



Funded through a grant from the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

- ❖ Central Case Study: Anthony Jan, a carpenter documented in the Danish West Indian Archives
Companion Resource: *Sources in the Danish National Archives on the History of the Danish West Indies*
- ❖ Research and Authorship: Camilla Jensen
- ❖ Curriculum Development: Amanda Sackey, Virgin Islands Architecture Center for Built Heritage and Crafts (VIAC)

Revision Statement: This lesson plan reflects the evidence and interpretations available at the time of its development. It is subject to revision as additional historical evidence becomes available, sources are clarified, or new research deepens our understanding. Documented facts, reasonable inferences, and unanswered questions are distinguished throughout to support responsible historical inquiry.

Lesson overview

When does a name become a person? Students reconstruct portions of Anthony Jan's life through church, transaction, mortgage, freedom, census, and pension records. They examine how archival fragments reveal family relationships, carpentry, and efforts to secure freedom within an oppressive colonial system. New records require students to revise claims and acknowledge what remains unknown.

Grades 9–12 • Three 55-minute class periods • Subjects: Virgin Islands history, social studies, English language arts, and heritage education

Essential question

How can we reconstruct a person's life from colonial records while respecting their humanity and the limits of the evidence?

Supporting questions

- What do records created for colonial administration reveal, and whose perspectives do they leave out?
- How did skilled work, family relationships, property, and debt intersect with efforts to secure freedom?
- How can sharing an archival finding contribute to Crucian cultural knowledge and preservation?

Learning products

Each student produces an evidence log, a revised historical claim, and a 250–350 word interpretive label or brief illustrated exhibit panel. The final product uses at least three records, distinguishes evidence from interpretation, and identifies one unresolved question.

Source basis

Camilla Jensen, Finding a Life Story in the Danish West Indian Archives that was Never Intended to be Remembered, presenter notes supplied by VIAC, undated. Envelope numbers below refer to those notes. Pair this plan with the corresponding archive packet; presenter summaries are secondary explanations, while the reproduced archival records are the primary sources.

Historical inquiry and cultural context

Recognize the person behind the record

When does a name become a person? This question invites learners to recognize the humanity that was always present: personhood does not depend on surviving documentation. Students investigate records, connect evidence, and examine context to develop a fuller account of a person's life while acknowledging what the archive leaves out.

Danish West Indian slavery was a brutal, coercive, racialized system that treated human beings as property and restricted their freedom, labor, autonomy, and family lives. Records in this case reveal that coercion through the sale of family members and the use of enslaved people as collateral for mortgages. Historical complexity must not soften these realities.

People living within this system carried knowledge, skills, cultural traditions, and relationships. Students examine evidence of craftsmanship, kinship, economic strategies, adaptation, negotiation, resistance, and survival. Documented expressions of agency do not diminish the violence of slavery, suggest that opportunities were equally available, or imply that skilled work guaranteed freedom.

Colonial records were created for religious, legal, administrative, or economic purposes and reflect institutional perspectives. They may document relationships, occupations, transactions, and legal status while leaving feelings, intentions, cultural knowledge, and everyday experiences unrecorded. A record's categories do not define the whole person. Students consider Camilla Jensen's interpretations alongside the records she analyzes, distinguishing documented evidence from reasonable inference and unanswered questions.

Use respectful language when discussing enslaved people. Identify dehumanizing terms as the language of the original source and examine their purpose and effects. Invite thoughtful engagement and allow time for reflection. Avoid activities that ask learners to reenact enslavement or the sale of human beings, or to debate or vote on whether economic considerations justified enslavement.

Guiding questions for continuing inquiry

Who created this source, for whom, and for what purpose?

What evidence connects records that may refer to the same person?

Which conclusions change when we add a mortgage, freedom record, or later census entry?

What perspectives are missing, and what further source might help?

What responsibilities do we have when sharing a person's story?

