Slavery in New France

This MysteryQuest examines selected documents to study the lives of slaves and commoners in New France in the early 1700s. Students learn to identify relevant evidence and draw plausible conclusions to determine if there were any significant differences in the lives of slaves and commoners at that time.

A critical thinking challenge to accompany

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History

Torture and the Truth: Angélique and the Burning of Montreal

http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/06/indexen.html

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based on an approach developed by The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC²)
www.tc2.ca

Ages
11-14

Courses
Canadian history, social studies, civics

Key Topics
• slavery in New France
• daily life in New France in the 1700s
• quality of life in 18th century Canada
Critical Challenge

How significantly different were the lives of ordinary citizens (commoners) and slaves in New France?

Broad Understanding

• Students will learn to use primary documents to learn about the lives of slaves and commoners in New France in the early 18th century.
• Students will use criteria to determine the quality of life of slaves and commoners in New France.
• Students will identify relevant evidence and draw plausible conclusions to determine if there were any significant differences in the lives of slaves and commoners.

Requisite Tools

Background knowledge

• knowledge of the geography and daily life in New France
• knowledge of the concept of slavery

Criteria for judgment

• criteria for quality of life (e.g., enough nutritious food to eat, shelter, support from friends or community, good health, security from harm at work and at home, basic rights)

Critical thinking vocabulary

• hypothesis
• inference

Thinking strategies

• data chart
• rating scale

Habits of mind

• attention to detail

Independent Study

This lesson can be used as a self-directed activity by having students individually or in pairs work their way through the guided instructions and support material found at http://www.mysteryquests.ca/quests/06/indexen.html.

Whole Class Activities

On the following pages are suggested modifications of the self-guided procedures found on the MysteryQuest website for use with a class of students. For convenience, each support material and set of directions found on the website is reproduced next to the relevant suggestions for whole class instruction.
THE TASK

In this Mystery Quest, you will assume the role of an historian interested in slavery in eighteenth century New France. As part of your inquiry into comparing the life of commoners and slaves in the Colony, you will examine primary documents written about the events of Montréal's fire of 1734 and the accusations that faced an African slave named Angélique. You will also use secondary documents — the interpretations of historians who have looked at slaves and commoners in New France. Your goal is to answer the question: How significantly different was the life of ordinary citizens (commoners) and slaves in New France?

Your first task is to gather information on commoners and slaves in New France — first by finding out more about Angélique and then about the lives of slaves. To know what their life was like, you will need to look at various factors — work, personal freedom, legal protection, and overall living conditions. Once you have an understanding of the life of a slave, you will need to gather information about commoners. You will then compare the groups, using criteria to determine quality of life. When you have reached a conclusion, you will present your findings and supporting evidence in a poster or a PowerPoint presentation.

Suggested Activities

Present information about New France

If your students are unfamiliar with the historical period of New France or have little knowledge of it, you may want to briefly discuss with them components of New France’s society. The “Context” section on the Torture and the Truth website, found at http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/angelique/contexte/indexen.html, offers some general information about Montreal during that period.

Introduce slavery in New France

Using Introduction as a guide, explain to students the challenge that is the focus of their investigation. As a class, discuss the questions raised in the Introduction.

Using The Task as a guide, outline the activities that students will undertake.

You may want to download and display pictures of the town of Montreal and other pictures depicting life in New France.

Learn more about Angélique

Using Step 1: Learn more about Angélique as a guide, outline the events of the story of Angélique — the Black slave — who was thought to have started the great Montreal fire in 1734 and who was subsequently hanged. You will find information in the documents listed in the Secondary Documents section of Evidence in the Case.

Evidence in the Case

Secondary documents
Welcome
The Trial in Context

Primary documents
Who were the slaves in New France? (consult chapter 10)
On laws regarding slaves
On how to bring up slaves and to whom belong the children born of two slaves
On work done by slaves
On how masters viewed and treated their slaves
On the role of the master
On how to liberate the slaves
On the baptism of slaves (and their age)
Gather information about slavery in New France

➤ Ask students to list three things they know or think they know about slavery in Canada during the 1700s. You may choose to have students write these on a chart rather than in their notebooks. Explain that they will be conducting research to find evidence to support or correct their ideas.

