

# Using a 1739 Household Inventory to learn about Colonial Life

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**OVERVIEW:** In this lesson students will use the 1739 household inventory from the Isaac Royall house to

1-learn how historical research works

Types of documents historians use, making a hypothesis and looking for support from primary source materials

2-learn about life in the Massachusetts colony in 1739

3-entice students for knowledge about this time period

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** After completing this lesson students will know that

- by 1739 the wealthiest colonists owned a variety of possessions which came from many parts of the world.

-enslaved people were considered property and listed with the animals

- enslaved people often lived and worked in the same room

-inventories were often taken for legal reasons, for example upon death or to sell goods to pay debts

-some of the differences in our homes today and homes during colonial times

This lesson also allows students to practice using historical thinking skills, making inferences and using historical documentation to back them up.

**GRADE LEVEL:** This lesson is designed for use with my 7<sup>th</sup> graders but I think it is adaptable to other grade levels.

**TIME PERIOD:** 42 minute period

**STANDARDS:** Grade 7: Social Studies Practices

**A. Gathering, Interpreting and Using Evidence**

5. Make inferences and draw general conclusions from evidence.

**C. Comparison and Contextualization**

5. Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes.

**Classroom Set Up and Materials:** The classroom should be set up for the students to work in groups of 3. Materials should be provided for each group. In addition to the materials attached to this lesson you will need a copy of the 1739 Inventory of the Isaac Royall House. We were given a copy at the NEH Summer Seminar, if you don't have it I can scan mine in once the school year begins, just send me a message.

**PROCEDURES:**

**Anticipatory Set:** Students will be given a picture of a modern day house which looks like it belongs to someone wealthy. Students will be asked to brainstorm a quick inventory of the contents of the house by room and then we will have a quick share.

**Activity:**

Ask students how they think the contents of a rich person's house in 1739 would be different than a rich person's house today. Have a quick class discussion. Explain that our guesses are similar to a historian's hypothesis. How might we find support for our hypothesis as to what would be contained in a colonial house inventory?

Pass out the 1739 inventory to students and have them compare it to their guesses/hypothesis. Explain to students that standards of spelling were different and that students should try to sound out words they don't recognize to infer their meaning.

Students work on the activity using the worksheet provided and the Isaac Royall House Inventory from 1739.

**Whole Class Discussion:** Using the activity discuss what students have inferred and share out. Might be best to have each group report on a different section of the house and discuss as a whole class.

**Exit Ticket:** I found a modified type of exit ticket on google images, an exit tweet. I think that might be fun to use. Topics for the tweet could be things they found memorable or surprising or questions they still have.

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

### OPENING ASSIGNMENT



Imagine that the family that lives in the above house has gone bankrupt (they've run out of money) and since they haven't been able to pay their bills, the places they owe money to are going to be allowed to sell all of their assets to raise the money to pay the debts.

The Bankruptcy Court has ordered that an inventory be taken of the property in the house and its approximate value so that it can be sold. What type of property would you expect to find on the inventory? List your ideas in the chart below by room:

Formal Living Room	Formal Dining Room	Home Office	Family Room	Kitchen

Master Bedroom	Bedroom 2	Bedroom 3	Guest Bedroom	Other:

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

**What can we learn about colonial life from a household inventory?**



This is the house of Isaac Royall, outside of Boston, Massachusetts.

When Isaac Royall, Sr. died his son, Isaac Royall, Jr. inherited the house and its contents.

Royall lived in the house with his wife,

2 daughters and their servants shown below.

When Isaac Royall, Sr. died an inventory was taken of all of the property in the 2 house buildings. What kind of property do you think they owned? Brainstorm and put some guesses in the appropriate boxes below.



Small Front Room(Best Room)	Large Front Room	Dining Room	Master Bedroom (Marble Chamber)	Bedroom 2 (Blew Chamber)

Bedroom 3 (Green Chamber)	Kitchen	Spinning Room (Garrat)	Back Foyer (Front Garrat)	Livestock (Living Property)

Now use the inventory to see what the household contents actually were in 1739. Read through the inventory and fill in the following information:

**Best Room, Front Room, Dining Room:** What questions do you have about this rooms contents?

What can you infer about the Royall family or Colonial life based on the contents of this room?

Did anything in these contents surprise you?

**Marble Chamber, Blew Chamber and Green Chamber:** What questions do you have about this rooms contents?

What can you infer about the Royall family or Colonial life based on the contents of this room?

Did anything in these contents surprise you?

**Kitchen Chamber, Spinning Garrat, Front Garrat** What questions do you have about this rooms contents?

What can you infer about the Royall family or Colonial life based on the contents of this room?

Did anything in these contents surprise you?

**Livestock/Living Property:**

What can you infer about the Royall family or Colonial life based on their "living property"?

Did anything here surprise you?



Today's Tweet

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