

Researching for Truth: Exploring the Issue of Slavery in the Era of the American Revolution, Lesson Plan 2017

Kolby Hume, Social Studies Teacher

Coe-Brown Northwood Academy

Suggested grade level: 11-12, College Prep

Essential Questions:

In what ways does material culture help us to have a better understanding of history?

How do race and gender shape life in 18th century American society?

Learning objectives:

- Students will be able to define the term “material culture.”
- Students will be able to explain the value of material culture by analyzing the ways that it can shape historical understanding of a particular people or period in history.
- Students will be able to identify the ways that a physical space can reflect intangible ideas about a specific time and place.
- Students will be able to explain the value of an object within its given historical context.
- Students will be able to analyze and appropriately discuss the ways that race and gender affect the roles and expectations of a person in American society.
- Students will be able to create a well-organized visual presentation which accurately and clearly conveys their analysis of two specific objects.
- Students will cite their research accurately to reflect an understanding of MLA formatting and its value in research.

Historical Context:

The Moffatt-Ladd House & Garden (1763) was the one-time home of William Whipple, a New Hampshire signer of the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776). This property, located on the waterfront of the Piscataqua River in Portsmouth, NH, reflects many aspects of the lives of its owners and the enslaved people who lived with them in the house. The home is decorated in a style that reflects the period of the American Revolution and thus provides invaluable insight into what the daily lives of the home’s occupants may have looked like. In the summer of 1776, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, PA to approve a document which would emancipate the American colonies from British colonial rule. William Whipple attended this conference with his body servant Prince Whipple who later worked with the Negro Court in Portsmouth to draft their own Petition for independence in 1779. Although the petition was tabled by the New Hampshire House of Representatives in 1780, it was by then-governor Maggie Hassan in 2013. This motion posthumously granted the 14 men their freedom.

Duration: 2-3 class periods and a site visit to the Moffatt-Ladd House

Resources used:

- *Black Portsmouth* by Mark J. Sammons and Valerie Cunningham
- *Dialogues Across Differences* by Robert Monroe
- Moffatt-Ladd House & Garden website: <http://moffatladd.org/>
- PBS, “Teacher’s Guide: Exploring Material Culture in the Classroom”
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/teachers_intheclassroom.html

Lesson plan:

Day 1: Material Culture (50 mins)

Focus Q → What is material culture, and how can it help us to have a better understanding of history?

Resources:

- **Material Culture** Google Slides Presentation
- **Material Culture Presentation** Assignment

Activities:

Present the powerpoint “Material Culture and History” and encourage students to take notes.

VIDEO →

Creating Cultural Artifacts that Build New Legacies | David Bailey | TEDxRVA (Aug 20, 2015)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mIlly5p6-c>

Questions for discussion:

- What is a cultural artifact?
 - A term used by social sciences for anything that is created by people that gives some type of information about the cultural narrative of either its creators or its users
- What are some examples?
 - A sculpture, a painting, lyrics or a monument
- What is the narrative of a place like Monument Ave. in Richmond, VA?
- What factors influence the different interpretations of this narrative?
- What is a “narrative of belonging” and how can cultural artifacts reinforce or change this?
- Predict: In what ways might we see this in Moffatt-Ladd House knowing that men and women, and free and enslaved people lived and worked there.

Day 1 Homework: Material Culture Presentation (Due Day 4)

Day 2: Site visit to Moffatt-Ladd House in Portsmouth, NH (2-4 hours)

Focus Qs →

- How was the space used differently by people of different races?
- How was the space used differently by people of different genders?
- In what ways is the location of the house significant?
- In what ways is the layout of the house significant?
- Were there places where people of color could/could not go and why?
- What does the location of the house reflect about time, place and status?
- Do any of the cultural artifacts that you saw at the house fit or defy the “narrative of belonging” that we discussed yesterday?

Day 2 Homework: Material Culture Presentation (Due Day 4)

Day 3: Reflection and Discussion (50 mins)

Focus Q → How being inside of the Moffatt-Ladd house add to your understanding of the people who lived there during the period of the American Revolution?

Resources:

- **Race/Gender Organizer** handout

Activities:

Fill in the Race/Gender Organizer based on the day to day lives of black and white men and women in colonial Portsmouth, NH.

Discuss students’ findings and have them support their answers with as much specific evidence as possible.

NOTE: Discussions regarding race and gender are often sensitive and sometimes tense. Encourage students to be aware of their own intention versus potential impact before contributing, and to be open to listening to the opinions of others. These conversations often become personal, but it is important to use empathy and understanding in these discussions- It is okay for students to be uncomfortable, but never feel unsafe! For more information and a helpful framework, consult workshop presenter Rob Monroe’s “Dialogues Across Differences.”

Day 4+: Project Presentations

Resources: **Material Culture Presentation-** Oral presentation rubric
Material Culture Presentation- Project grading rubric

Possible adjustments for students with learning differences:

This assignment should be relatively easily accessible to many different types of learners because it is both hands-on, and personal. The more complex themes about race and gender may overwhelm some students, but encouraging them to think about how someone *might feel* about the expectations/restrictions put on them in the house or in society during the time period may help. Some one on one conversation with students who struggle with these kinds of empathy skills may be necessary and helpful! It may also help to restrict the “Their Stuff/My Stuff” assignment to one part if necessary. The ideas of material culture may actually be more accessible to some students who struggle with the abstracts concepts and themes associated with history, but limiting the required output of work may help some students to focus better on the core learning objectives of this lesson.

Optional/Additional Resources:

Handout: Opposing Viewpoints: Thomas Jefferson (1776) vs. Prince Whipple (1779)

- “1779 Freedom Petition submitted by slaves to the New Hampshire state legislature,” PDF <http://www.trinityhistory.org/AmH/SlavesNH1779.pdf>
- National Archives, “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription” <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

Article/Handout

New York Times, “In Search of the Slave Who Defied George Washington” (February 6, 2017)
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/06/arts/george-washington-mount-vernon-slavery.html?_r=0

Article

Boston Globe, “234 years later, 14 slaves given freedom” (June 28, 2013)
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/06/07/governor-maggie-hassan-signs-bill-into-law-tha-t-frees-african-slaves/84cMVEhqwObWZ7TFTnjvWK/story.html>

