had already been awake for several hours, spending time reading or working on his correspondence. With the household involved in a number of undertakings in different locations, a signal was utilized to call everyone together. Winthrop Sargent, who visited Mount Vernon in October of 1793, was summoned to breakfast by "the Great Bell."

Benjamin Henry Latrobe visited in the summer of 1796 and his diary provides insight into a typical meal at Mount Vernon. Latrobe reported being served what he considered a typical Virginia breakfast consisting of tea, coffee, and cold and broiled meats. Manasseh Cutler had a similar meal in 1802 that included ham, cold corned beef, cold fowl, red herring, and cold mutton, all garnished with parsley and other vegetables from the garden.

Chocolate was also a favorite breakfast beverage at Mount Vernon; Burges Ball requested in 1794 that Washington send him two or three bushels of chocolate shells, which he had "frequently drank Chocolate of at Mt. Vernon, as my wife thinks it agreed with her better than any other Breakfast."

As with breakfast, a bell was sounded to call the busy household to the dinner table. The bell was first rung fifteen minutes before dinner. George Washington frequently expressed preference for meals that were plain but substantial. According to one young member of his household, Washington "ate heartily" at dinner, "but was not particular in his diet, with the exception of fish, of which he was excessively fond." Several French officers stopped at Mount Vernon in 1780 to pay their respects to Martha Washington, who invited them to dinner. One of them, Pierre Etienne Du Ponceau, found that "the table was abundantly served, but without profusion."

While a number of visitors made references to dining with the Washingtons, only a few went into detail about the contents or progress of the meal. In June of 1797, Amariah Frost was given what he considered a "very good" dinner consisting of "a small roasted pigg, boiled leg of lamb, roasted fowles, beef, peas, lettice, cucumbers, artichokes. . .puddings, tarts, etc. "

About a year and a half later in February 1799, Joshua Brooks recorded a number of specific details about his dinner at Mount Vernon. The table was arranged with a leg of boiled pork at the head, a goose at the foot, and the following dishes arranged around the table: roast beef, round cold boiled beef, mutton chops, hominy, cabbage, potatoes, pickles, fried tripe, and onions. Beverages offered during dinner included wine, porter, and beer. The tablecloth was wiped off before the second course, which included mince pies, tarts, and cheese. The cloth was then removed altogether and port and madeira, as well as two kinds of nuts, apples, and raisins were set out. The eight diners were attended by three enslaved waiters.

Supper was occasionally offered later in the evening, but was not a regular meal for the Washingtons. As President, George Washington himself noted in a letter to his household steward that "we never have suppers nor sudden calls for extra dinners," a statement which was probably true for the presidential mansion, and may indicate his general preference.

Martha Washington's grandson recalled that during a typical family evening, George Washington would leaf through newspapers "while taking his single cup of tea (his only supper)," while reading aloud "passages of peculiar interest, making remarks upon the same." At nine o'clock, Washington would say good night and head for his bedroom.

*From:* http://www.mountvernon.org

**Instructional Information:** Students will be creating anumberedlist, time line, or flow chart for the analysis activity. Tell students to pay attention to the sequence of events as they analyze the primary sources in this supporting question. Remind them that **sequence** is the order in which the key events take place. Tell them to look for words that signal time. Suggest that it might be beneficial for them to keep a separate note to keep track of the sequence of events.

**Summative Assessment Task: Teacher Material**

**Compelling Question:** Why was ice cream an exclusive treat at Mount Vernon long ago?

**Instructional Information:** At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the interconnected relationship between the enslaved population at Mount Vernon, the cultivation of the ice cream ingredients, the preparation and serving of the ice cream, and the Washington family. Students should be able to demonstrate their understandings of this relationship and use evidence from multiple sources to answer the compelling question. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question “Why was ice cream an exclusive treat at Mount Vernon long ago?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could be in the form of a detailed paragraph or a drawing. Students’ arguments will likely vary but could include any of the following:

* The Washingtons had an enslaved population to operate their estate.
* The Washingtons had farms where they could grow or make the ingredients.
* The Washingtons had money to buy the other ingredients they could not grow or make.
* The Washingtons also had the money and opportunity to buy the ice cream maker and the dishes.
* The Washingtons had a large house to entertain guests and serve the ice cream.

\*It might be necessary to go over the definition of ***exclusive****,* as it is used in this context, with the class: available to only a few people because of high cost.

**Take Action**

**Compelling Question:** Why was ice cream an exclusive treat at Mount Vernon long ago?

**Taking Informed Action:** How did Mount Vernon operate? Create a newscast to make people aware of how Mount Vernon operated in 1799. If possible, record your newscast for your classmates and teachers to view. The following questions can help guide your newscast for your school news:

* Who operated Mount Vernon?
* What were some of the tasks that went into operating Mount Vernon?

The following checklist will help you create your newscast:

* The introduction is memorable.
* The newscast conveys the story in a smooth and engaging style.
* The newscast has appropriate evidence from primary and secondary sources placed seamlessly throughout.
* The newscast has a concise conclusion.
* The speaker masterfully uses speaking rate, volume, and inflection.
* The student effectively uses body language, such as eye contact, posture, and gestures.