

Enslaved People Project

Community Board 8

Kingsbridge Historical Society

Van Cortlandt House Museum

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

Integrated Social Studies/ELA mini Unit:

The Enslaved People of Van Cortlandt Plantation

4th Grade



Acknowledgment:

The Enslaved People Project is a joint effort of the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, Van Cortlandt House Museum operated by The National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York, and the Kingsbridge Historical Society. The Enslaved People Project Curriculum has been funded by Bronx Community Board 8 and the New York City Council.



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Integrated Social Studies/ELA mini Unit:
The Enslaved People of Van Cortlandt Plantation
4th Grade

Curriculum Written by: Nick Dembowski

Nick Dembowski, President of the Kingsbridge Historical Society, has done original research on the Van Cortlandt plantation that has uncovered previously lost information about some of the enslaved people who lived there and were responsible for the functioning of the plantation. This research was the genesis of the Enslaved People Project in Van Cortlandt Park.

Dear Bronx teacher,

Enclosed is a series of three standards-based lesson plans that are specially tailored to your 4th grade students. They deal with the history of The Bronx and refer to places that students already may be familiar with. The lessons teach about the impact that enslaved African and Native American people had on the development of New York using Van Cortlandt Park as a case study. It is meant to be used as a supplement to your regular social studies curriculum and assumes that the students are already familiar with the concept of New York as a colony where slavery was legal. In addition to the social studies content, the lessons utilize the short response and extended response formats for writing that will serve as practice for the New York State Grade 4 ELA test.

The lessons can be taught on consecutive days in your classroom. Ideally, you could teach the 1st lesson in the classroom followed by a visit to The Van Cortlandt House Museum as a field trip. This would leave the students prepared and inspired to do their best work for the 2nd and 3rd lessons afterwards. Field trips can be conveniently booked online at <https://www.explorableplaces.com/places/the-van-cortlandt-house-museum>. You can call the museum at 718-543-3344 for more info.

The first lesson includes a reading passage that will provide you and your students with all of the background information on Van Cortlandt Park that is needed to implement the mini unit. If you wish to learn more about enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation, please see the article at vancortlandt.org/epp.

Lesson Summaries:

Lesson 1: Van Cortlandt Park was Van Cortlandt Plantation

Summary: Students will read a passage and answer a short response question about the lasting impact of enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Park.

[OPTIONAL: VISIT TO VAN CORTLANDT HOUSE MUSEUM FIELD TRIP]

Lesson 2: Historians Interpret Primary Source Documents

Summary: Students will do the work of real historians as they work with newspaper clippings, inventories, wills, and census documents to find information about enslaved people that lived on Van Cortlandt Plantation. (This lesson can be broken up into multiple sessions at the teacher's discretion)

Lesson 3: Spread the Word about the Contributions of Enslaved People

Summary: Students will synthesize what they have learned in the previous lessons to write an informational sign for Van Cortlandt Park, which will be displayed on the website of the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance.

Lesson 1: Van Cortlandt Park was Van Cortlandt Plantation

Topic	New York Colony's agricultural output was key to its economic growth and its enslaved workforce made that growth possible.
Essential Question	What impact did enslaved people have on the development of New York?
NYC Social Studies Scope and Sequence	Unit 3: Role of Enslaved Africans in the growth and development of New York
Objectives	Students will understand that the work of enslaved people was essential to the development of New York.
Activity Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Inform the students that while they have been studying the history of New York State and New York City, today they are going to be reading about the history of their part of The Bronx.● Using a projector or interactive whiteboard, display some images of Van Cortlandt Park and ask the students if they have ever been there. You could also pull up a map of the area to show the park's location in relation to the school.● The students will read the attached passage--Van Cortlandt Park was Van Cortlandt Plantation. The passage contains the following vocabulary words that you may want to preview before reading depending on the reading level of your class:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Injustice○ Profit○ Crops○ Wages○ Wealth○ Legacy● At the teacher's discretion, the students can read the passage individually, in partnerships, as a whole class, in guided reading groups, or whatever works best for your students● After reading, you may want to take some time to answer any clarifying questions then have the students answer the short response.● Lead a discussion around the student responses while charting the evidence that they cite from the passage. Encourage the students to share what they think and feel about what they read.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The standard short response rubric from the 2019 New York State ELA test can be used to assess the responses.

