

**Teachers Guide to:**

**The Ties that Bind, from Slavery to Freedom:  
The Turner-Nelson Family**

Three Generations of an African American Family  
Living in the Shadows of St. Paul's Church

An elementary school social studies curriculum

In this unit, students learn about the Turners and Nelsons, free persons of African descent. They were born in Westchester County, New York during and shortly after the American Revolution, and were an integral part of the rural community now known as Mount Vernon, New York. They owned land, paid taxes, and lived in peace with the other farmers. Life centered around their family, the old church, the cemetery, and Eastchester Creek. But there were also important changes that affected their lives. Lessons will emphasize these topics. Each will be introduced by a written passage, and will feature copies of records, letters, art work, diaries, and photographs of tombstones and architecture. Questions will be based on these materials, as well as the introductory paragraphs. Definitions of vocabulary words are offered as necessary. The lessons are aimed at developing the following skills:

Finding the main idea  
Noting details  
Comparing and contrasting  
Cause and effect  
Drawing conclusions  
Interpreting artifacts, diagrams, and language of the period  
Drawing inferences  
Applying math concepts and skills  
Applying background knowledge

## **Lesson 1. The Beginning of the story: The early life of Rebecca Turner**

**Background:** In this lesson, the students are introduced to the inspiring story of Rebecca Turner, a woman of strength and character. She was born enslaved, became free, married, and took care of a home and farm with her husband. She bore children, and by working and holding two jobs, was able to hold onto home and property. An important part of this lesson is the concept of manumission, which means the securing of freedom for a slave by a financial payment to the owner. Of note is the usage of the term “colored”, which is today unacceptable, but was the customary practice of the period, both in speaking and writing.

**Skills Developed:** Noting details, cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, applying math concepts, applying background knowledge

### **Definitions:**

Emancipation – Freedom from slavery

Manumitted - To have been freed from slavery by a financial payment to the owner.

### **Answers to Questions:**

1. Revolutionary War
2. A freed slave who was Rebecca’ husband.
3. Rebecca was freed in that year.
4. Mary
5. Glorianna Franklin
- 6 .Catherine , a slave of John G. Glover, was given her freedom
- 7 She was four years old
- 8 Rebecca
- 9 She was 29 years old
10. A probable answer would be that since the State had passed a gradual emancipation law, there had to be a way to keep track of children born to enslaved mothers who would eventually realize their freedom once they reached the designated age.

## **Lesson 2: Ben and Rebecca's Neighborhood**

**Background:** This lesson emphasizes the centrality of St. Paul's Church and cemetery in the lives of the Turners. It shows a plan of the St. Paul's Church community today, at the southern edge of Mt. Vernon, New York, and a superimposed circle segment shows Rebecca Turner Elementary School and Benjamin Middle School, local public schools named for the subjects of this curriculum guide. But it has an unusual feature; it includes the Turner farm and Guion's Tavern from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. How shall we present this to the children? Perhaps one way is to compare photographs of a person at different ages -- there are many pictures of Abraham Lincoln from youth to middle age; another possibility is for the children to bring in pictures of themselves at two different ages. Also, pictures of towns or cities illustrating differing periods could be used.. Certainly, the concept of showing past and present together must be introduced before the lesson is begun. Along with this, the important features of the map should be introduced or reviewed: the compass rose, the key -- and along with each number and heading the matching location on the map. Helpful also is the reminder that number 8 is not exactly similar to a geometric shape, but is close enough to identify as one.

**Skills Developed:** map skills, main idea, details, math skills and application, comparison and contrast

### **Definitions:**

Guion's -- A tavern near St. Paul's Church.

Descendants - Children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, Great great grandchildren in a family.

### Answers to Questions:

1. North
2. Rectangle
3. 400 ft.
4. South
5. 200 feet
6. Yes; it would have been a good place to work. It was very close to her home, so she could get there easily, probably walking.
7. No more than ten minutes.
8. The Rebecca Turner Elementary School and the Benjamin Turner Middle School. Also, the factory buildings that are represented but not named were certainly not there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Too, the Turner grave site would not really have existed while they were alive.
9. A plausible answer is that she was an admirable, historically interesting person who lived in the immediate vicinity.
  
