



The Status of Women in New France

This MysteryQuest examines documents related to the trial of the Black slave, Angélique, accused of setting a deadly fire in Montreal in the early 1700s. Students will learn to analyse primary documents to discover the different roles and implied social values of women in that period.

*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/13/indexen.html>

Author: Kathleen McConnachie

Editor: Ruth Sandwell

Series Editor: Roland Case

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

Ages

14-18

Courses

Canadian history, social studies

Key Topics

- social institutions in New France
- the power structure and quality of life
- role of women in New France

Critical Challenge

- Draw warranted inferences about the lives of women in New France from the primary documents.
- Rank order the quality of life of eight women or groups of women during this period in New France.

Broad Understanding

- Students will learn about the impact of gender on the power structure in New France.
- Students will learn from documentary evidence how status in this society affected a woman's power.

Requisite Tools



Background knowledge

- knowledge of the purpose and structure of the colony of New France
- knowledge of the basic demographic patterns of Quebec and Montreal in the early 1700s
- knowledge of the conditions of women in 18th century New France



Criteria for judgment

- criteria for quality of life (e.g., living conditions, security, freedoms, health, family and community support, influence)



Critical thinking vocabulary

- inference
- historiographer
- point of view
- bias
- historical validity



Thinking strategies

- data chart
- ranking



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/13/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.

Suggested Activities

Introduce the Angélique case

- Using *Introduction* as a guide, explain to students the challenge that is the focus of their investigation.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1734, a fire occurred in Montréal that destroyed a hospital and 45 houses on rue Saint-Paul. Criminal proceedings were soon underway against Marie-Josèphe, dite Angélique, a Black slave, and her White lover, Claude Thibault. The latter fled, leaving Angélique on her own to prove her innocence.

Twenty witnesses filed before the judge, many of them women. Ultimately, Angélique was found guilty based on one late and mysterious statement by a five-year-old girl. Forced to confess her crime under torture, Angélique was publicly executed on June 21, 1734.

Did you know that slavery and state-authorized torture were part of Canada's early history? These are not the topics that traditionally find their way into Canadian high school textbooks. New France is presented typically as the story of exploration and trade, of coureurs de bois and furs, of the seigneurial system and royal governors. Women enter only in the margins of history; we may learn that the filles du roi were sent out to New France, but we know little of the fabric of their lives. Why do we know so little about the lives of women in the past?

Fortunately, fragments of this story are accessible in primary documents from the period — the testimony in the trial of Angélique, colonial correspondence, personal diaries, and letters. These documents open windows into an important, yet neglected aspect of life in New France: *What was life like for women in eighteenth century Quebec?*

- Using *The Task* as a guide, outline the activities that students will undertake.
- You may want to download and display pictures to help your students conceptualize the time period and way of life in New France.

THE TASK

In this MysteryQuest, you will develop a profile of the social and political status of various groups of women in New France. You will first learn about the general conditions during the first half of the eighteenth century. Next, you will analyse eight primary documents to learn about the different roles of women and the social values reflected in these roles. Your task will be to identify relevant facts provided in the documents and to draw inferences about the conditions experienced by various women during this period. You will then use this information to compare these women's quality of life and social position. Your final task is to rank order the eight women or groups of women according to their relative status in this colonial society.

Set the historical context

- Using *Step 1: Learn about the historical context* as a guide, discuss with students the Introduction to MysteryQuest 13. Encourage them to react to the case of Angélique, including her treatment and the decisive testimony (of a five-year-old child) that sealed her fate. Encourage them to respond to the case by posing questions such as: What surprises you about the description of this event? What questions does it raise in your mind? You may want to duplicate and distribute a copy of the *Introduction* for easy reference during the discussion. Invite students to make personal comments in the margins to describe their emotions, questions, etc.
- Provide students with a box of coloured chalk and explain that they are going to engage in a “graffiti” exercise. Invite students to use the chalk to write what they know about life in Quebec in the early 1700s. Alternately, cover the chalk board with chart paper and provide students with a supply of coloured felt markers. Discuss the completed comments and ask students to write in their notebooks questions they still may have about the topic.

STEP 1: LEARN ABOUT THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduce yourself to Montréal in 1734 by reading *Quebec Society 1700-1760*. You can find out more about the city of Montréal during this historical period by reading two introductory materials found in the “Secondary documents” section of *Evidence in the Case*.

- Duplicate and distribute (or display as an overhead transparency) copies of *Quebec Society 1700 – 1760* to each student. Use this very brief text, ideally combined with a map of New France from the students' text, to set the historical context for this MysteryQuest.
- As an out-of-class assignment, you may want to ask students to find out more about the city of Montreal during this historical period by reading the secondary documents listed in *Evidence in the Case*.