Lesson 1 Reading passage:

Van Cortlandt Park was Van Cortlandt Plantation

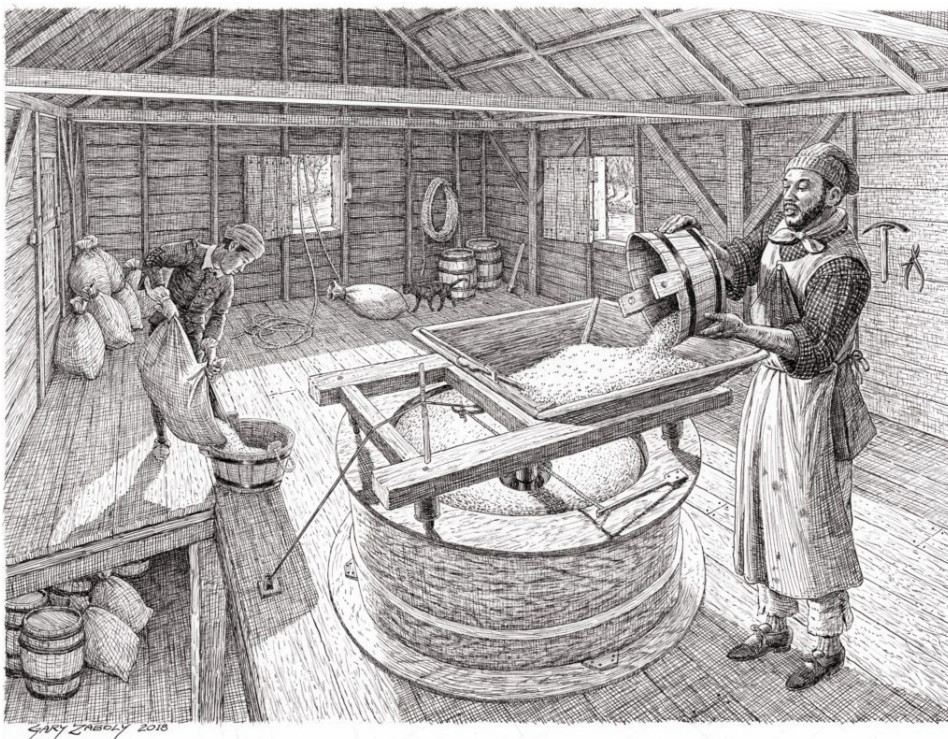
Imagine a fun day with your family at Van Cortlandt Park in The Bronx. Perhaps you would have a picnic and play tag on one of its grassy fields. Maybe you would take a hike on one of the park's many trails. Or you just might take a moment to sit on a park bench and admire the beautiful swans and ducks floating on Van Cortlandt Lake. As wonderful as a day in Van Cortlandt Park might sound today, these same places in the park were once the scene of a great injustice and an important chapter in the history of New York.



Beginning in the 1600's, and for about 150 years, men, women, and children were forced to work that land as slaves. They were not paid for the work that they did and they were not allowed to leave. Worst of all, the children of these enslaved people could be separated from their parents and sent away. Most of the enslaved people that lived there were Africans while some were Native Americans. Many enslaved people were kept there by the rich and powerful Van Cortlandt family,

who were Dutch colonists. They owned the land that became Van Cortlandt Park and used it as a plantation--a large farm where crops were grown for profit. And even though the plantation was named after the Van Cortlandt family, the work of enslaved Africans and Native Americans made the plantation profitable.

The same grassy fields in Van Cortlandt Park where you might play tag or soccer today, were fields of crops including, wheat, when it was a plantation.