10. No one answer here, but interesting to speculate. The church and the cemetery would be familiar; the creek, though now a modern industrial waterway, is still there. Many buildings would be unfamiliar. She might walk past the school now named for her and recognize it must be near her old neighborhood.

### **Lesson 3: Life along the Creek: Plenty of Food**

**Background:** If you were to visit Eastchester Creek today, you would see a stream that has nothing alive in it – no plants or animals. It was polluted by oil, coal, and chemicals from factories built along its shores in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and waste from the village that was growing and changing from a farming community to one of manufacturing and business. Of course, in Ben’s time, everyone believed that there would always be fresh water and air; no one realized the implications of the industrial revolution that was to come upon them.

You should discuss the picture before the class begins the assignment, pointing out that the arrows go from the animal that gets eaten to the eater. Children may be more familiar with the opposite, where the arrow points from the eater to its food catch.

Children may notice that many of the water creatures are larger than the fisherman, Ben. This is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate perspective, using two objects of the same size and moving them to near and far positions. This will explain the disparity in size between Ben and the water creatures. You may also remind the boys and girls that the underwater part of the picture is a literal rendering, while the top belongs to the context of the story..

**Skills developed:** Cause and effect; drawing conclusions; scientific observation.

**Definitions:**

Oyster – a two-shelled water animal

Community – a group of people or animals living together

Creatures - animals

### **Answers to Questions:**

1. Creek or stream
2. A water community
3. Arrows show creatures being eaten by larger creatures or animals.
4. Insects, minnow, sunfish, fisherman
5. Heron (bird) and the turtle
6. A man (Ben Turner)
7. A fish
8. Insects.
9. Probably four
10. Ben and Rebecca lived very close to the stream that supplied them with a constant supply of food, especially fish, but also (not necessarily pictured here) oysters and clams.

## **Lesson 4: A trusted Job for Benjamin**

**Background:** We are now introduced to Benjamin Turner who was also given his freedom before he met Rebecca. A man of character and determination, he not only farmed his land, but had a second job as assistant pounder, (a person who catches and keeps stray farm animals in an enclosed area until a fine is paid by the owner) . Both tasks demanded much physical labor; but much more important the job of assistant pounder demanded the trust of the townspeople, an extraordinary level of trust, at the time, for the town to place in an African American man who had been born into slavery. This is a subject that should be presented and discussed with tact and sensitivity.

**Skills Developed:** Reading comprehension: details, drawing conclusions, cause and effect

### **Definitions:**

Pounder – a man who catches escaped animals, keeping them until a fine is paid by the owner who then retakes possession of the animal

Manumission - freedom given to a slave when a sum of money is paid.

Constructed – built

Assistant – helper

Area - a place

### **Answers to Questions:**

1. The Pound
2. September 29, 1818
3. Four white feet and a white belly, and a white star in her forehead
4. Pigs, goats, horses
5. Town Clerk
6. A plausible answer is that in an agricultural community, where almost all the families owned barnyard animals, creating a large stock of pigs, cows, goats, etc., escapes were common, and more than one pounder was needed.
7. Going to Ben's home, the Pound, proving ownership, and paying the charges, or the fine;
8. One day
9. He was liked and trusted, and was willing to build the pound on his land which was near the center of the village so that the owners could get to him easily and reclaim their animals. Probably, by offering these terms, Ben knew he had a good chance of getting the job.
- 10 Animal shelters that take in stray dogs and cats. You would need the skills of knowing to properly care for and maintain those kinds of pets. It might require some re-tooling for Ben, since he lived at time when domestic pets were understood in a different context.



## **Lesson 5: A Place to Worship, but not on an equal basis**

**Background:** In this lesson, the students learn about the racial segregation faced by the Turner family at St. Paul's Church in the 1820s. The family of Ben and Rebecca Turner were members of St. Paul's; they lived in the neighborhood, Ben even held a trusted job in the community. But, to an extent, their membership in the church was always qualified. The 19<sup>th</sup> century prejudice of segregation limited their participation in the life of the parish.

