

The Role of a Plantation Mistress

General

Grade Level

Middle School

Author Info

Robin Gabriel
Monticello Education Department
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

Duration

30 minutes

Objectives

Overview

Students will examine several pages from the household account book of Martha Wayles Jefferson (Thomas Jefferson's wife) and make deductions about the role of a plantation mistress based upon their examination.

Prior Knowledge

none

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

1. Students will learn how to analyze a primary document.
2. Students will draw conclusions based upon their observations.
3. Students will learn about the role of a plantation mistress in late 18th-century Virginia.

Procedures

1. 5 min

Hand out, or show on an overhead, the pages from Martha Wayles Jefferson's household account books.

2. 10 min

Question 1: What types of things did Mrs. Jefferson seem to be responsible for, based upon her accounts?

Ans: Butchering of animals for consumption; making of tallow, soap, and candles; care of clothing and household linens; recording of vegetables planted; trading with slaves for items not grown or produced at Monticello.

Hint – be sure to point out that she was supervising much of this activity and not actually doing the slaughtering, etc.

3. 10 min

Question 2: The entries for June and July are much less detailed than the entries for the other months. What might account for this?

Ans: Students will probably suggest things such as an absence from Monticello; too busy; sickness of Mrs. Jefferson or other family concerns.

In actuality, this time period covers the birth and death of Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson's only son, which may explain the lack of more detailed accounts. Mrs. Jefferson was known to be very weak after the birth of each of her children.

4. 5 min

Assign the activity for homework by clicking the "Copy to Assignment" link in upper right of this lesson plan and inserting the instructions as appropriate. Give students the **Class Number** to access the assignment online.

Related Assets

Handouts and Downloads

- [The Role of a Plantation Mistress – Using the Documents](#)

Materials

Materials Needed

1. Info sheet on Martha Wayles Jefferson (link above)
2. Images of Martha Jefferson Account Book page (link above)
3. Monticello Classroom Slideshow Builder (link above)

Technology Needs

Digital projector, laptop and screen