Farming wheat was hard work. Rocks were removed from the fields. The soil had to be plowed and seeds planted. Weeds were pulled up and wild animals kept out of the fields. When the wheat was ready, it needed to be harvested and prepared for milling. All of this work required long days outside under the sun and it was the enslaved people that were forced to do this work.

Once the wheat was harvested, it was brought to the mill building that was

Piero and his son milling wheat

owned by the Van Cortlandt family. This was located by Van Cortlandt Lake in today's park. The mill was a complex machine that used water power from the lake to grind the wheat into flour. Operating a mill required years of training so millers were usually paid well for their skill. But on Van Cortlandt Plantation, the milling was done by an enslaved Black miller named Piero. This allowed the Van Cortlandts to have their wheat milled without paying fair wages to a worker.

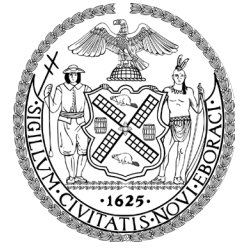
After the wheat was milled into flour, it needed to be put into wooden barrels so that it could be shipped and sold. A person that made barrels was called a cooper. It was skilled work and a cooper could usually expect to be paid well. But the Van Cortlandts avoided paying by forcing an enslaved Black cooper to do the work. He was named Andrew Saxton.

After the flour was packed into barrels, the flour could be shipped and sold, which made money for the Van Cortlandt family. They used some of their wealth to build a large mansion that is the oldest house in The Bronx and still stands in Van Cortlandt Park. While this plantation was located in The Bronx, there were many farms and plantations all across the New York area where enslaved people worked and lived. The flour that they produced generated wealth that made New York Colony prosperous. The importance of flour production is the reason why a flour barrel is one of the images included on the seal of the city of New York, a symbol which can be found on New York City government buildings today--including every public school.

The work done by enslaved people on plantations was important to the development of New York. Growing wheat, milling, and making barrels were only a few of the jobs they performed. Some of the trails in Van Cortlandt Park were originally roads when the park was a plantation. Historians believe that enslaved people helped build these roads. The beautiful lake in the park was once just a stream. It was dammed by the enslaved workers creating the lake that was used to power the mill. Historians think that enslaved people on Van Cortlandt plantation also worked on building the beautiful Van Cortlandt Mansion, which is today a museum.

The enslaved people were not paid for their work nor did they have the rights and protections that were granted to free people. This situation led many enslaved people to resist slavery. For example, Andrew Saxton, the cooper, took his tools and escaped from the Van Cortlandt family. Another enslaved man held by the Van Cortlandts, Sam, tried to organize a group of enslaved Africans to fight for their freedom using violence. He was arrested and sent to an island far away as punishment.

Slavery ended in New York state in the early 1800s. Most of the people that had been enslaved by the Van Cortlandt family left the area at that time. But they did not leave without a trace. They left a legacy, which is visible in the fields, the trails, the lake, and the mansion in Van Cortlandt Park.



Short Response:

According to the passage, hundreds of years ago enslaved people worked to build some of the features that visitors still enjoy in Van Cortlandt Park today. Explain how these features were used in the past and how they are enjoyed by visitors today. Use at least two different features of the park in your response.