EVIDENCE IN THE CASE

Secondary documents
Welcome
Introduction: The Trial in Context

Primary documents
Miscellaneous documents
 François Montmorency de Laval, Pastoral letter against the extravagance and vanity of women in the church, Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des évêques de Québec, 1887

Letters
 Elisabeth Robbert de la Morandière (dite Madame Bégon), Extract of letters regarding dances, December 27, 1748 / January 18, 1749 / February 25, 1749 / March 6, 1749

Court documents
 Juridiction royale de Montréal, Deposition of Louise Chaudillon, April 24, 1734
 Jugements et délibérations du Conseil supérieur, Sentence rendered against Marie-Anne Sigouin found guilty of infanticide, May 7, 1732

Colonial correspondence
 Agathe de Saint-Père, Letter on the goods produced in Canada, October 13, 1705
 Charles-René Gaudron de Chèvremont, Indenture of Angélique Vignaud to Sieur Mailhot and his wife, December 15, 1736

Books
 "Entering Religion", August 1, 1749, in *Travels of Pehr Kalm in Canada*, Pehr Kalm (Montréal: Pierre Tisseyre, 1977), p. 202
 "Description of a convent of sisters in the city of Québec", August 8, 1749, in *Travels of Pehr Kalm in Canada*, Pehr Kalm (Montréal: Pierre Tisseyre, 1977), p. 228-231

MysteryQuest 13
 Support Materials 1 (Briefing Sheet)

Quebec Society 1700–1760

Montréal was founded in the 1660s, an outpost in the expanding French Empire in North America. Located on the southwest boundary of the French territory in the St. Lawrence valley, Montréal's importance grew steadily as both a military and trade center. As a fortified city, it defended French territorial claims. As a center of trade, it was the St. Lawrence base for the lucrative fur trade in the interior. Montréal was also the regional seat of administration. The city's profile was reflected in the social structure and economic activity of its citizens.

By the 1730s, the city's population had increased to 2000 people. Montréal's population was predominantly French, but it was also inhabited by allied Amerindians, numerous slaves from enemy nations, and a large garrison of soldiers from the Marine troops. Montréal was therefore more diversified than we might have thought.

When New France was first founded, the population was overwhelmingly male, but French government policy to sponsor the emigration of young women, the expanding merchant class, the increasing size and permanence of colonial administration, and the establishment of religious teaching and nursing orders resulted in a steady increase in the female population in the colony.

Introduce the concept of primary sources

- Introduce the terms "historiography" and "historiographer." Explain that historiography is the writing of history based on the analysis and evaluation of source materials and that they will be acting as historiographers in the activities that follow. Point out that, in their study of the documents about Angélique, they will notice that the experience of women has often been neglected in traditional historiography.
- Explain to students that, to construct their history, historians use primary sources. Depending on the grade level of students and their level of historical inquiry skills, a brief discussion of the variety/ nature of primary sources may be appropriate at this point: e.g., government documents, official and private correspondence, diaries, artifacts, paintings and photographs, maps, and statistics. The impact of time on accessibility, volume, and variety of primary sources is most relevant to this MysteryQuest. At this point you may decide to take your students through an introduction to primary sources, available at *What Are Primary Documents* (in the Teachers corner of the main Mysteries website).

Examine the evidence

- Using *Step 2: Examine the evidence* as a guide, explain that students are now ready to direct their attention to the experience of women in this early period of Canadian history. Point out that their key challenge will be to find out as much as possible about women's lives. It will help to keep in mind two questions: What facts are provided in the documents about their lives? and What can we infer from these facts about the quality of their lives as well as the social attitudes toward women?
- Provide copies of the eight primary documents listed in the Primary Documents section of *Evidence in the Case* to students, or invite them to examine the documents online. Point out that the documents have been drawn from diverse sources (private letters, government documents, official colonial correspondence) and that they are being presented with a sampling of primary sources.
- Duplicate and distribute to students copies of *Gathering Information About Women's Lives*. Ask students to work with a partner to record relevant facts and make inferences about the conditions for women.

Frame questions to ask of these women

- As students work through the task, draw their attention to the fact that there are sections of this outline that they cannot complete; the information is simply not there in the primary source. Emphasize that NOT finding information can be as significant as finding it.
- Using *Step 3: Ask questions of these women* as a guide, discuss with students the kind of information that has not been recorded. Ask students to develop a meaningful question to be asked of each woman introduced in the documents and record those questions on their charts.
- After each pair of students has completed their charts and has decided what "meaningful questions" they would ask, put two pairs of students together. Encourage them to compare and discuss the questions they have decided are important.

STEP 2: EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

You are now ready to direct your attention specifically to the experience of women in this early period of Canada's history. The eight documents you are about to examine are drawn primarily from people who lived in Montréal at this time, but references are also made to the lives of women living in Québec City, the centre of government in the colony. Some of the sources are quite detailed; you will be able to gather a lot of information from them. Others are so short and lacking in detail that you may find it frustrating as you search for answers.

The key challenge here is to find out as much as you can about women's lives. As you read each document, try to answer two questions:

- What facts are provided in the document about women's lives (occupation, living conditions, status)?
- What can we infer from these facts about the quality of women's lives and social attitudes towards women?

