

# TELLING THEIR STORIES

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Thank you for registering your students for *Telling Their Stories* at George Washington’s Mount Vernon. This student program is intended to introduce students to the lives of the individuals who were enslaved at Mount Vernon. The tour provides an in-depth exploration of how Mount Vernon was a successful plantation because of the labor of enslaved people who, by no choice of their own, worked as domestic servants, skilled craftspeople, field hands, and in other occupations. The focus of this tour and materials, while certainly relevant to the subsequent historic narrative, is the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the world of George Washington, supporting the mission of the interpretation of the historic site.

In the same spirit of Mount Vernon’s using the term “enslaved people” instead of “slaves” to emphasize the humanity of these individuals, this tour is designed to explore the lives of specific enslaved people to include who their families were, what they did, how they resisted the bonds of slavery, as well as Washington’s views on slavery.

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**NOTE ABOUT STAFF FACILITATING TOURS:**

Telling Their Stories is a tour facilitated by trained history interpreters and character interpreters, who are paid staff members at Mount Vernon. The interpreters trained for this tour participate in continual research and discussion of the best practices for interpreting slavery and historic content.

**PROGRAM OUTCOMES:**

- Gain a deeper understanding about the lives of specific individuals who were enslaved at Mount Vernon.
  - Discuss the hardships that the practice of slavery placed on the people in bondage.
  - Understand that enslaved people were deprived of their most basic human rights.
  - Learn that some of formerly enslaved people helped established prominent free black communities in Alexandria and elsewhere.
  - Discuss that although the 13th Amendment, which outlawed slavery in the United States, was ratified in 1865, some forms of forced servitude still exist today.
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**CONNECTIONS TO DCPS STANDARDS:****GRADE 8 CONTENT:**

8.1. Students explain the religious, political, and economic reasons for movement of people from Europe to the Americas, and they describe the impact of exploration and settlement by Europeans on Native Americans.

10. Identify the origins and development of slavery in the colonies, the struggle between proponents and opponents of slavery in the colonies, and overt and passive resistance to enslavement (e.g., the Middle Passage). (P, S)

**GRADE 6 THROUGH 8 SKILLS:**

3. Students explain the central issues and problems from the past, placing people and events in a matrix of time and place.

**GRADE 9 CONTENT:**

9.16. Students describe patterns of change in Africa during the trade in slaves between Africa, Europe, and the Americas from the 17th through 18th centuries.

1. Recognize that millions of Africans were forcibly removed from seven regions in northwestern, central and southwestern, and southeaster Africa as captives and forced to endure the harsh conditions of the Middle Passage. (S)

**GRADE 12 CONTENT:**

12.DC.3. Students explain how and when Africans came to the Chesapeake and Potomac Region, why a significant number of them were free, the roles they played in the development of the agrarian economy (e.g., tobacco), and how slavery developed as an institution in the region.

#### **GRADE 9 THROUGH 12 SKILLS:**

2. Students analyze how change happens at different rates at different times, understand that some aspects can change while others remain the same, and understand that change is complicated and affects not only technology and politics but also values and beliefs.

#### **TOUR OVERVIEW:**

Through guided discussion during a tour of the Mount Vernon estate, students learn about the stories of the specific people who were enslaved on the estate.

#### **PART ONE: TOUR HISTORIC AREA AND OUTBUILDINGS**

##### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- Washington's vision for Mount Vernon was made possible through the labor of the enslaved people who lived and worked on the estate by no choice of their own, and although Washington was a slave owner for most of his life, his views on the institution changed over time.
- Despite a lack of legal recognition, many enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon formed families and communities by marrying and having children—unions which George Washington generally recognized. One of the reasons that Washington eventually stopped buying and selling enslaved people was because he did not want to break up families.
- Mount Vernon's enslaved population resisted their bondage through passive and active means from pilfering supplies and working slowly to running away.
- Washington freed a portion of those enslaved in his will, while the remaining enslaved individuals were inherited by Martha Washington's descendants.
- Some freed people chose to remain at Mount Vernon throughout the 19th century and played an important role in interpreting the estate to visitors.

##### **ACTIVITIES:**

- Tour Historic Area (bowling green, gardens, east lawn) with a History Interpreter
- Tour Outbuildings (buildings on the north and south lanes, and slave quarters) with a History Interpreter

#### **PART TWO: DISCUSSION WITH CHARACTER INTERPRETER**

##### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- Enslaved workers faced many hardships that the practice of slavery placed on them while in bondage.
- Despite being enslaved, many individuals formed families and communities.