Like most Protestant churches in the North in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. Paul's certainly accepted black worshippers. With the decline of slavery in Westchester County in the early 1800s, most of those newly freed, often deeply religious African American people joined the St. Paul's Episcopal Church located at the center of the Town of Eastchester. It was the only church for miles around. The Turners were among these. But the treatment was probably never equal, and one place this unfortunate prejudice is manifest is in the Sunday school at St. Paul's, conducted on a separate, segregated basis. That segregation is the basis of this lesson. The Turner children attended the separate "Colored" class on Sunday school. That term, which is derogatory in our times, but was commonly used in the 1800s, should be discussed with the children prior to having them engage the lesson. To help them with the lesson, point out that we are presenting the original page from the 1822 church records, but also providing a transcription to help them decipher the material.

Also, before presenting the lesson to the students, a discussion about racial segregation would be helpful. Point out that segregation in something like Sunday school was probably, unfortunately, common in Northern churches at the time. But it certainly violates our contemporary values of equality. Even in trying to understand the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this segregation in a house of worship, where all people were presumed equal in the eyes of God, seems especially unwarranted and cruel.

The seating of the Turner family in the gallery, or balcony was certainly, partly racial, but it was also a function of income and ability to pay. This was not racially segregated seating like a Southern courthouse in the Jim Crow era. Rather, all of the local people who could not obtain private pew boxes through donations were obliged to sit in the balcony. This included white town residents of modest means

and almost certainly all of the African Americans, who could not afford the donations necessary to obtain a private pew box.

It is very interesting to note that the Turner family left St. Paul's in the mid 1830s to join with a growing number of African American families in the vicinity to form a new, nearby congregation, the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. It is possible the inferior treatment they received at St. Paul's led to this exodus. Additionally, the Methodist Church offered a more emotional style of worship that black worshippers may have preferred. But an additional historic note of interest concerns the death of Benjamin Turner in the mid 1830s and Rebecca's assumption of leadership of the family. Perhaps Ben decided that his position as a respected townsman, and assistant pounder, required attendance at the local Episcopal church. Once he passed away, perhaps, Rebecca did not agree with that conception of a badge of respectability through attendance at St. Paul's, and was a leader in removing the family from the church to help establish an independent, black congregation.

**Skills developed:** Main idea, details, understanding historical documents, applying mathematical skills and concepts, drawing conclusions.

**Definitions:**

Services -- religious ceremonies

parish -- a group of people belonging to a church

segregated -- people separated by race

integrated -- races that are joined together

prejudice -- an unfair negative opinion of a group by race , sex, or religion.

**Answers to Questions:**

1. Yes; they went to church regularly.
2. It was primarily financial. They could not really afford a donation required to obtain a private family pew. Instead, they sat in the gallery, where no fee was required.
3. A follow up to number 2. The gallery seating was free, and provided on a first come first serve basis. It was used by community members who did not, and almost always could not, pay the money required for a private family pew.

4. Children at St. Paul's attended Sunday School, religious instruction prior to the regular service. Sunday School was conducted on a segregated basis, with the Turner children attending the "Colored" or black Sunday school. By the way, it is interesting to note that St. Paul's at the time had no parish hall, and Sunday school was conducted in the balcony.
5. The Sunday school roster lists 11 children and four parents, so there were seven more children than parents.
6. Do or DO, means what we would call ditto, or a repeat of the same information immediately above. So, instead of constantly writing Turner, the clerk who created the Sunday school roster just wrote Do for the rest of the children in that family.
7. Benjamin turner, with four.
8. Two -- Mitchell and Venus.
9. Moses Franklin.
- 10 The term at the time was "Colored." In our time, African American or black are acceptable.

## **Lesson 6: Hard World for Rebecca**

**Background:** In this lesson, the children learn about Rebecca's efforts to support her family after her husband's death in the mid 1830s through the development of a home-based laundry business. In a pre-industrial world, with no electricity, washing clothes was a labor intensive, time consuming and unpleasant task. Many people who had the means, or money, preferred to hire somebody else to wash their clothes.

Another important concept to recognize for this lesson is that there were not many ways for women – especially elderly women – to earn money during Rebecca Turner's lifetime. Besides cooking, one way was to take in laundry. But it was extremely tiring, and took more than a day to finish. In Rebecca's case, the laundry was probably a family project. It was also dangerous, for it meant using water heated over a fire to a boil which could spill and badly scald the laundress. Secondly, in the days of long skirts, the fire itself was a hazard. Many women were seriously burned, and some lost their lives. But washing was only half of the job. To iron, the laundress used two irons – one to flatten the laundry, and the second to be heated over the fire and ready to use when the first began to cool. Lastly, the laundry was folded and delivered – probably by the children. It was finally done – until next week! But for Rebecca's family, nothing was too difficult or dangerous for her!

