Lesson Title:

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<th>Grade Level: Middle</th>
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<td>School: George Washington Middle</td>
<td>Time Estimated: 2-3 days</td>
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Overview:
This lesson is part of a unit of study on life in Colonial America. During this unit, students explore the reasons colonial settlements were created, regional differences among the colonies, and aspects of life for diverse groups of colonial Americans. This lesson focuses on women’s roles in the colonies, as well as some of the differences between New England colonies and Mid-Atlantic and Southern colonies. This lesson would fit best in the later part of the unit, after students have gotten a solid understanding of the religious and economic conditions that shaped the development of the 13 colonies, including a basic understanding of the economic systems of indentured servitude and slavery. With this basis of knowledge, students will be able to make connections to what they learn in this lesson. In this lesson, students will use primary source documents, as well as secondary sources, to study and interpret the role of women in Colonial America.

Historical Background:
While it is frequently assumed that all women worked inside the home during the colonial period, there really is a much more complex picture to be created of women during that time. Though there are common themes that united women’s experiences, there was also a broad array of individual stories and situations.

The 13 Anglo-American colonies were established for diverse reasons, both economic and religious. Each colony had its own charter and, in addition to British law, each created its own rules, including rules that had an impact on the status of women. In the colonies, women basically had no legal or political standing. Rules of coverture (or “femme covert”) applied, meaning that a woman’s entity was subsumed by a man’s: first her father and then most likely her husband. Therefore, she was not allowed to own property, keep her own wages, sign contracts, or bring lawsuits. In the colonies, the male population far outweighed the female population, so there were very few single women. Divorce was rare, though it did occur more in the Puritan colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. The fault was generally assumed to be the woman’s, and the children were given to the father. Violence against women was even sanctioned by the “rule of thumb”: a man was allowed to beat his wife, as long as he didn’t use anything wider than his thumb.

Despite these legal impediments, women did find opportunities to work and contribute to their families and communities. Widows gained the most legal opportunities, as they were allowed to act in their husband’s stead. The rule of jointure also protected the property that women brought into a marriage. The reality of individual economic circumstances provided women with many more opportunities than they would appear to have on paper. Although not much wage work was available to women in the colonies, women contributed to the economic output of their families...
through their domestic labor. Women were often involved with social and economic exchange beyond their own households and farms, taking responsibility for certain tasks and trades. (Ulrich, 76). In many cases, this “invisible economy” was managed by women as housewives traded goods and labor, employed their own and their neighbors’ daughters, and kept records of accounts independently of their husbands. (Ulrich, 84).

In addition to these economic systems, women’s status improved with both the Enlightenment and the American Revolution. The Enlightenment put forth a more favorable view of women and brought about increased literacy and access to reading material. The American Revolution brought about appeals to women to participate and cooperate, from boycotting British goods to taking on new roles so that men could go fight. These sacrifices and contributions led to a greater respect and acknowledgement of women’s roles.

Of course, not all women in the colonies were free. Thousands of women were brought to the colonies as indentured servants and had to earn their freedom with years of hard work. Many thousands more were brought against their will from Africa and forced to live their lives enslaved. They faced particular challenges, not only because of their lack of freedom, but also the constant threat of being separated from their family members.

Women’s role in colonial history is frequently boiled down in our textbooks to a paragraph or two that serves as a side note to the more male-dominated themes of the colonial era, personified in gigantic figures like Patrick Henry, Sam Adams, and Paul Revere. By looking at stories of individual women, we can add layers that help us form a more multi-dimensional understanding of women during this period.

**Objectives:**

Students will:
- Interpret and analyze primary documents
- Identify types of work performed by women in Colonial America
- Describe colonial life in New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern colonies
- Compare the lives of various social groups, including women, indentured servants, slaves, commoners, and the upper class.
- Work effectively with a partner to analyze documents
- Demonstrate ability to write from a historical perspective

**Standards of Learning:** United States History to 1877

**Skills:**
USI.1: Students will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to:
a) identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents
d) interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives
e) evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing

**Content:**
USI.5: Students will demonstrate knowledge of factors that shaped colonial America by:
b) comparing and contrasting life in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern colonies, with emphasis on how people interacted with their environment

c) describing colonial life in America from the perspectives of large landowners, common farmers, artisans, women, indentured servants, and slaves.

**Major Understanding:**
By examining the stories of individual women in colonial America, students will understand the complex nature of the lives and relationships of women during the colonial period.

**Culminating Assessment:**
Students will create a dialogue between two of the colonial women that they learned about in the lesson. In the dialogue, the women will discuss how they live, what kind of work they do, challenges they face, and how they feel about their lives. Students should include specific evidence from the primary sources.

**Resources**

**Books**

Kerber, Linda K. “‘Ourselves and Our Daughters Forever’: Women and the Constitution, 1787-1876;” *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Women’s Suffrage Movement,* ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler.