Interdisciplinary learning

- Historical literacy: Read, annotate, corroborate, and evaluate sources.
- Language: Compare originals, transcriptions, and translations while preserving uncertain readings and noting variations in terminology and spelling.
- Chronology: Sequence events and distinguish event dates from certificate dates or later annotations.
- Numeracy: Examine the documented 1783 payment and remaining balance, checking the monetary units before calculating or comparing amounts.
- Communication: Develop and revise a public interpretation supported by cited evidence.

Identify the monetary units and accounting context in each record. *Rigsdaler* may appear as *rixdaler* in historical sources. In some St. Croix records, “pieces of eight” and “Danish West Indian rigsdaler” were used interchangeably; verify the usage in the relevant records before assuming either equivalence or a difference in value.

Do not infer earnings—or whether a person received or controlled payment—from occupation alone. Comparisons with wages of the period, currency conversions, and estimates of purchasing power require additional historical evidence and explicit assumptions. Recorded sale prices reflect the colonial treatment of people as property, not their human worth or personal earnings.

Community connections

The lesson begins with Virgin Islands people, places, and cultural knowledge. Optional conversations with cultural bearers and observations of local heritage sites can broaden inquiry. Attribute these contributions to their sources, seek permission before recording or sharing them, and distinguish among archival evidence, community knowledge, and present-day interpretation.

Learning objectives

By the conclusion of the lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Investigate history through primary source evidence

Develop and revise a historical claim using details from multiple records. Cite sources and distinguish documented information, reasonable inference, and unanswered questions.

2. Recognize the humanity of people represented in colonial archives

Identify documented relationships, skills, and life circumstances beyond administrative classifications. Frame possible experiences or aspirations as questions rather than established facts.

3. Analyze historical complexity and resist generalization

Explain how legal status, occupation, and family or social relationships intersected or changed. Complicate an initial interpretation without minimizing harm or generalizing from one case.

4. Analyze skilled trades and pathways toward freedom

Use specific records to examine how skills, earnings, property, credit, or networks may have supported efforts to secure freedom or autonomy. Identify documented barriers and avoid assuming how Anthony obtained money.

5. Connect individual experiences to colonial structures

Explain how the legal treatment of people as property, racial classifications, and debt shaped documented circumstances. Recognize human agency and the coercion that constrained choices.

6. Interpret records across languages and perspectives

Compare names, dates, occupations, and relationships across records and translations. Consider each record's purpose and uncertainties in handwriting, translation, later annotations, or identification.

7. Connect archival discovery to cultural preservation

Explain what the case contributes to Crucian craftsmanship, family history, or community memory. Propose a respectful way to share a sourced finding without assigning Anthony to buildings he is not documented as having worked on.

Curricular connections

Historical inquiry and source evaluation; corroboration and perspective; evidence-based explanatory writing; discussion and revision; financial numeracy; Virgin Islands cultural knowledge and built heritage. The learning standards crosswalk below connects these activities to Kallaloo, C3, Learning for Justice, and NCTE/IRA.

Teacher preparation and care

Prepare the archive packet

Provide one set per group of three or four: numbered envelopes, readable reproductions, transcriptions, translations where needed, and source labels. Give each document its archive or collection, record type, date, page or entry number, and translator when available. Keep original wording visible alongside explanations. Do not invent missing catalog references.

Use Envelopes 1–10 as the shared core. Assign Envelopes 11–13 to groups for comparison and use Envelope 14 for the whole-class conclusion. Retain Jensen’s numbering so the class can locate sources, but build the timeline by event date: the supplied sequence places Envelope 6 before 5 chronologically and Envelope 8 before 7.

Materials and prior knowledge

Archive packet; evidence logs; large paper or board for a timeline; pencils and optional calculators. Review a map of the Virgin Islands with specific focus on St. Thomas and St. Croix and introduce the Danish colonial setting. Define primary source, corroboration, inference, manumission, self-purchase, mortgage, collateral, and agency. Agency means the capacity to act within constraints; it does not imply equal power or unrestricted choice.

Facilitate with care

Explain that records include enslavement, family separation, sale of people, racial classifications, and death. Invite thoughtful participation and reflection; provide an equivalent private written response when needed. Use person-centered language in discussion. Explain historical racial terms without requiring students to read them aloud.