➤ Using Step 2: Gather information about slavery in New France as a guide, explain that to learn more about slavery they will need to read documents written during that period—or primary documents. They will find eight short documents listed in the Primary Documents section of Evidence in the Case.

➤ Suggest that students first try to discover who wrote the document and for whom it was written. Also, draw students’ attention to the fact that since the documents were written in the 1700s, they may have to read the passages several times to understand them.

➤ Remind students that they may have to infer information—that is, make conclusions based on evidence. For example, in one of the documents it states that “a valet” (a man’s personal servant) was paid 150 livres a year, which was more money than most servants earned. We can infer from that information that wealthy people might have employed valets as servants, and not as slaves.

➤ Duplicate and distribute copies of Evidence about Life in New France to students. Instruct students to record evidence about slaves on the charts.

➤ You may choose to have students share the evidence they have gathered about slaves in order to verify or correct their original ideas about slaves they previously recorded. Ask students to name the sources they accessed and speculate whether or not they think the documents are a reliable source.
Gather information about commoners

➤ Using Step 3: Gather information about commoners as a guide, explain that in order to compare the lives of slaves and commoners, they will have to find information about commoners in New France.

➤ Duplicate and distribute copies of Life of Commoners in New France to students. Explain that this briefing sheet will give them some information but not enough to complete their task.

➤ Explain that in order to gain a better understanding of life in New France, students will be able to find additional information by reviewing two other secondary sources:

- Common People [available at http://www.civilisations.ca/vmnf/popul/habitant/gens-e.html]

Instruct students to record the information in a new copy of the data chart Evidence about Life in New France.

Determine quality of life

➤ Using Step 4: Determining the quality of life as a guide, help students establish criteria for determining quality of life.

➤ Point out that, having completed their research, it would be easy for students to say that slaves were not free and commoners were, so they had a better life. But what factors make for a quality of life? Explain that to make that decision, they must decide what criteria they will use when determining quality of life.

➤ Ask students to suggest factors that make their quality of life. List their ideas on the chalkboard, eventually narrowing the list to the following suggested criteria:

- enough nutritious food to eat;
- shelter;
- support from friends or community;
- good health;
- security from harm at work and at home;
- and basic rights.
➤ Duplicate and distribute copies of *Comparing Quality of Life* to students.

➤ Explain to students that, in the columns for “slaves” and “commoners,” they are to list the information they have for each criterion. For example, what evidence did they find to suggest that slaves or commoners had proper shelter? Depending upon the evidence, decide whether the slaves or commoners had the same quality of life as far as shelter is concerned. Or perhaps one group had much better or slightly better shelter? Remind students to give reasons to explain their rating for each quality of life factor.

Present your conclusions

➤ Using *Step 5: Present your conclusions* as a guide, explain that students are now ready to answer the original question: Overall, did one group — slaves or commoners — enjoy a significantly better quality of life in New France?

➤ Present students with a choice of creating a poster or PowerPoint presentation to present their conclusions. Alternatively, you may choose to offer only one choice.

➤ Remind students that adding illustrations and charts will make their presentations more interesting but they should not focus only on graphics but make certain they fully answer the question.

➤ Before students begin, you may choose to share with them the rubric for assessing this activity listed in the *Evaluation* section.
Evaluation

➤ Use the rubric Assessing the Evidence and Conclusions to evaluate how well students were able to identify relevant evidence and draw plausible conclusions about the quality of life of slaves and commoners. Use the rubric Assessing an Informative Account to assess students’ presentations to illustrate, with relevant evidence and plausible conclusions, whether slaves or commoners in New France had a better quality of life.

Extension

➤ Invite students to work individually or as a class to pursue the suggested activities listed in Extension.