**Video**
A Midwife's Tale. PBS Home Video. 1997

**Primary Sources**
- Excerpt from the Diary of Martha Ballard: [http://dohistory.org/diary/themes/money/index.html](http://dohistory.org/diary/themes/money/index.html)
  These excerpts are based on the theme "Martha Ballard and Money" and give many examples of the kinds of work Martha did and the types of goods that were traded in addition to money.
- Letter from Elizabeth Sprigs, an indentured servant: [http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5796](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5796)
- Elizabeth Fuller Diary: [http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5824/](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5824/)
- Images of slavery in America: [http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/collection/large/NW0253.JPG](http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/collection/large/NW0253.JPG)  
Secondary Sources

• Colonial Williamsburg: "Introduction to Colonial African-American Life"
  http://history.org/Almanack/people/african/aaintro.cfm
This site provides a good overview of colonial life for African-Americans, both enslaved and free.

• Colonial Williamsburg: "Meet the People"
  http://history.org/Almanack/people/people.cfm
The Colonial Williamsburg website describes a number of people who lived in Williamsburg, including Lady Susannah Beverley Randolph, a member of a powerful gentry class family.

Day 1 Women in Colonial America

Materials:

Student Worksheets
- Student Handout #1: Women in Colonial America

Video
A Midwife’s Tale

Websites (bookmark for each station)
Station 1 http://dohistory.org/diary/themes/money/index.html
Station 2 http://history.org/Almanack/people/african/aaintro.cfm
Station 3 http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5796
Station 4 http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5824/

Strategies

1. Hook: Have students respond in their notebooks to the following prompt: “During the colonial period, women worked only in the home.” Explain why you think this statement is true or false, using as many examples as possible.

2. After students have written their answers, discuss the idea with the class, and get students to explain or defend their arguments.

3. Introduction: Explain to students that they will be exploring the roles of women in Colonial America. Show an excerpt from the Martha Ballard film that will help students visualize Martha’s story in particular, but also the clothing, housing, and lifestyle of the period. Also as an introduction, as a class we will look at the Martha Ballard diary website and use the “magic lens”.

4. Activity: Place students in mixed-ability pairs. Students will proceed through a series of
stations, at which they will examine the lives of some very different women in colonial America. Together with their partner, each student will read, evaluate, and interpret the documents, and then answer the questions on their worksheet. Some stations will require the use of the internet. Computers should be bookmarked with the websites that students will use.

5. After pairs have finished looking at the documents and answering questions, the class will come back together. Students will have an opportunity to share their answers and to ask questions.

6. **Wrap Up:** Ask students which woman in Colonial America they would most like to meet: Martha Ballard, Elizabeth Sprigs, Lady Randolph, or one of the enslaved women. Why would they like to meet her? What questions would they ask her? What advice would they give her?

**Day 2: Colonial Woman’s Pocket**

**Materials**
- Construction paper
- Glue
- Yarn
- Tape
- Pattern for the colonial woman’s pocket
- Student Handout #2: Instructions for Colonial Woman's Pocket
- Student Handout #3: Instructions/Rubric for Written Assignment

**Strategies**

*Some students may need to finish up the stations from Day 1.*

1. On the second day, students will again use the documents and the information they’ve learned to create a product. Their goal will be to demonstrate some of the aspects of women’s lives by creating a “Colonial Woman’s Pocket.” Students will be given a pattern for the pocket, which they will cut out, and then they will create items (using construction paper) that women might have used to complete their work. Then they will glue them to the pocket and tie the pocket with yarn.

2. After each group has completed their colonial woman’s pocket, they will present it to the class and explain how the items in the pocket demonstrate what they learned about women’s lives in Colonial America.

3. **Homework** (can be started in class, if time). Students will create a dialogue between two of the colonial woman that they learned about in the lesson. In the dialogue, the women will discuss how they live, what kind of work they do, challenges they face, and how they feel about their lives. Students should include specific evidence from the primary sources.

**Differentiation:**
Much of the differentiation is built into the strategies that are used in this lesson plan. Students will work in mixed-ability pairs and be reading aloud, so this will help students who might
struggle with reading the works. In addition, a variety of materials are used, including text, visual images, and video. The woman’s pocket activity will also be accessible for students who struggle with reading and writing.

Another important way to differentiate would be to pare down the readings from the Ballard diary and the Spriggs letter for certain students. For students who are quick readers or very interested in the topic, more diary excerpts and other resources could be provided. They could also extend the culminating project to a more in-depth conversation by involving more than 2 people or creating a diary of their own.
Student Handout 1: Women in Colonial America

Directions: With your partner, you will visit several stations where you will investigate information about women in Colonial America. You will be using images, diaries, letters, websites, and text to find information. As you and your partner examine the resources, answer the questions below. After you complete each section, bring this sheet to your teacher to be checked.