##### **ACTIVITIES:**

- Have a discussion with a character interpreter portraying an enslaved worker. The discussion is driven by student questions.
- For older student groups, the character interpreter will “break character” to discuss with the students their personal experience in telling the story of an enslaved individual.

### **PART THREE: WREATH LAYING CEREMONY AT THE SLAVE MEMORIAL**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- The Slave Memorial, designed by Howard University students in 1983, is located on the burial site of many enslaved people.
- Tributes at memorial offer an opportunity to remember and honor the lives of enslaved people who lived and worked at Mount Vernon.

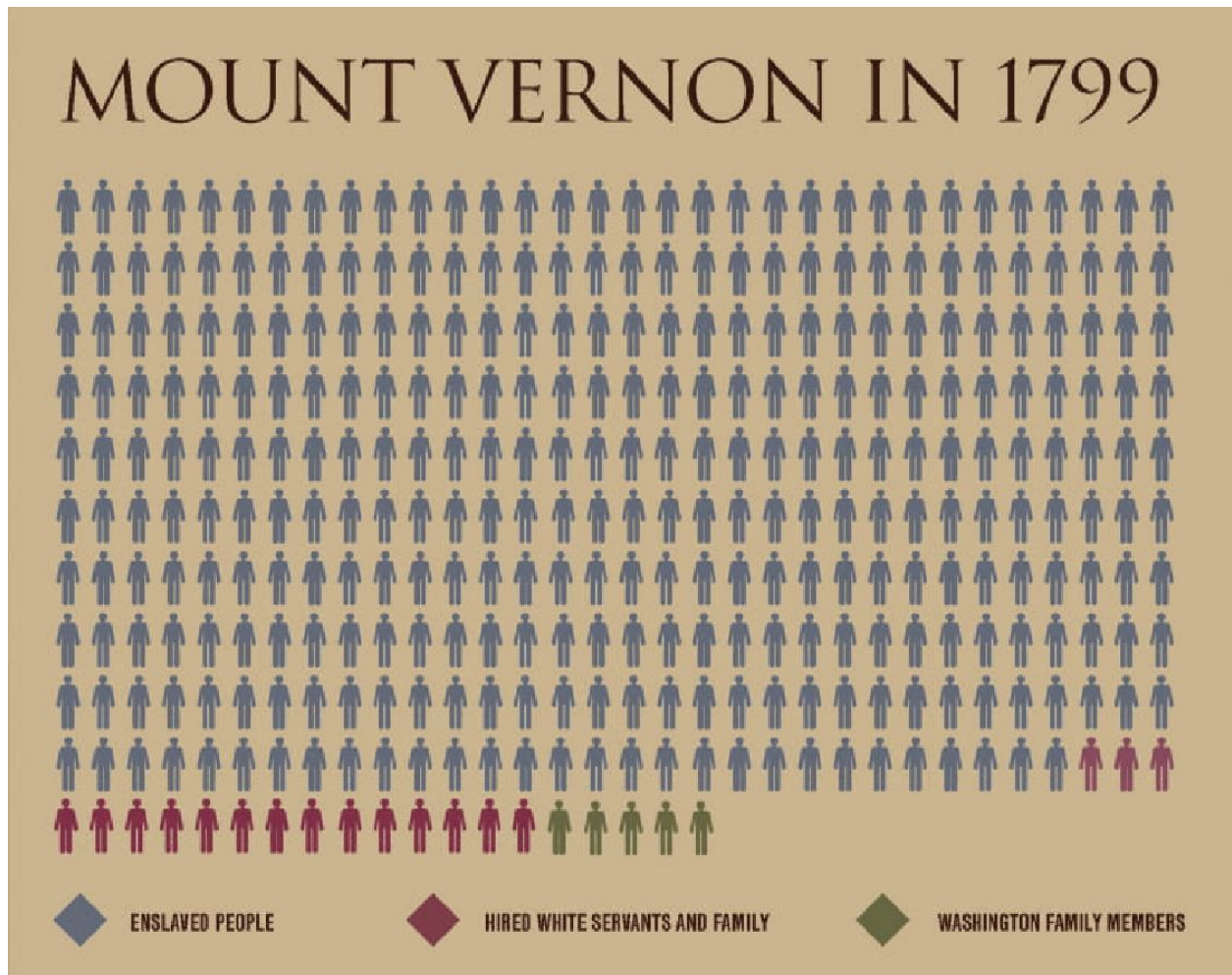
#### **ACTIVITIES:**

- Participate in a wreath laying ceremony at the Slave Memorial.
- Students will be invited to read biographies of individuals who may be buried at this site.