The second question asks you to infer or draw conclusions from the factual information provided. For example, if a document stated that someone was sentenced to ten years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread, you might infer both that the person was probably very desperate to risk such a harsh punishment and that society was not very sympathetic to people who were poor or in need.

Record the relevant facts and inferences about conditions for women in the chart *Gathering Information about Women's Lives*. The eight documents can be accessed in the "Primary documents" section of *Evidence in the Case*.



MysteryQuest 13

Support Materials 2 (Activity Sheet)

Gathering Information About Women's Lives

Document	What facts are provided in the document about women's lives? (occupation, living conditions, status)	What can we infer from these facts about the quality of women's lives and social attitudes towards women?	What question would you ask of this person about their lives?
Pastoral letter by Monseigneur de Laval			
Letters by Madam Bégon			
Statement by Louise Chaudillon			

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History
MysteryQuest 13 – The Status of Women in New France
MysteryQuest 13 Home Website – Torture and the Truth: Angélique and the Burning of Montreal

STEP 3: ASK QUESTIONS OF THESE WOMEN

When you have read the documents and completed the facts and inferences columns of Gathering Information about Women's Lives, think about what the documents do not tell us about these women and their lives. What sections of the chart were difficult to complete? Why are the experiences of some women described or recorded more fully? What additional information would you want to have about the lives of these women?

Imagine that you have the ability to "time travel" and you could interview the women introduced in each of the documents. What one question would you pose to each of these women? Why do you think this question is meaningful? Record your questions in the right-hand column of the chart *Gathering Information about Women's Lives*.

Assess the relative status

- Using *Step 4: Assess the relative status* as a guide, discuss with students the information they have gathered. What kinds of women seem to have had the best quality of life and who seem to have had the worst? In what ways is it the same or different today?

STEP 4: ASSESS THE RELATIVE STATUS

Using the information summarized on Gathering Information about Women's Lives, consider how women's lives differed because the society was stratified (arranged in a hierarchical way, based on power and social status). What kinds of women seem to have the best quality of life (living conditions, security, freedoms, health, family and community support, influence) and who seem to have the worst?

On the chart *Ranking the Women*, you will find the names of eight women or groups of women. Your task is to rank these women from 1st (highest status) to 8th (lowest status) in order of their quality of life and place in society. Make sure your rankings are based on evidence drawn from the documents.

- Duplicate and distribute to students copies of *Ranking the Women*. Point out that they are to rank the women listed as to who has the highest status (1st) to the lowest (8th) in order of their quality of life. Remind students to make sure their rankings are based on evidence drawn from the documents.
- You may want to ask students to return to their group of four to complete this activity.
- As a class, ask students to share their conclusions and insights about the stratification of Quebec society. You may want to do this by asking each group to present and justify the ranking decisions they arrived at. Emphasize the importance of the evidence base they must present to validate their argument.



Ranking the Women

Person/group	Occupation/ status	Rank	Reasons for ranking
Marie-Anne Sigouin			
Louise Chaudillon			
Wives of French Administrative Officials			
Angélique Vignaud			
Agathe de Saint-Père			
Madame Bégon			

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History®
 MysteryQuest 13 – The Status of Women in New France
 MysteryQuest 13 Home Website – Torture and the Truth: Angélique and the Burning of Montreal

- After the groups have resolved the ranking decisions they have made, provide an opportunity for students to express their reactions to the patterns they have identified in the documents and what they have learned about women in New France.
- The important point to emphasize here is that students are examining fragments of the historical record. That being said, students have enough evidence to arrive at some meaningful insights about women's experience:
 - A social hierarchy existed.
 - Different variables shaped that hierarchy - some women had more power than others.
 - There were differences in power between women who functioned in the public sphere and those whose lives were in the private sphere of society.
 - Different social institutions exercised power over women's lives, including the Church, government, and the legal system.

Evaluation

- Use the rubric *Assessing the Evidence and Conclusions* to assess how well students were able to identify relevant facts, draw plausible conclusions, and rank the relative status of women.



MysteryQuest 13

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.

Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History®
 MysteryQuest 13 – The Status of Women in New France
 MysteryQuest 13 Home Website – Torture and the Truth: Angélique and the Burning of Montreal

Extension

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

EXTENSION

Examine additional documents

Locate additional documents in the Context section of the main website that provide further information about the lives of women in New France. The following sections will be particularly helpful:

Introduction

Town

Society

Interview an historical figure

Based on your research, develop five or six powerful questions that you could use in an interview with one of the women introduced in the primary documents. Your questions should explore not just her private life experiences, but also illuminate the society she lived in and the public power structure that shaped her experience.

Compare the lives of men and women in New France

Prepare a report comparing life and conditions of free women, free men, and slaves in eighteenth century Montréal. Read the historical documents listed in the Society section at the link below to learn more about each group.

<http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/angelique/contexte/lasociete/indexen.html>