**Skills Developed:** Understanding historical documents; applying mathematical concepts; comparison and contrast,

### **Definitions:**

Iron -- to flatten and smooth wrinkled clothes .

Hazard – danger.

Laundry - dirty clothes, pillows, sheets, and napkins that need to be washed.

### **Answers to Questions:**

1. By doing laundry for neighbors.
2. Rev. W.S. Coffey and probably other neighbors.
3. To prove that he paid her, \$7.50 Receipts are used today for the same reason.
- 4 Yes, it was hard and heavy work, and she was no longer young, by 1858.
5. There was no electricity nor Laundromats at that time. We use Laundromats, or machines and electric irons.
6. Probably. The receipt says for all laundry work completed till that day in 1858, and certainly implies that there would be more work.
- 7 A person could get burned by the fire, boiling water, or the hot irons.
8. The iron in use would start getting cool, so the other would have to be kept hot and ready to use.

The flat iron is lighter and easier to lift and use.

9. Wood, water, tub, soap, washboard, irons.

10 . 77

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## **Lesson 7: Another Way of Earning Money**

**Background:** As we can see through the previous lesson, Rebecca worked hard to earn money so that her family could survive. Besides laundry, she cooked at Guion's Tavern, located around the corner from St. Paul's. Before presenting this lesson, refer back to the map lesson, "Ben and Rebecca's Neighborhood", and point out the proximity of the tavern to the Turner farm. Like other taverns of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Guion's catered to stagecoach travelers on the highways, offering food, liquor, and overnight accommodation. There was a dining room, and usually a tap room only for men. Two travelers usually shared a room, so women did not usually travel by themselves. Rebecca was probably paid a small salary in addition to being allowed to keep the day's leftover food. The following recipe for fish chowder was surely used often, since the stream was near and filled with trout, oysters, and clams. It is taken from a cookbook of the period, although no guarantee is offered that Rebecca followed it exactly.

**Skills Developed:** Noting details, comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions, interpreting special idiom, drawing inferences.

### **Definitions:**

Chowder – Thick soup of fish or shellfish with vegetables and crackers.

Layer - Single thickness spread out over a surface (ex. A layer of tuna on a slice of bread)

Strew – to scatter. (She strewed crackers on top of the soup.)

Sauté – ( saw tay) To fry lightly in butter for a short time.

Seasoned- To have improved the flavor of food with salt, pepper, or other spices.

### **Answers to Questions:**

1. It was around the corner from St. Paul's, and a short distance from the Turner farm.
2. In both - food, drink, and a place to sleep are offered. But in today's motels, modern conveniences such as cellphones, T.V.s, computers, and swimming pools, as well as exercise rooms in the more upscale establishments are available, as well as dining rooms serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
3. New York City and Boston
4. She could be seriously burned by the boiling water if it spilled.
5. Bass is mentioned in the lesson about "Life Along the Creek," as well as oysters and clams. .
6. Salt and pepper.
7. Fish and clams make it distinctive.
8. A knife.
9. Rebecca used her cooking and laundering skills to earn more money and food. She cared about her family and worked hard to keep them fed and clothed.
- 10 The kitchen was in the back, as was the usual custom. It was rare then, and now, to have the kitchen anywhere else in a restaurant, because the guests would have to pass the kitchen to be seated.

### **Optional Activity: Historic Cooking, Johnny Cakes**

This is an activity in which the students assemble the ingredients and sample a common 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century baked food called *Johnny Cakes*.