## RESOURCES

Prior to the visit, please review the webpage covering [slavery at Mount Vernon](#) for context. The following resources to provide background on the enslaved people living and working at Mount Vernon. The resources, based on primary documentation, will help provide context to the living conditions of the enslaved people, as well as population on the estate in Washington's lifetime.

## POPULATION OF MOUNT VERNON IN 1799:



Source: Mount Vernon's Ladies Association, taken from George Washington's Last Will and Testament, Mount Vernon, 9 July 1799

Enslaved People: 317 people

Hired White Servants and Family: 17 people

Washington Family Members: 5 people

## BUILDING COMPARISON: MOUNT VERNON AND THE ENSLAVED WORKER'S CABIN

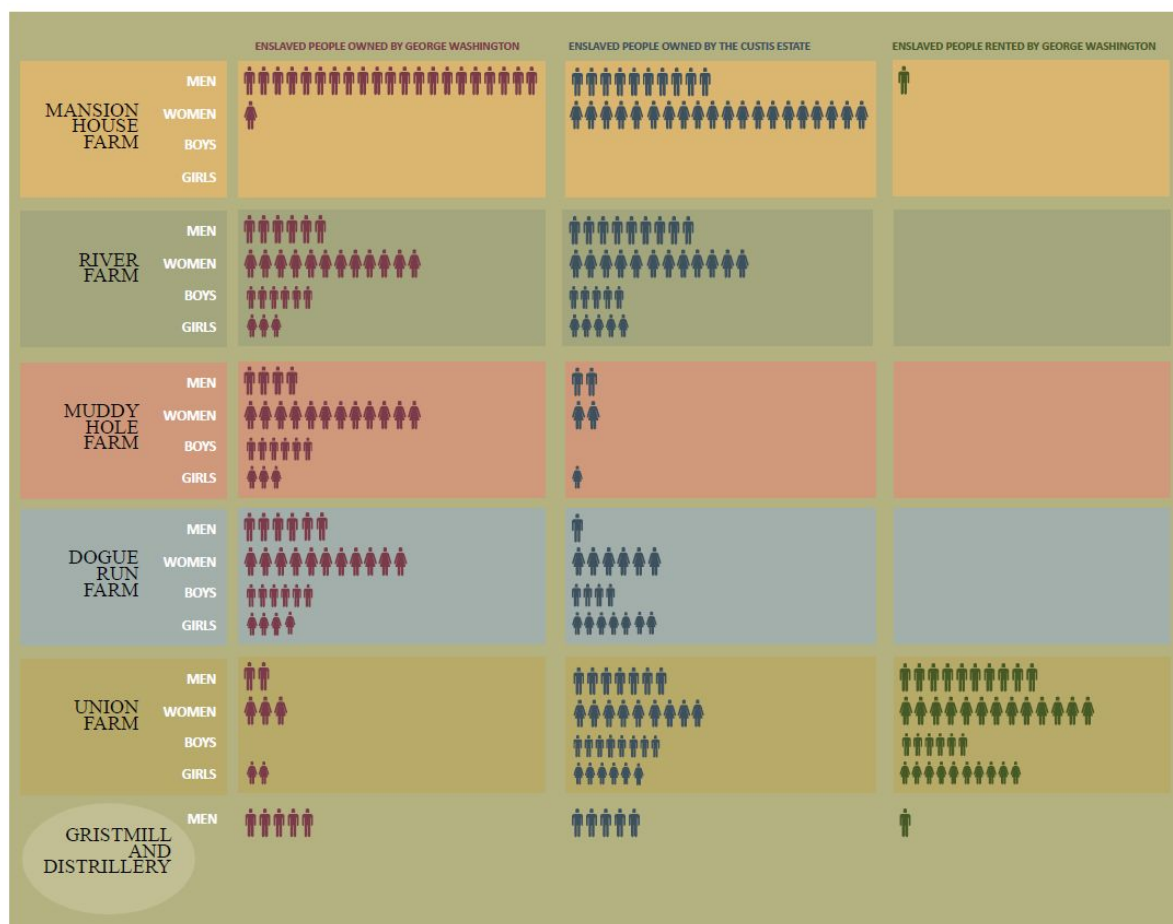
This is a size comparison between the square footage of an enslaved worker's cabin and the first floor of the Mansion at Mount Vernon. The replica cabin at Mount Vernon represents a building that one or two enslaved families would have lived in. It contains one room and a small loft totaling to about 225 ft<sup>2</sup>. George Washington lived in the Mansion House, which is 11,028 ft<sup>2</sup>. It is two and a half stories tall with 21 rooms. The biggest room was the "New Room," which was used for dining, concerts, and dances is about 694 ft<sup>2</sup> and can fit three replica cabins.