Do not reenact enslavement, auctions, or sales; assign students the roles of enslavers or enslaved people; ask learners to vote on slavery’s acceptability; or treat people’s sale prices as measures of human worth. Financial analysis examines coercion and barriers to freedom. Do not require students to disclose family histories or imagine testimony in Anthony’s voice.

Check before teaching

Agnes: the notes list a 1796 census entry but refer to 1797 in the narrative. Verify the reproduced record before assigning an exact year.

Petrus: the notes give 801 rixdollars for the 1791 sale and 807 in the 1793 declaration. Preserve both figures and investigate the difference; do not silently reconcile them.

Names and identity: retain variants such as Anthony, Anton, Antoni, Antonio Jan, Susanna or Susantia, and Petrus or Peder. Similar names alone do not establish identity.

David: Jensen identifies the later David as Anthony and Susanna's son through her research. Present this as an identification to evaluate unless the packet supplies a conclusive link.

Pension record: distinguish the record date listed as 1825 from the narrative's October 21 appearance date. Verify dates and details in the reproduction. Avoid inferring lifelong isolation from circumstances reported at one moment.

Class one

Focus: Meet a person through archival fragments • 55 minutes

Opening inquiry 5 minutes

Ask: "What records might show that a person existed if they left no diary?" Collect examples. Introduce the essential question and participation agreements. Explain that students will discover a story in stages rather than receive a completed biography.

Model source reading 8 minutes

Open Envelope 1. Model the evidence log: identify record type, date, creator or institution, purpose, names, and legal status as recorded. Separate the 1770 entry from undated later annotations. Ask what the entry establishes and what it cannot establish about arrival, freedom, or personal feelings.

Trace family relationships 17 minutes

Groups open Envelopes 2–4 one at a time. Assign rotating roles: reader, recorder, source checker, and discussion facilitator. Compare parents, children, name variants, and enslavers. Add event dates to the class timeline. Ask: "What changed between entries? Do we see the change itself or only its recorded result?"

Corroborate and read annotations 12 minutes

Examine Envelopes 5 and 6. Use baptism number 581 to connect Catharina's baptism and burial. Offer quiet reflection without asking students to perform grief. Examine the later word "Free" in Anton Jr.'s baptism entry: it records a change but does not date that change. Place the 1778 baptism before the 1781 records on the timeline.

Humanity and archival perspective 8 minutes

Discuss: "What relationships or skills can we document? What do church clerks record for institutional purposes? What questions about the family remain?" Students draft a two-sentence claim citing two records. Require a question or uncertainty rather than invented emotions or aspirations.

Exit ticket 5 minutes

Name one direct fact, one conclusion supported by connecting records, and one thing we cannot yet know. Cite the envelope and entry or date for the first two. Collect responses to identify unsupported assumptions before Class Two.

Teacher look fors

Students distinguish entry dates from later annotations, connect records using more than a similar name, and recognize family members as individuals. A recorded change of enslaver does not by itself explain the transaction or its circumstances.

Class two

Focus: Freedom as an event and a process • 55 minutes

Retrieve and revise 5 minutes

Review one well-supported claim and one claim needing qualification from exit tickets. Students mark a revision in their own evidence log.

Establish Anthony's freedom 10 minutes

Open Envelope 7. Compare June 18, 1782, the recorded self-purchase date, with December 2, 1783, the Free Brief issue date. Identify carpentry as a documented occupation. Ask: "Does this record establish how he earned or obtained the purchase money?" The occupation alone does not answer that question.

Investigate family separation and debt 15 minutes

Open Envelope 8, then 9. Place the family sale in 1781 before Anthony's self-purchase. Read the 1783 mortgage carefully. Ask what Anthony had achieved and what remained constrained. Identify the house and family members listed as security, explaining that this legal treatment of people as property demonstrates oppression.