**Ingredients:** 1 cup yellow cornmeal; ½ teaspoon salt; 1 cup boiling water; ½ cup milk

Mix the cornmeal and salt. Add the boiling water, stirring until smooth. Add the milk. Stir well. Grease a heavy, 12 inch frying pan. Set over medium-low heat. Drop teaspoons of the batter onto the pan. Cook until golden, about five minutes. Turn the cakes carefully with a metal spatula. Cook the other side five minutes. Serve the first cakes hot with butter and maple syrup while you cook the rest of the batter. Serve the rest with more butter and maple syrup. **Makes 12-15 cakes.**

## Lesson 8: Samuel Nelson Joins the Family

**Background:** In this lesson, the students learn more about the Turner family and also about employment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the biography of Samuel Nelson, who married one of Ben and Rebecca's daughters named Sarah. Born in 1797, Samuel arrived in the Eastchester area in the 1830s, and was taken in by the Grigg family who lived across the street from St. Paul's. His origins are obscure, and some local historians have speculated that he may have been a runaway slave escaping from bondage via the Underground Railroad, but that is not clear. Sam and Sarah married, and the young couple lived with the Turners on their farm. Samuel continued to work for the Griggs family, but he gained additional employment as the gravedigger at St. Paul's, a position he held for 25 years. It was not an easy job, especially in winter, for there were many deaths then - sometimes two or three in one week. He lived to the age of 70, and was buried in the St. Paul's cemetery. On his tombstone were written the words: "For thirty years attached to the family of John Grigg."

The students will be working with two sources to answer the questions in this lesson. One of them is the Sexton's book, which is a log of burials at St. Paul's recording the kinds of payment in good that Sam received for his work. It is an interesting, challenging document, and it would be helpful to review it with the children before they engage the lesson. Point out the variety of things he received for digging graves -- soap, fish line, a loaf of bread, Bottle of Beer, a pair of suspenders, a handkerchief. The numbers on the right represent the monetary value of those things. Clearly, it was a time when money had not yet become the sole means of paying people for work. The children also will be looking at Samuel Nelson's marble gravestone, which is located in the St. Paul's cemetery.

**Skills Developed:** Finding the main idea, applying math concepts and skills , comparing and contrasting , drawing inferences, noting details, interpreting language of the period (tombstone).



## **Definitions:**

Resident -- A person living in a place.

Sexton -- A person who works for a church, taking care of the building and property.

## **Answers to Questions:**

1 Sarah, the daughter of Ben and Rebecca Turner. Sam was older, born in 1797, while Sarah was born in 1809.

2. John Griggs. He showed kindness, and probably had a fairly large house. He wanted to help him survive.

3. A reasonable presumption here is that the Sexton, who was named Theodosius Hunt, was an educated man, since the penmanship is clear and stylish.

4. The numbers represent the monetary value of the items, in dollars and cents.

5. It could be that Sam and his family valued goods and merchandise more than currency. It does show that at the time people still lived in a barter world, where services (in this case digging graves) were sometimes traded for goods.

6. Some of them are a handkerchief, Bottle of Beer, Soap, suspenders Bread, fish line.

7. Possible answers are the loaf of bread, as a basic source of food, while fish line, which would help catch fish in the nearby creek, also relates to nourishment. Soap is a hygienic necessity, and could also perhaps help with Rebecca's laundry business. Some of the other items -- handkerchief, Beer, suspenders -- are arguably of less vital importance.

8. He died in 1867, at age 70, so he was born in 1797.

9. The Grigg family took him in when he first arrived in the town. Over the intervening years, Samuel probably continued to be attached to them through employment as a handyman, maintenance worker. Additionally, a bond of loyalty and friendship likely developed over the course of 30 years.

10. Always an interesting question. Who takes care of the nurse when she is sick? Who delivers the midwife's child? No one answer here, but likely it would have been other members of the Turner-Nelson family, or maybe the church sexton was compelled to hire a temporary gravedigger until they could fill the position.

## **Lesson 9: A long life ends**

**Background:** In this lesson, the students learn about inheritance and memorial stones through the poignant story of the death of Rebecca Turner in 1874, at age 93. At a time when life expectancy was perhaps 50-55, Rebecca's life trajectory - an African American woman born into slavery, mother of six, widowed in her 60s, struggling to sustain a large family, living into her tenth decade -- is extraordinary. It is probably a testament to the strength and perseverance of a remarkable woman. The students will be working with a portion of Rebecca's last will and testament. Friends and neighbors helped her prepare the will, probably including Rev. Coffey of St. Paul's Church, who lived next door. Wills were not required in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but Rebecca was a property owner and had many dependents. Obviously, she wanted to arrange a reasonable disposition of her possessions. Again, as with previous exercises in this curriculum, we present the original document, and then a transcription of relevant portions, since the will would probably be hard for the children to read. It would be helpful to review the concept of a will with the students.