Lesson 2: Historians Interpret Primary Source Documents

Topic	The challenge of learning about enslaved people from documents
Essential Question	What can a historian learn about slavery from primary sources?
Standards	<p>NY Social Studies Framework Gr. 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognize, use, and analyze different forms of evidence to make meaning in social studies (including primary and secondary sources) ● Identify and explain creation and/or authorship, purpose, and format of evidence. Identify point of view and bias.
Objectives	The students will understand that primary sources provide valuable but very limited information about the history of enslaved people.
Activity Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remind students of the passage that they read previously about Van Cortlandt Plantation. Tell them that it was written by a historian in 2020. Ask the students how they think that a historian could have found the information included in the passage? Tell the class that there were never any books written about enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation. ● Tell the class that the historian used information from documents written by people that visited or lived on Van Cortlandt Plantation. Those kinds of documents are called primary sources. The reading passage, on the other hand, is called a secondary source because the writer did not have a first-hand connection to the people and events that are described. ● Tell the students that primary sources are challenging to read as they were not written for the purpose of teaching people from our time. They were written for all sorts of different reasons. Since they were written hundreds of years ago, they sometimes include words and spellings that we do not use today and the handwriting is often difficult to read. But they reveal information that is valuable to historians. ● Today you will investigate and interpret several primary sources. ● Explain that studying enslaved people is difficult as they were prevented from receiving an education. As a result, we do not have much written information from their perspective. They left behind very few letters and diaries to let us know who they were as people so historians must rely on other kinds of documents for information. ● Tell the class that you will model how to interpret a primary source using a method called <i>SEE, THINK, WONDER</i>. Display the 1790 census clipping on the interactive board. ● Explain that the government took a census of the entire country to figure out how many people lived in different parts of the country and this is the page from the census that counted the West Bronx, which was then called South Yonkers. ● After reading and pointing to the column headings, ask the students to spend a minute or two just looking at and reading the document. Then ask the students to share low-inference observations about the document--in other words, what do they notice? You should go first by noticing that each row indicates several people at each house but there is only one name. This is the "SEE" portion of <i>SEE, THINK, WONDER</i>. Students should resist inferring or concluding anything before observing it carefully in this stage.

<p>Activity Sequence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Then, after plenty of students get to share observations, ask them to share what the document makes them <i>THINK</i>. In other words, what ideas do they have or what can they infer? You may model by inferring that men had higher status based on the fact that men are the only people listed. ● Then model how the document may make you <i>WONDER</i>. What kinds of questions do you have? You can model by asking why enslaved people lived at some houses while they do not live at others. ● Conclude by asking how this document could provide information about life for enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation. You should focus the students' attention on the row describing Augustus Van Cortlandt's household. ● The other primary source documents come from Van Cortlandt family wills, newspapers, and an inventory of the Van Cortlandt estate. The original documents are available here: vancortlandt.org/epp but transcribed copies are available below. They include background and annotations to make it easier for students to understand. How the students should interact with the documents is at your discretion. The children can work in partnerships, in groups, or as a whole-class activity. Given the complexity of the task, this would be difficult for a student to complete individually. ● The accompanying <i>SEE, THINK, WONDER</i> charts are to help them make sense of the documents and organize their thinking. ● After completing the charts the students should come together to share what they were able to learn from the primary source documents. ● Encourage the students to also share what they feel about the information.
<p>Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This is a challenging assignment and the students should be assessed on whether their conclusions are supported by the documents
<p>Homework</p>	<p>This following is a segue into the next lesson: Instruct the students to ask an adult what he/she knows about the contributions of enslaved people to the development of their neighborhood.</p>

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Primary Source 1: Runaway Ad - 1733

The information below was printed as an advertisement in a New York newspaper in 1733. The bold vocabulary words are defined below. You should read the passage slowly and carefully a few times to help you understand it.

“Ran away the 18th of August 1733, from Jacobus van Cortlandt of the City of New York, a **Negro** Man Slave, named Andrew Saxton, a tall lusty Fellow, is very black, walks **stooping** and somewhat **lamish** with his left Leg; the Thumb of his left hand is somewhat still by a Wound he had in his Hand formerly; the shirts he had with him and on his Back are mark'd with a Cross on the left Breast; He **professeth** himself to be a Roman Catholick, speaks very good English, is a Carpenter and Cooper by Trade, and has with him a Broad-Ax, a **Two-foot Rule**, and a **Hollow-Howel**. He had on a Pair of **Linnen** or **Oznaburg Breeches**, and an old Cloth coat, but 'tis uncertain what other [clothes] he has with him. Whoever takes up and secures the Said Negro Man, and gives Notice thereof to his Said Master, So as he may be had again, shall have Forty **Shillings** if taken within Ten Miles of the City of New York, and Three **Pounds** is further, as a Reward, and all reasonable Charges, paid by Jacobus Van Cortlandt.”