## MOUNT VERNON MAP:

George Washington (1732–1799). A Map of General Washington's Farm from a Drawing Transmitted by the General. Removed from Letters from His Excellency General Washington to Arthur Young. London: W. J. & J. Richardson, 1801.





## ENSLAVED POPULATION AT MOUNT VERNON, 1799 INFOGRAPHIC

Source: Mount Vernon's Ladies Association, taken from George Washington's List of Enslaved People, 1799.

Mansion House Farm: 88 people

River Farm: 57 people

Muddy Hole Farm: 41 people

Dogue Run Farm: 45 people

Union Farm: 75 people

Gristmill and Distillery: 11 people

## PROFILES OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE AT MOUNT VERNON



### **Ona Judge**

It is believed that Ona Judge, an enslaved personal servant to Martha Washington, may have lived in the women's bunk room in the Slave Quarters. She was born at Mount Vernon in 1773, the daughter of an enslaved woman named Betty and an indentured English tailor named Andrew Judge. Judge was trained as a seamstress, and eventually became a servant for Mrs. Washington. She was one of multiple enslaved workers who the Washingtons brought with them to Philadelphia for the presidency. On May 21, 1796, Judge walked out of the presidential mansion while the family ate dinner. Despite being contacted by Washington's aides, Ona Judge lived out the rest of her life in New Hampshire—a fugitive, but free.



### **Christopher Sheels**

Christopher Sheels may have lived in the men's bunk room in the Slave Quarters. As a young boy, Christopher was trained as a carpenter, but he took over as Washington's valet—a personal servant—when the general's previous valet retired due to knee injuries. As a valet, Christopher worked in the Mansion and attended to Washington's every need. Christopher married an enslaved woman belonging to a friend of the Washingtons, and in September 1799, the couple wanted to run away, but their plans were discovered. It is unclear how Washington handled the situation, but at the time of the general's death, Christopher was still serving as his valet. He was present throughout Washington's final illness, and participated in the funeral.



### **William Lee**

William Lee and his brother, Frank, were purchased by George Washington and brought to Mount Vernon in 1768. Both brothers worked in the Mansion—Frank, as the butler, and William as Washington's valet. When George Washington accepted the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, William went with him to war. After the revolution, Lee suffered two severe knee injuries, forcing him to end his service as Washington's valet. While performing the duties of shoemaker on the estate, he met with the many Revolutionary War veterans that traveled to Mount Vernon to pay their respects to the general. When Washington died in 1799, William Lee was the only

enslaved worker who he freed outright in this will—the rest had to wait until Martha Washington freed them in 1801. William Lee lived the remainder of his life as a free man at Mount Vernon, where he died in the 19th century. He is likely buried in the Slave Cemetery at Mount Vernon.



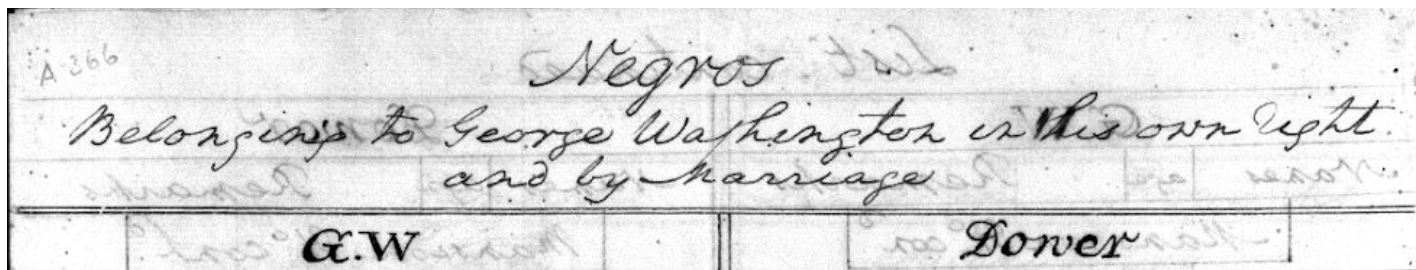
### **Priscilla and Penny**

Priscilla, also called Silla, worked as a laborer and plower on Dogue Run Farm. She was married to Joe, who worked as a ditcher on Mansion House Farm. Together, Silla and Joe had at least five children, including 10-year-old Penny, who lived with Silla in a cabin. To see his wife and children, Joe had to walk several miles both ways from Mansion House Farm to Dogue Run Farm. Silla and her children belonged to General Washington, and would have been given their freedom under the conditions of Washington's will. Joe, however, belonged to the Custis estate, and would have remained in slavery after Martha and George Washington's deaths.