They will also utilize a granite stone which marks Rebecca's burial site at St. Paul's. She was buried in at the rear of the cemetery near her daughter; eventually, other members of her family were buried there. It might be helpful to discuss with the children the idea of a family plot in a cemetery. Rebecca's grave was unmarked for many years, a common situation for people of modest means in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stone was placed at her grave in modern times. The location of her grave site far behind the church is often interpreted as a form of racial separation, unfortunately common in Northern cemeteries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other African Americans -- both enslaved and, like Rebecca, free -- are buried nearby. These people had been enslaved to prominent local families. But the St. Paul's cemetery was never officially segregated, and for much of the burial yard's history plot locations were distributed to families regardless of race.

**Skills Developed:** Drawing conclusions, understanding historical documents, noting details; applying mathematical concepts.

**Definitions:**

Advanced - Given (such as money that was given)

Bequeath - To leave or give in a will

Devise - To plan in a will

Estate- All of the property and money left by a person who has died.

Executrix - A woman who carries out the wishes of a person who made a will and later died.

**Answers to Questions:**

1. Rebecca Turner died on March 27, 1874 (mentioned in the paragraph), and she was buried on March 30, 1874 (on the gravestone), three days later.
2. Possible answers about shorter average life span in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, compared with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are: much less advanced health care and procedures of public health, poorly trained doctors, unsanitary food and beverages, lack of home climate controls, among many others. The interesting point here, of course, is that Rebecca was an exception to the rules, living into her tenth decade.
3. Probably not. At the bottom, we see she acknowledged the document with her mark, and not her signature. We don't really know much about her formal education, and most legal documents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were prepared by lawyers or clerks.
4. Two years, since she wrote the will in 1872 and passed away in 1874.
5. From the beginning of the will we see that one of the daughters, Georgianna, was married, while the other daughter, Mary Tredwell, was a widow. They were both daughters of Rebecca and had been married.
6. According to the will, Rebecca had already provided a home and shelter for her son in law Samuel, even after Sam's wife Sarah had died, and also for Samuel's children, who were Rebecca's grandchildren.
7. Opinions could vary, but maybe: Wife, Mother, Grandmother, Cook, Laundress, Remarkable Woman.
8. It is a modern granite gravestone, and does not look like it has been there for 140 years.
9. Looks like winter, because of the snow on the ground near her stone.
10. Answers could vary, but it could be the family plot or the possibility of racial separation; both of which are accurate.

## **Lesson 10: Their Land No More**

**Background:** In this lesson, the children learn about the final, unsuccessful efforts of the Turner-Nelson family to retain the land alongside the creek, near St. Paul's Church. This occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and by then the district had been incorporated into the City of Mt. Vernon. Sarah Nelson, daughter of Samuel Nelson and Sarah, and granddaughter of Ben and Rebecca Turner, was the last heir to live on the land. The lesson will be based on two interesting, emotional letters that Sarah, often called Libby, exchanged with Mt. Vernon in a legal and financial battle over the plot. They are correspondence designed to forestall foreclosure. The letters powerfully reflect pride in their land, the conviction in trying to sustain their inheritance, and the shared recollection of how Ben and Rebecca had cared out an existence following slavery. Before starting the lesson, it would be helpful to lead a brief discussion with the children about taxes on land charged by local governments. They would need to understand the obligation to pay those taxes, and what could happen if a homeowner does not pay.

The industrialization of the area around St. Paul's in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century created conditions that were not consistent with the residence of the Nelson women, who, with great dignity and resilience, were still trying to live like their grandmother -- maintain a small farm, and operate a small, hand wash laundry concern. Perhaps more importantly, Mt. Vernon was eager to clear the remaining residential character of the neighborhood and complete the district's industrialization. The Nelson women were among other local landowners who were, in various ways, encouraged to depart.