Station 1: Martha Ballard Diary
Go to the bookmark: “Martha Ballard Diary”. (http://dohistory.org/diary/themes/money/index.html)
Read through the excerpts from the diary and answer the following questions:

1. Sometimes Martha Ballard traded with currency, such as shillings, pence, and pounds. Other times she and her neighbors traded for other items. List at least 10 other items that were traded:
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

2. Martha’s main job was being a midwife. In the first 15 entries, how many times does Martha mention helping delivery a baby? ________________________________
   How much detail does she use in describing the births? Why do you think this is the case?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

3. In addition to being a midwife, Martha also does lots of other work. As you read the journal entries, list at least 5 other types of work or chores that she does: ________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

4. What do you think was the purpose of this diary? Why do you think so? Use evidence from the diary to support your answer. ________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

5. What did you learn about women in colonial America from reading this diary? ______________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

Station 2: Images of Slavery
First, read “Introduction to African-American Life in Colonial America”. Next, look carefully at the images, discuss them with your partner, and answer the questions.

6. Image 1: What details do you notice in the picture? What do they tell us about this woman’s life?
   ________________________________________________________________________________

7. Image 2: What is taking place in this picture? How do you think the woman feels about what is happening? Why?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
8. **Image 3:** How does the ad describe the “Negroes for Sale”? __________________________________________

What does the ad tell us about how slave traders viewed slaves? __________________________________________

9. **Image 4:** What seems to be different about this woman from the other images of slaves you have looked at? __________________________________________

10. Using the images and the reading, how would you compare the lives of enslaved African-Americans with the lives of free African-Americans? __________________________________________

Station 3: Letter from Elizabeth Sprig, an indentured servant


12. Elizabeth says that she is “suffering” and “unhappy”. Why? Give specific examples. __________________________________________

13. How does Elizabeth compare her life to the life of a slave? __________________________________________

14. What does Elizabeth want her father to send her? __________________________________________

15. What questions do you still have about the letter or Elizabeth’s situation? _____________________

Station 4: Diary of Elizabeth Fuller

16. As you read through the diary, write down all the jobs or chores that Elizabeth writes about:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

17. Other than chores, what other activities does Elizabeth mention?

________________________________________________________________________________________

18. How would you describe Elizabeth’s life? __________________________________________

19. What does the diary tell us about the lives of colonial women? __________________________________________

20. What questions do you still have about the diary or Elizabeth’s life? _____________________
Station 5: Lady Randolph (Secondary Source)
Go back to the Colonial Williamsburg website: “Meet the People”. Click on the link to Lady Susannah Beverly Randolph and read the information about her.
21. How would you describe Lady Randolph’s social status?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
22. What were some of Lady Randolph’s duties on the plantation? ___________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
23. What were some of the things Lady Randolph did for fun or enjoyment? ___________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
24. How do you think Lady Randolph’s life was different from the lives of the other women you have learned about?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Student Handout 2: Colonial Woman’s Pocket

In colonial times, pockets were not built into women’s clothing as they are today. So women had pockets that could be tied on and removed, much like an apron. In their pockets they kept important tools and supplies that they used regularly.

You are going to make a colonial woman’s pocket that will help show what you have learned about the lives of women in Colonial America.

Directions:
1. Use the pocket pattern to cut out a pocket, using a large sheet of construction paper.
2. Look back at handout 1 and your answers to the questions about the jobs women performed. Brainstorm a list of tools or supplies that women would have needed to use while doing these jobs and chores. Think about any items that were mentioned in the diaries or images.
3. After you have completed your list, start making the items. Use construction paper to draw and cut out the items. Make sure the items will fit in the pocket!
4. Glue the items to the pocket.
5. Punch holes in the top of the pocket and string yarn through the holes. These will be the strings to tie on the pocket.
Student Handout 3: Writing for Understanding

Directions: You will be writing a dialogue, or conversation, that might take place between at least two of the women that you have learned about. You may choose any two of the following: Martha Ballard, Elizabeth Sprig, Elizabeth Fuller, Lady Randolph, or an enslaved or free African-American from one of the images we looked at (you may make up a name for these). Use your notes from Student Handout 1 and what you have learned in class to complete the assignment. If you wish, you may include more than two women in the conversation.

Your dialogue must:
- Include at least 5 spoken statements from each woman, for a total of at least 10 statements.
- Include descriptions of the types of work performed by each woman.
- Include where each woman lives and what kind of life she has.
- Describe challenges faced by each woman, as well as things they enjoyed about their lives.
- Show how life was similar and different for different groups of women in colonial America.

An excellent written dialogue will:
- Include evidence from the primary sources
- Be interesting and creative
- Include the points-of-view of different women
- Have correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar