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

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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.

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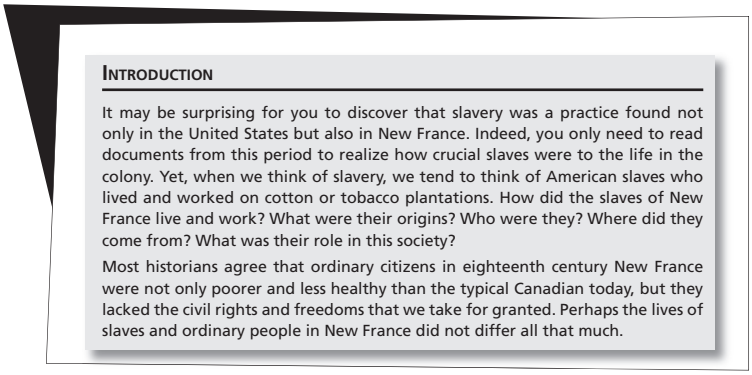
Suggested Activities

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.



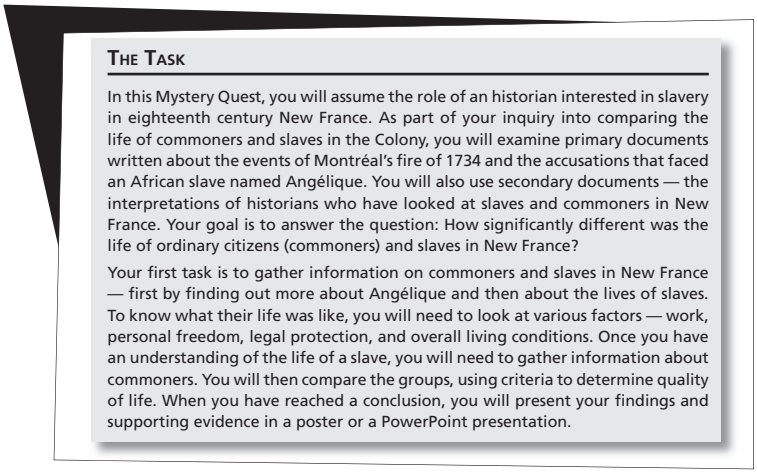
Introduction

It may be surprising for you to discover that slavery was a practice found not only in the United States but also in New France. Indeed, you only need to read documents from this period to realize how crucial slaves were to the life in the colony. Yet, when we think of slavery, we tend to think of American slaves who lived and worked on cotton or tobacco plantations. How did the slaves of New France live and work? What were their origins? Who were they? Where did they come from? What was their role in this society?

Most historians agree that ordinary citizens in eighteenth century New France were not only poorer and less healthy than the typical Canadian today, but they lacked the civil rights and freedoms that we take for granted. Perhaps the lives of slaves and ordinary people in New France did not differ all that much.

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*.



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?

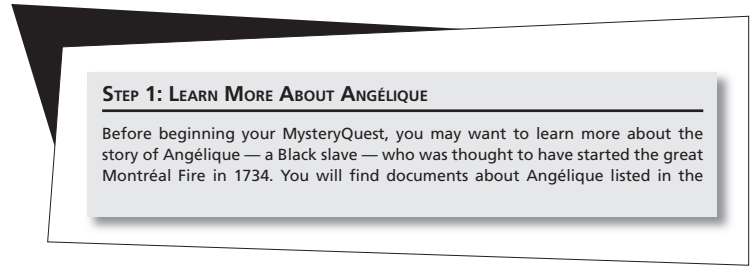
Your first task is to gather information on commoners and slaves in New France — first by finding out more about Angélique and then about the lives of slaves. To know what their life was like, you will need to look at various factors — work, personal freedom, legal protection, and overall living conditions. 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.

➤ 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.

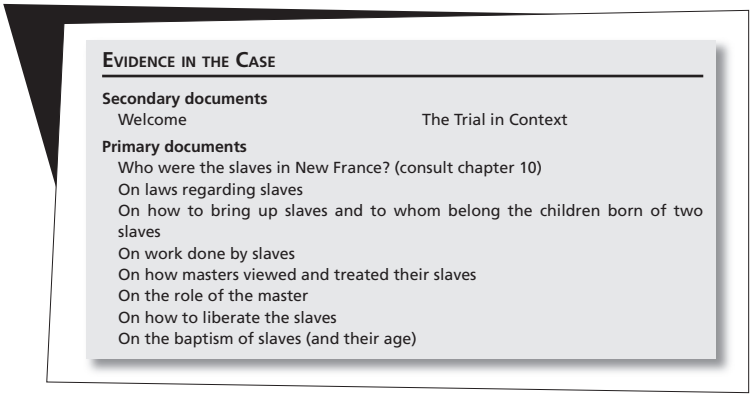
Learn more about Angélique

➤ *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*.



Step 1: Learn More About Angélique

Before beginning your MysteryQuest, you may want to learn more about the story of Angélique — a Black slave — who was thought to have started the great Montréal Fire in 1734. You will find documents about Angélique listed in the



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)

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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*.

STEP 2: GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT SLAVERY IN NEW FRANCE

As an historian, you depend on primary documents as the main source of information for your study. You will now have to use these documents to help you learn about slavery in New France. Eight short documents are listed in the "Primary documents" section of *Evidence in the Case.*

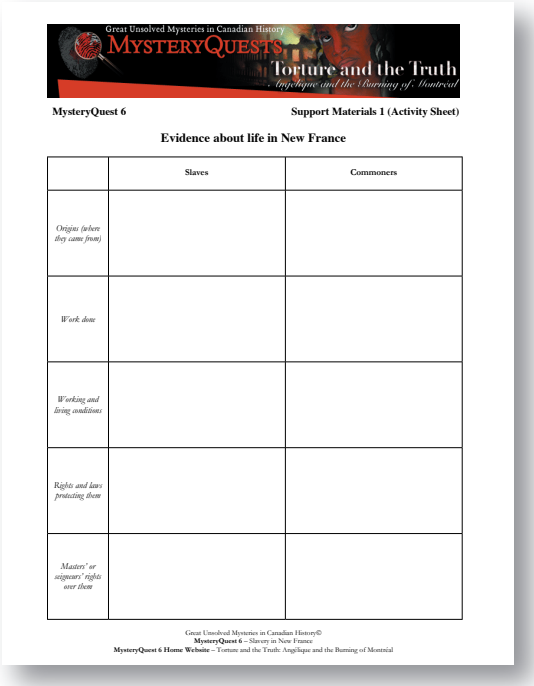
You will need to gather information from all of these documents. First, try to discover who wrote the document and for whom it was written. Because the documents were written in the 1700s, you may have to read the passages several times to understand them. You may have to infer information — that is, 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.

Use the chart *Evidence about Life in New France* to record the information you collect from all of these documents about the life of slaves.

➤ 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.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MysteryQuest 6 **Support Materials 1 (Activity Sheet)**

Evidence about life in New France

	Slaves	Commoners
Origins (when they came from)		
Work done		
Working and living conditions		
Rights and laws protecting them		
Masters' or seigneurs' rights over them		

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➤ 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.

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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.

STEP 3: GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT COMMONERS

Now that you have a better understanding of the roles and rights of slaves in New France, you need to examine the life of commoners in order to make the comparison. Begin by reading *Life of Commoners in New France*. This briefing sheet gives limited information. In order to gather a better understanding of life in New France, you will need to review two other secondary documents:

Common People
http://www.civilisations.ca/vmnf/popul/habitant/gens-e.htm

New France — Daily Life

http://www.ottres.ca/hconline/chapters/3/3Fdailylife.html

As you read these three secondary sources, look for information about commoners to record in a new copy of your data chart *Evidence about Life 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

New France — Daily Life [available at http://www.ottres.ca/hconline/chapters/3/3Fdailylife.html]

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

MysteryQuest 6
Support Materials 2 (Briefing Sheet)

Life of Commoners in New France

Following Jacques Cartier's discovery of what became New France, people from Europe eagerly came to this new territory. First fur traders came; then settlers from Europe were encouraged to settle the land. Coming from different regions of France, settlers were divided in three social classes: nobility, middle class, and commoners. In fact, almost all were commoners. When arriving in New France, settlers worked in seigneuries (large estates owned by the church or wealthy people). The settlers worked in the seigneuries until they were able to rent or buy their own piece of land.

To read more about the seigneurial system, follow the link below: http://www/civilisations.ca/vmnf/popul/habitant/seigneur-eg.htm#http://www.civilisations.ca.vmnf/popul/

Farmers made up 80% of the population; the remaining 20% were active as administrators, merchants, militia (military), and members of the clergy. Officers in the militia and members of the clergy enjoyed a higher social status. Of course, this slightly better status did not provide them with all the prestige and advantages enjoyed by the members of the nobility.

Social advancement was not limited to members of the clergy and the militia. Fur traders were sometimes given the concession of a seigneurie. Some historians suggest that the life of a farmer in New France, even with its difficulties, was easier than the one of a French peasant. Seigneurs were not wealthy, however. It took up to fifty tenant farmers living on the seigneurie before it would show a profit. Seigneurs added to their income by fur trading and serving in the militia.