Calculate: 1,200 rixdaler total minus 400 paid equals 800 unpaid. The paid share was one-third and the unpaid share two-thirds. Ask how the remaining debt shaped the situation. Do not convert the sum to present-day currency or speculate about interest, wages, or affordability without evidence.

Follow the path to manumission 10 minutes

Open Envelope 10. Compare the 1783 purchase and mortgage with the June 1786 freedom records and the record of installment payments. Attend to differences in names and children listed. Students revise their claim to explain why a purchase record and a manumission record establish different things.

Evidence-based discussion 10 minutes

Discuss: "What can this case show about property, debt, and family freedom? What can it not establish about all enslaved tradespeople?" Recognize Anthony's efforts without suggesting skill guaranteed freedom, making slavery acceptable, or erasing his documented legal control over others. Explain the case through records rather than a universal legal rule about manumission.

Exit ticket 5 minutes

Explain in three or four sentences why Anthony's freedom and his family's freedom followed different timelines. Cite at least two records and identify one unanswered question about money or labor.

Teacher look fors

Students distinguish self-purchase, certificate issuance, purchase, mortgage, and manumission. They explain financial constraints without claiming that carpentry funded a particular transaction unless a source supports that claim.

Class three

Focus: Complexity and responsible public interpretation • 55 minutes

Set the comparison task 5 minutes

Return exit tickets. Ask: "When we encounter a purchase record, what additional evidence would we need to understand what followed?"

Compare archival trails 15 minutes

Assign groups Envelope 11, 12, or one case from 13. Each group reports the purchase evidence, any later evidence of freedom, the strength of identity links, and what remains unknown. Use the following teacher guide.

Case	Evidence to investigate	Interpretive boundary
Thomas • 11	Purchase; later free burial; baptism number 878 links church entries.	A later free status does not establish the missing manumission date or circumstances.
David • 12	1770 baptism; 1787 purchase; later certificate recording 1788 freedom.	Evaluate Jensen's identification of David as the son; dates and occupation alone are not conclusive.
Petrus • 13	1791 purchase; 1793 stated intention; 1798 freeing of brother.	Compare names and 801 versus 807 amounts. Do not invent a loan or repayment history.
Agnes • 13	Purchase and mortgage; later free woman in household.	Check census year and identity. Intention to secure her freedom is Jensen's interpretation.
Cæsar • 13	1802 purchase and mortgage; no later record found in this research.	Neither later freedom nor continuing enslavement is established by the missing trail.

Read the final fragment 7 minutes

Open Envelope 14. Ask how the pension record changes or extends the portrait of Anthony as an older person. Treat age, need, work capacity, and support as circumstances represented in this record. Discuss what an administrative record still leaves out.

Create an interpretive product 20 minutes

Students draft a 250–350 word exhibit label or illustrated panel about Anthony or a related case. Require a central claim, at least three cited records, a revision prompted by new evidence, one uncertainty, and a connection to Crucian craftsmanship or community memory. Propose an audience and respectful sharing method. Complete as homework if needed.

Peer review and reflection 8 minutes

Partners check citations, identity claims, and distinctions between fact and inference. Close with Jensen’s question: “What would you like to ask Anthony?” Students explain why a surviving record cannot answer their question. Do not write an imagined answer in his voice.

Assessment and instructional supports

Assessment rubric

Score each criterion from 1 to 4 for a total of 16. Assess historical reasoning and communication rather than personal disclosure or emotional response.

Criterion	4 Secure	3 Developing	2 Partial	1 Beginning
Evidence and sources	Uses 3 or more relevant records with traceable citations.	Uses 3 records; some citations need detail.	Uses fewer records or weak links.	Claims lack source support.
Reasoning and uncertainty	Revises a claim and clearly separates fact, inference, and gaps.	Revises claim; most distinctions clear.	Limited revision; some speculation as fact.	Treats speculation or missing evidence as proof.
Context and humanity	Explains agency and structural constraints with person-centered language.	Addresses both; explanation needs detail.	Addresses one or oversimplifies status.	Minimizes harm or generalizes broadly.
Cultural connection and sharing	Makes a supported heritage connection and a respectful sharing proposal.	Connection and proposal present but broad.	One element unclear or unsupported.	Connection or sharing proposal absent.

