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Lesson Plan  
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**Using Information and Literature to Shed Unexpected Light on Colonial America:  
Introductory Lessons in the Library for 4th Graders in VT**

It is customary in Vermont public schools for 4th graders to engage in a unit on colonial America. Children in Vermont grow up with a template of hillside farms, small villages and the ubiquitous town green bordered with a white church, local store and other assorted recognizable small town structures. It is very easy for them to simply put this template to use imagining life as a colonial villager back in the 1700s, but it is not so easy for them to recognize that slavery was indeed a part of many (if not all) colonial New England villages. As an educator and an information specialist I feel it is important to bring the whole picture to light in elementary school in order for students of the 21st century to have a clear understanding of the past--the past that happened right in the middle of the towns where many of them live as Vermonters--so they not only know the truth, but can imagine a better world from that truth. My job as a school librarian allows me to highlight credible sources and quality literature to both students and teachers. It is also my job to fan the flames of wonder in students. This lesson means to do all three of these things at the beginning of the unit so students are engaged and curious for all of their learning with their classroom teacher. They also can carry with them the notion that the library and librarian are always available to help answer questions and find out information pertaining to their schoolwork.

**Objective:** To show elementary students (i.e., 4th Grade) early on in their understanding of colonial America, especially Vermont, that slavery was a key component of this time period

**Time Frame:** 2 40 minute lessons

## **Materials:**

### Primary Sources:

-Runaway Slave ad from the *New York Gazette*, April 1, 1754, excerpted from: Hodges, Graham Russell and Alan Edward Brown, eds. *PRETENDS TO BE FREE: Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*. Garland Press: New York, 1994.

-Various pictures found on website:

<http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/afram/index.html>

### Secondary Sources:

-Information found in narrative form on website:

<http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/afram/index.html>

-McCully, Emily Arnold. *The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom*. NY: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2007.

## **Lesson 1**

Explain to students that you are getting their upcoming colonial America unit off to a start in the library with them. Acting as scribe, write down at the easel/board all the notions and facts students have as prior knowledge. Ask students to look for any common themes, things they notice, etc.

Ask students to then think about what they know about slavery. Again, act as scribe and write their notions and “knowns” down. Ask students to look at the list of ideas and notice anything significant.

Ask students why they think you might have asked them to think about what they know about colonial America and slavery as they begin their colonial unit. Once ideas have been heard and remarked upon, hand the students a copy of the runaway slave ad (as listed in the primary source list above). Let them read it and then read it together. Let a conversation ensue, encouraging students to say what they know from this document, details that interest them, etc. By the end of the group discussion students should be understanding that this credible primary source is proof that although perhaps we do not hear much about it, slavery was a very real part of Colonial American life, even in Vermont.

At the SmartBoard, turn their attention to the “African Americans in Early Rural New England” portion of the americancenturies.mass site (as listed in the primary and secondary source lists above). Showcase some pre-selected pictures and informational pieces that will go well with your group to show further proof of the history at hand.

Assure students that this interesting website is available on the library website, and show them how to access it there.

Encourage students to delve into this resource on their own time now that they are curious!

## **Lesson 2**

Remind students that the last time they were together in the library they used some sources to learn about the fact that slavery was a fact of Colonial American life. Remind them that historians do lots of research to discover truths about the past, like looking at firsthand accounts that people wrote (like the runaway slave ad), looking for clues in places, and investigating what others have recorded as true. Introduce the picture book, *The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom*. Ask students to think about how this true story came to be written: how did the author find the facts? Give students a bit of background (that Portsmouth, NH is "next door" to VT but on the seacoast, etc.) Read the story aloud--savor and marvel! Encourage a post-read discussion and send students on their way back to class with some new found knowledge and appreciation for colonial American life...that slavery in all of the colonies was a very real part of it and we, as learners, Americans, as people, have the power to learn and understand history, and see our present and future from it.