Farmers who rented land from the seigneur had to live on their land and use it for agricultural purposes. They were required to clear their land at the rate of 2 acres per year and build a house. Three years after an immigrant arrived to work for the seigneur, he was granted the land. He moved up in rank from an immigrant to a habitant (free farmer) and could then get married. He hoped to have many strong sons to help with the farm. Apart from his own responsibilities, if the habitant wanted to keep his farm, he was required to pay the land rent. He also had to pay different fees; for example, a tenant had to pay the seigneur a fishing fee, which was a certain percentage of the catch. He was also expected to do some work for the seigneur without receiving pay. These jobs could be anything from repairing a fence to any task that would help the seigneurie. As well, if a parish was established on the seigneurie, tenants were obliged to contribute to maintenance of the Church and the priest. By the eighteenth century, tenants gave 1/26 of their annual crop to support their parish.

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.

STEP 4: DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Now that you have completed your research, you can analyze your findings. It would be easy to say that slaves were not free and commoners were so they had a better life. But first you need to decide other factors that make for a good quality of life.

Think of all the things that make a good life — a home, a nurturing family, good health, safety at work and at home, enough food to eat, and basic rights. These are the things that provide a good life – that make your quality of life. Consider the following criteria when determining quality of life:

- enough nutritious food to eat;
- shelter;
- support from friends or community;
- good health;
- security from harm at work and at home;
- and basic rights.

You are now ready to compare the quality of life of slaves and commoners in New France. Organize the research you have collected on the chart *Comparing the Quality of Life*. In the columns for "slaves" and "commoners" list the information you have for each criterion. For example, what evidence could you 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. Give reasons to explain your rating for each quality of life factor.

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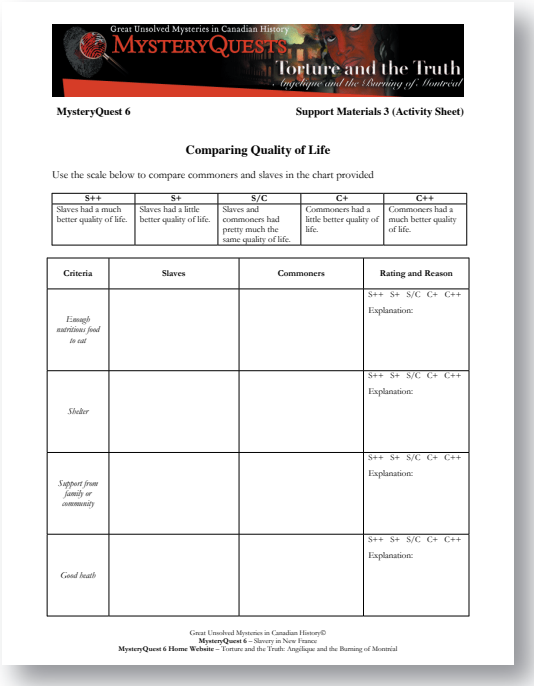
➤ Duplicate and distribute copies of *Comparing Quality of Life* to students.

➤ 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.



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MysteryQuest 6 **Support Materials 3 (Activity Sheet)**

Comparing Quality of Life

Use the scale below to compare commoners and slaves in the chart provided

S++	S+	S/C	C+	C++
Slaves had a much better quality of life.	Slaves had a little better quality of life.	Slaves and commoners had pretty much the same quality of life.	Commoners had a little better quality of life.	Commoners had a much better quality of life.

Criteria	Slaves	Commoners	Rating and Reason
Enough nutritious food to eat			S++ S+ S/C C+ C++ Explanation:
Shelter			S++ S+ S/C C+ C++ Explanation:
Support from family or community			S++ S+ S/C C+ C++ Explanation:
Good health			S++ S+ S/C C+ C++ Explanation:

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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.

STEP 5: PRESENT YOUR CONCLUSIONS

You are now ready to answer your original question:
Overall did one group — slaves or commoners — enjoy a significantly better quality of life in New France?

Create either a poster or a PowerPoint presentation to present your conclusions. Make your presentation interesting by adding illustrations and charts, but don't forget to answer the question. In order to do so, you will need to refer to the data charts you have completed.

To help you create your PowerPoint presentation or your poster, refer to the evaluation rubrics, which state the different elements that will need to be present in your final product.

➤ 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.