Access and differentiation

Provide enlarged images, typed transcriptions, translations, a vocabulary sheet, and teacher read-alouds. Keep original and translated text side by side when possible.

Chunk source sets and model one record before independent work. Permit paired reading, speech-to-text, or a recorded explanation with an attached citation list.

Use sentence stems: “The record states...,” “Connecting these records suggests...,” and “We cannot yet establish....” Offer an equivalent quiet written analysis for students who prefer it.

For greater challenge, ask students to compare original and translated terms, evaluate a disputed identity link, or identify the next record type needed to test an interpretation.

Heritage extension

Students may connect the recorded occupation of carpenter to a broader question about historic building trades, materials, or skills in Christiansted. Use separately sourced photographs, buildings, or cultural-bearer accounts. Do not attribute a building, construction technique, or surviving object to Anthony without evidence. Obtain permission before sharing family stories or recording community contributors.

Shortened version

For a 90-minute session: agreements and model 10 minutes; selected family records 15; Envelopes 7–10 and financial analysis 25; compare Thomas or Cæsar 15; pension record and reflection 10; sourced paragraph and exit ticket 15. Assign the full exhibit label afterward.

Place-based curriculum alignment

Kallaloo provides the local cultural foundation. C3 supports historical inquiry; Learning for Justice supports analysis of injustice and respectful interpretation; NCTE/IRA supports literacy and communication. This sequence expresses the lesson’s design, not an official hierarchy among frameworks.

The following crosswalk is an instructional alignment, not certification of mastery. Descriptions are paraphrases. Kallaloo CS.C codes concern curriculum; CS.S.B is a student standard. C3 and Learning for Justice connections use grades 9–12 where specified. National standards do not replace locally adopted requirements.

Crosswalk for objectives one through four

Objective	Kallaloo connection	National connections	Evidence of learning
1 Primary source inquiry	CS.C.E.1 Critical thinking through active learning.	C3 D3.3.9-12: evidence and claim revision. NCTE/IRA 7: research and synthesis.	Source log and revised claim using multiple records.
2 Humanity	CS.C.A.1 and CS.C.A.3 Cultural context and diverse traditions of knowledge.	LFJ DI.9-12.8: respectful curiosity. JU.9-12.11: individuals beyond stereotypes.	Documented relationships and skills; unanswered questions labeled.
3 Complexity	CS.C.B.2 Cultural change and outside influences.	C3 D2.His.10.9-12: limits of evidence and interpretation. LFJ DI.9-12.10: unequal power and identity.	Claim revised after a later annotation or additional record.
4 Trades and freedom	CS.S.B Cultural knowledge connected to academic and economic life.	C3 D2.Eco.9.9-12: institutions, property rights, and law. LFJ JU.9-12.13: unjust institutions and restricted freedom.	Analysis of purchase, debt, property, and manumission in this case.

How to use the alignment

Assess the work students actually produce. A source log supports inquiry alignment; a claim revision demonstrates corroboration; a public-facing label demonstrates purposeful communication. The debt calculation is a supporting numeracy activity, not evidence that students have mastered an entire economics standard.

LFJ outcomes about learners' own identities are not assessed through Anthony's life story alone. This plan therefore emphasizes respectful interpretation and structural injustice without requiring personal disclosure.

Learning standards crosswalk continued

Crosswalk for objectives five through seven

Objective	Kallaloo connection	National connections	Evidence of learning
5 Colonial structures	CS.C.B.2 Cultural systems shaped by outside forces.	C3 Dimension 2, History: historical context. LFJ JU.9-12.12 and JU.9-12.13: levels of injustice and institutional harms.	Explanation linking family circumstances to coercive laws and debt.
6 Language and perspective	CS.C.C Culture through language, traditions, and environment.	C3 D2.His.11.9-12: source usefulness and purpose. NCTE/IRA 3 and 7: interpretation and research.	Comparison of names, annotations, translations, and identification links.
7 Preservation and sharing	CS.C.D.1: community learning. CS.C.E.2: cultural preservation. CS.C.D.4: documentation tools, when used.	C3 Dimension 4: communicating conclusions. NCTE/IRA 4, 11, and 12: audience, literacy communities, and purposeful communication.	Sourced exhibit label, peer review, and respectful sharing proposal.