## POST-VISIT ACTIVITY

### STUDYING THE 1799 SLAVE CENSUS

In 1799, the year of his death, George Washington compiled a census of all of the enslaved workers at Mount Vernon. Along with archaeology and other written sources, the census has become an important resource for historians to learn more about the enslaved community. Below, you will find a transcript of a portion of the 1799 Slave Census. Using the census (transcribed primary source document), as well as what you learned during your visit, answer the questions below. In advance of the the visit, students may select an individual listed in the profiles above. Please note additional lesson plans appropriate for a post-visit activity can be found on the Mount Vernon website, suggested additional lesson plans include: [Enslaved Worker's Cabin](#), [the](#)



[Concept of Ownership](#), or [Be an Archaeologist](#).

Names		Ages	Remarks	Names		Ages	Remarks
Nat	Smith		His wife...Lucy...Dogue Run...Dower	Tom Davis	Bricklayer		Wife... at Mr. Lear's
George	Smith		His wife...Lydia...River Farm...Dower	Simms	Carpenter		Wife... Daphne- French's
Isaac	Carpenter		Kitty...Dairy....Dower	Cyrus	Postilion		Wife... Lucy... River Farm.. GW
James	Carpenter	40	Darcus....Muddy Hole....GW	Wilson	Postilion	15	No wife
Sambo	Carpenter		Agnes....River Farm....Dower	Godfrey	Carpenter		Wife... Mima...Mansion...Dower
Davy	Carpenter		Edy...Union Farm...GW	James	Carpenter		Wife...Alla... Mansion...Dower
Joe	Carpenter		Dolshy...Spinner...Dow	Hanson	Distiller		No wife
Tom	Cooper		Nanny....Muddy Hole...GW	Peter	Distiller		No wife
Moses	Cooper		No wife	Nat	Distiller		No wife
Jacob	Cooper		No wife	Daniel	Distiller		No wife
George	Gardener		His wife....Sall...Dogue Run...Dow	Timothy	Distiller		
Harry	Gardener		No wife	Slammin Joe	Ditcher		Wife... Sylla... Dogue Run...GW
Boatswain	Ditcher		His wife...Myrtilla...Spinner...GW	Christopher	House Servant		Wife... Wife.. Major West's
Dundee	Ditcher		His wife...At Mr. Lears	Marcus	House Servant		No wife
Charles	Ditcher		His wife...Fanny...Union Farm...Dow	Lucy	Cook		Husband...House Frank...GW
Ben	Ditcher		His wife....Penny...River Farm...GW	Molly			No husband
Ben	Miller		His wife...Sinah...Mansion ...Dow	Charlotte	Seamstress		No husband
Forrester	Miller		No wife	Sall	House maid		No husband
Nathan	Cook	31	Wife...Peg....Muddy Hole....GW	Caroline	House maid		Husband... Peter Hardman
W. Muclus	Brick Layer		Wife...Capt Marshalls	Kitty	Milk Maid		Husband...Isaac...Carpenter...GW
Juba	Carter		No wife	Alice	Spinner		Charles...Freeman
Matilda	Spinner		Boson...Ditcher	Betty Davis	Spinner		Mrs. Washington's.. Dick
Frank	House Servant		Wife...Lucy -- cook	Dolshy			Husband... Joe...Carpenter...GW
Will	Shoemaker		Lame- no wife	Anna			Husband...Living at Georgetown...GW

- How many different jobs can you identify on this part of the census? Do these jobs appear to be farm or trades jobs? If you are unfamiliar with some of these jobs, research them online to learn more.
- What can you learn about an enslaved individual by looking at the census?
- What can you NOT learn about an enslaved individual by looking at the census?
- During your tour, you learned about several individuals who were enslaved at Mount Vernon. Try to locate them on the census and write down the information Washington lists about them.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- History of George Washington and Slavery:  
<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/>
- *Lives Bound Together* Exhibition:  
<https://www.mountvernon.org/plan-your-visit/calendar/exhibitions/lives-bound-together-slavery-at-george-washingtons-mount-vernon/>
- Timeline of George Washington and Slavery:  
<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/timeline-of-george-washington-and-slavery/>
- Relevant Lesson Plans:  
<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/lesson-plans/?grade=&theme=6&type=&teach=>
- Video Resources: <https://www.mountvernon.org/video>