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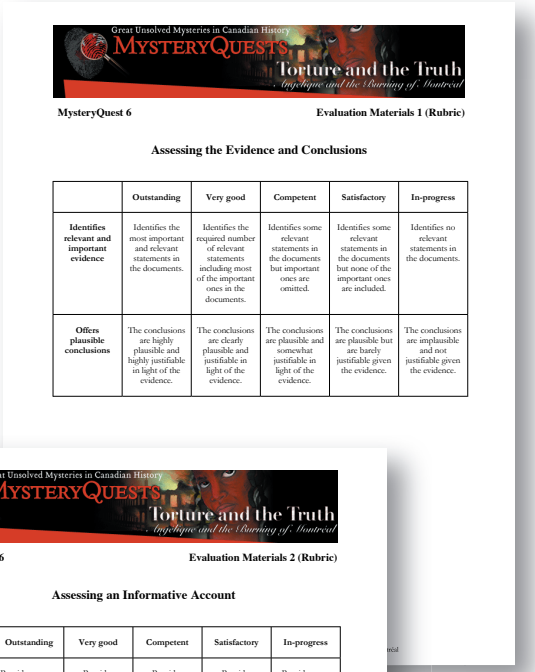
Evaluation

➤ 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.



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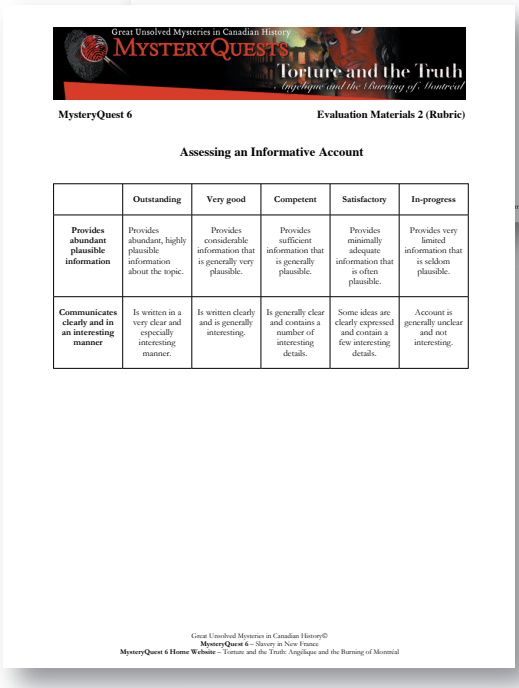
MysteryQuest 6 **Evaluation Materials 1 (Rubric)**

Assessing the Evidence and Conclusions

	Outstanding	Very good	Competent	Satisfactory	In-progress
Identifies relevant and important evidence	Identifies the most important and relevant statements in the documents.	Identifies the required number of relevant statements including most of the important ones in the documents.	Identifies some relevant statements in the documents but important ones are omitted.	Identifies some relevant statements in the documents but none of the important ones are included.	Identifies no relevant statements in the documents.
Offers plausible conclusions	The conclusions are highly plausible and highly justifiable in light of the evidence.	The conclusions are clearly plausible and justifiable in light of the evidence.	The conclusions are plausible and somewhat justifiable in light of the evidence.	The conclusions are plausible but are barely justifiable given the evidence.	The conclusions are implausible and not justifiable given the evidence.



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MysteryQuest 6 **Evaluation Materials 2 (Rubric)**

Assessing an Informative Account

	Outstanding	Very good	Competent	Satisfactory	In-progress
Provides abundant plausible information	Provides abundant, highly plausible information about the topic.	Provides considerable information that is generally very plausible.	Provides sufficient information that is generally plausible.	Provides minimally adequate information that is often plausible.	Provides very limited information that is seldom plausible.
Communicates clearly and in an interesting manner	Is written in a very clear and especially interesting manner.	Is written clearly and is generally interesting.	Is generally clear and contains a number of interesting details.	Some ideas are clearly expressed and contain a few interesting details.	Account is generally unclear and not interesting.

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Extension

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

Extension

Learn more about slavery
For more information about opposition to Slavery you may use the link below to read quotes from Philippe You de La Découverte's criticism of selling slaves in New France.

Examine modern day slavery
You have just looked at slavery in New France. Yet, slavery is still present in the world today. Child labour in developing countries is often present among other events. Using the Internet or journals available at your school library, see the various forms in which slavery is present today.

Compare slavery in Canada and the United States
Compare slaves living in New France with slaves found in Southern United States at the same period. Did they share similar roles and tasks?

Explore other challenges
Apply your detective skills to other mysteries associated with Angélique and life in New France during this period. Different MysteryQuests invite you to explore the following issues:

- MysteryQuest 2 — whether or not Angélique was actually guilty of the crime for which she was executed;
- MysteryQuest 13 and MysteryQuest 18 — what life and working conditions were like for various groups of women in New France;
- MysteryQuest 16 — the reasons why some people opposed slavery while the majority in New France supported it.

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