Negro = Black or African

Stooping = hunched over

Lamish = limping

Professeth = claims or declares

Two-foot Rule = a two foot ruler

Hollow-Howel = a barrel-maker's tool

Linnen or Oznaburg Breeches = pants made from a certain kind of cheap linen cloth

Forty Shillings = a certain amount of money

Three Pounds = a certain amount of money (more than 40 shillings)

SEE - what do you notice about the passage?:

THINK - What does the passage make you think? What can you infer or figure out?

WONDER - What do you want to know after reading the passage?

What does the document reveal about enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation?

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Primary Source 2: Will of Frederick Van Cortlandt - 1749

The information below was written in the will of Frederick Van Cortlandt. A will is a document that explains what should happen to a person's belongings after he or she dies. The bold vocabulary words are defined below.

"In the name of God Amen, I Frederick Van Cortlandt . . . give and **bequeath** unto my said Wife Frances my two **Negro** Girl Slaves Mary and Hester with my two and four wheal **chaise** to sell or dispose of as she . . . shall think fit for her own use and benefit. . .

I am now finishing a large stone dwelling house on the plantation on which I now live . . . will **devolve** after my **decease** on my said eldest son James, my mill boat with the canoe . . . also my negro man Levellie, the Boatman, with all . . . my Waggon, Carts, ploughs, . . . tools. Immediately after the death or remarriage of my said Wife Frances then I do also give and bequeath unto my said son James the following Negro Slaves to witt: Piero the **Miller** and Hester his Wife and little Pieter the Son of Piero with my Indian Man Caesar and Kate his wife. Item I give and Bequeath unto my daughter Anne the negro Girl called Hannah and to my Daughter Eve the Negro Girl called Sare.

To my son Augustus I give my Negro Boy called Clause and to my son Frederick I give my Negro Boy called little Franke and the remaining part of my [belongings]."

Bequeath = to give an object to another person in a will

Negro = Used to refer to African or Black people

Chaise = Carriage

Devolve = Be passed to

Decease = Death

Miller = A person who operated a mill where wheat was ground into flour or wood was sawed into lumber.

SEE - what do you notice about the passage?:

THINK - What does the passage make you think? What can you infer or figure out?

WONDER - What do you want to know after reading the passage?

What does the document reveal about enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation?

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Primary Source 3: Will of Augustus Van Cortlandt - 1824

The information below was written in the will of Augustus Van Cortlandt. A will is a document that explains what should happen to a person's belongings after they die. The bold vocabulary words are defined below.

"In the name of God Amen I Augustus Van Cortlandt of . . . [the] State of New York Esquire . . . first and principally, I recommend my soul to God who created it, hoping for pardon of all my **sins** . . .

I **bequeath** the sum of five hundred dollars . . . to St. John's Church at Yonkers. . .

I **manumit** my **Negro** Slave Dinah in consideration of the great care and attention she paid my **deceased** affectionate wife during her last illness. . .

I give and bequeath to the said Henry White all my carriages and horses . . . and all my farming utensils and **Stock** of every kind, which at my decease may be upon my farm or belong to me; and also all hay and grain and produce of every kind, which then may be upon my farm, and also all crops which may then be in the ground or growing

Sins = Wrongdoing

Bequeath = to give an object to another person in a will

Manumit = to grant freedom

Negro = Used to refer to African or Black people

Deceased = Dead

Stock = Farm Animals

SEE - what do you notice about the passage?:

THINK - What does the passage make you think? What can you infer or figure out?

WONDER - What do you want to know after reading the passage?

What does the document reveal about enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation?