Harassed by drunkards, pressured by new city regulations and escalating taxes, she stayed until 1908, and was finally forced to move to New Jersey, and years later to Nyack, New York, leaving the land uninhabited. In 1912, land along the creek was sold to developers who proposed to use it for coal, construction materials, and oil storage. The project was blocked for twenty years though, because of the Turner land -- whose owner (Libby) or deed could not be found. But in the 1930s, the project was revived, and attorneys were hired to clear any questionable deeds to the land along the creek; this included the Turner land. In 1934, Libby was found. She defended her claim to the Turner property, but because she had not been in physical possession of the land nor paid all the taxes owed, it was

confiscated by the city in 1938. Libby lived three more years after she lost her land; she died in 1941. In 2015, Mt. Vernon memorialized Benjamin and Rebecca Turner by renaming local schools in their honor.

**Skills Developed:** Noting details, using background knowledge, drawing inferences, comparing and contrasting, background knowledge

**Definitions:**

Devise -- To plan in a will

Bequeath – To give or leave in a will

**Answers to Questions:**

1, 100 years

2 Granddaughter of Benjamin and Rebecca Turner.

3. She was being harassed; garbage was being thrown on her land, and the well water was dirtied with ashes. She was not able to earn money by doing laundry.

4. She probably did laundry again.

5. “grant parents”

6. 3 generations

7. Libby was the last owner of the land her grandparents had settled. She finally lost the land because life became too difficult, and after she moved, the city took it for non-payment of taxes.

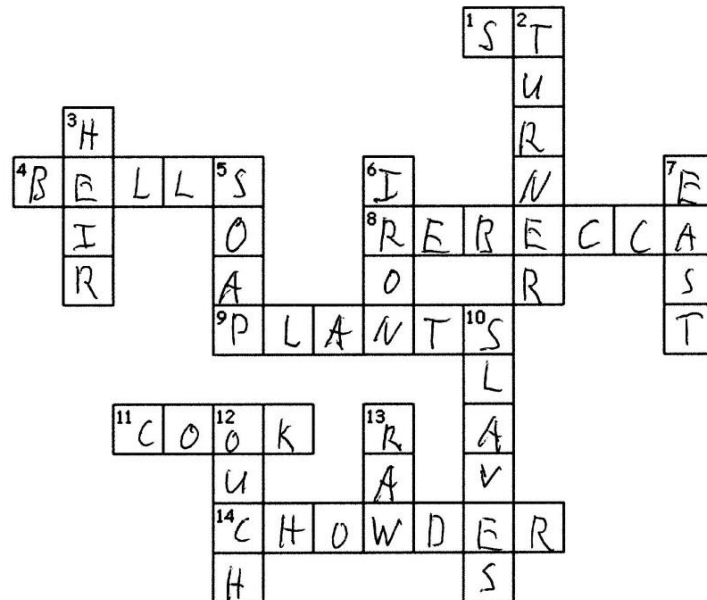
8. The tavern (saloon)

9 “The land is in your hands. I am the last heir, the city may go right on and do what they like as before.”

10. Former slaves Benjamin and Rebecca Turner settled on land next to St. Paul’s and kept a small farm. Their daughter married Sam Nelson who worked hard as a pounder (catching stray farm animals) and a gravedigger, while Rebecca worked as a cook at an inn, and also did laundry. Years later, their daughter Libby also took in laundry, but was driven out as her surroundings became more and more unlivable. She moved, but her land was taken over by the town because she was behind on her taxes. She died not long after.

## Crossword Puzzle

Has your class done crossword puzzles? If they are familiar with them, a quick review should be sufficient. Otherwise, the first question (1 across) should be done together, noting that each answer will begin with the number that goes with the clue. Depending on the class's understanding, they may then be ready to begin. Otherwise, you may want to try one more -- perhaps 9 down. Please note that the first letter of each word has been given. All of the answers are words and terms that were introduced in each unit. Here is the completed puzzle, with all the answers penciled in. :



## Suggestions for Further Exploration of this Topic

### Field Trips:

African Burial Ground National Monument, Ted Weiss Federal Building, 290 Broadway, New York, NY 10007. 212-238-4367. [www.nps.gov/abg](http://www.nps.gov/abg)

St. Paul's Church National Historic Site, 897 S. Columbus Ave., Mt. Vernon, NY 10550. 914-667-4116 [www.nps.gov/sapa](http://www.nps.gov/sapa).

### Readings:

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