Conditional connections

CS.C.C.2 concerns local language as a route to cultural understanding; Danish-to-English translation alone does not establish that alignment. NCTE/IRA 9 applies when students explicitly examine language diversity, rather than simply compare spelling. Add these connections only when the teaching activities address them.

CS.C.D.2 treats students as participants in teaching and learning. Student choice of inquiry and product can support that connection. CS.C.D.4 applies when learners use tools to document or transmit knowledge. A proposal to share an exhibit supports preparation for public communication; actual sharing provides stronger evidence of audience engagement.

Distribution checks

Check name variants, dates, disputed amounts, and identity links against the archive packet, using the preparation notes above.

Supply the packet title, compiler, source index, repository citations, and translation credits. Retain envelope numbers alongside document references.

Check school requirements for locally adopted standards and any required grade-level indicators before labeling the document as a formal compliance submission.

Review community-facing interpretations for accurate citations, uncertainty, culturally respectful language, and permissions for contributed material.

Sources and framework references

Historical source: Camilla Jensen, Finding a Life Story in the Danish West Indian Archives that was Never Intended to be Remembered, presenter notes supplied by VIAC, undated. The primary source archive packet accompanies classroom use; historical claims should cite the individual records, not only the presenter notes.

Framework descriptions and codes were checked against the following publisher resources on September 30, 2026. The objective-to-standard mappings are instructional judgments made for this lesson.

Virgin Islands cultural education

Virgin Islands Department of Education, Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education. Kallaloo Framework Print. Relevant sections: curriculum and student standards, PDF pages 4, 6, 8, 12, and 16. Use the framework's grade-band guide when selecting additional student performance indicators.

[Kallaloo Framework official PDF](#)

[Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education](#)

Social studies inquiry

National Council for the Social Studies. The College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards. 2013. Relevant printed pages: 36, 47, 54, and 58–59.

[C3 Framework official PDF](#)

Justice and respectful interpretation

Teaching Tolerance, now Learning for Justice. Social Justice Standards. Grades 9–12 outcomes, printed pages 11–12. The crosswalk uses selected outcomes in Diversity and Justice.

[Social Justice Standards official PDF](#)

Literacy and communication

National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association. Standards for the English Language Arts. 1996; reaffirmed by NCTE in 2012. Selected standards: 3, 4, 7, 11, and 12; standards 8 and 9 may support additional resource and language activities.

[NCTE and IRA Standards for the English Language Arts](#)

Student evidence log

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Essential question: How can we reconstruct a person's life from colonial records while respecting their humanity and the limits of the evidence?

Read each source

Envelope and document _____ Record date _____

Archive or collection and entry number _____

Record creator and purpose _____

What does the document directly state? Note names, relationships, occupation, status, or transactions. Distinguish original entries from later additions.

What other record supports or complicates this evidence? Give a date or entry number. Explain the link rather than relying only on a similar name.

What is a reasonable inference? What remains unknown?

Build and revise a claim

My initial claim and supporting source _____

New evidence and its source _____

My revised claim _____

Prepare your public interpretation

Write 250–350 words using at least three records. Include a central claim, how new evidence changed it, one uncertainty, and a connection to Virgin Islands/Crucian cultural knowledge. Cite each document by envelope, date, record type, and entry or page number when available. Add the archive or collection from the packet.

Who should encounter this finding, and how could you share it respectfully?

One question I would ask Anthony, and why the archive cannot yet answer it



 **The Virgin Islands
Architecture Center**
VIAC for Built Heritage and Crafts

**Registry: Sources in the Danish National
Archives on the history of the
Danish West Indies
(U.S. Virgin Islands):**