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Primary Source 4: Estate Inventory of Van Cortlandt Plantation - 1834

The below information was taken from an estate inventory of the Van Cortlandt Plantation. An estate inventory is a list of all of the property that belongs to a person and how much each item is worth. The bold vocabulary words are defined below. This is a small part of the inventory:

	\$	¢
HORSES, CATTLE, ETC.		
10 Pair old carriage horses	60	
1 pair farm horses	100	
2 colts 3&4 years old	75	
63 sheep	189	
20 hogs	200	
5 sows and 19 pigs	75	
1 boar	3	
5 geese	1	20
5 ducks	3	
4 turkeys	3	
100 pigeons	4	50
GRAIN & CROPS		
33 ½ Bushels Wheat	41	
53 Bushels Rye	53	
160 Bushels Potatoes	40	
12 Acres in Wheat	75	
14 Acres in Rye	30	
200 Bushels Corn	150	
50 Cords Fine Wood	150	
Lot of Plank Lumber at Mill	57	

Colt = Young horse

Sow = Female pig

Bushel = Unit for measuring produce. 33 ½ bushels of wheat is about 2,000 pounds of wheat.

Cord = An amount of stacked wood. 1 cord is 4 feet wide, 4 feet tall, and 8 feet long

SEE - what do you notice about the passage?:

THINK - What does the passage make you think? What can you infer or figure out?

WONDER - What do you want to know after reading the passage?

What does the document reveal about enslaved people on Van Cortlandt Plantation?

Lesson: Spread the Word about the Contributions of Enslaved People

Topic	Synthesizing the primary and secondary source information to produce an informational sign for the Van Cortlandt Alliance Website.
Essential Question	What should New Yorkers understand about the contribution of enslaved people to the development of their state?
Standards	NY Social Studies Framework Gr. 4: Unifying theme: 4.5a There were slaves in New York State. People worked to fight against slavery and for change.
Objectives	The students will be able to explain how the work performed by enslaved people was important for the development of their community and New York.
Activity Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin the lesson by asking students about the conversations with their families. ● Based on those conversations, what information needs to be shared with the community to raise awareness about the lives and legacy of enslaved people that lived in The Bronx. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Most people living in the neighborhood have no idea that enslaved people, most of whom were Black, ever lived here. ○ Most visitors to Van Cortlandt Park do not know how much of what they enjoy about the park is the legacy of slavery. Some of the fields, the trails, the lake, and the Van Cortlandt House Museum are all features that enslaved people worked to build. ○ The fact that these contributions are not acknowledged is upsetting to some local people that know this history. Many African Americans that live in the neighborhood today are themselves the descendants of enslaved Africans. Some are working with local organizations to make sure that the lives and contributions of enslaved Africans are not ignored or forgotten. They feel that the story of their enslaved ancestors should be honored and included in history. Local historians and leaders of organizations agree that an accurate history must include the history of the enslaved people that lived here and what they left behind in the park as their legacy. ● One way to acknowledge this legacy and educate the community is to make signs in the park that explain its history to visitors. Currently, a coalition of local people and organizations are working to make that happen and they would welcome your help! ● The assignment: Write the text for a sign for park visitors that explains the contributions of the enslaved people that lived there. Include why these contributions were important to the history of New York. Use details from “Van Cortlandt Park was Van Cortlandt Plantation” and the primary sources to support your statements. Remember: Most visitors to the park see the soccer fields and playgrounds and have no idea that there was anything there before so you will need to provide some background.

<p>Activity Sequence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The parameters of the assignment are largely at your (the teacher's) discretion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You can require a five paragraph essay if the students are familiar with that text structure. ○ You can extend the activity by allowing students to incorporate facts learned during their usual social studies lessons. ○ Ideally, you could give this assignment after a class field trip to the Van Cortlandt House Museum in Van Cortlandt Park, where the students can visit the enslaved servant's quarters of the house and incorporate what they learn in their sign text. ● Student Work can be mailed to Van Cortlandt Park Alliance/ EPP Task Force, 80 Van Cortlandt Park South Ste. E1 Bronx, NY 10463 or emailed to info@vancortlandt.org with the subject line: Student Work for EPP Task Force
<p>Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The extended response rubric used for the New York State Grade 4 ELA test can be used to assess student responses