

The Prince of Smith's Castle

Objective

This lesson aims to further humanize enslaved people through the student's understanding of one individual, his life as an enslaved laborer, and how he navigated through long years of enslavement to raise his status and value among the whites competing for his skills. Additionally, the lesson plan will show how he was able to earn his own living and leave his mark: with a gracefully carved tombstone in Newport.

Introduction:

Africans brought many skills into New England that were traditional in their homeland. Enslaved with such skills were often purchased by plantation owners and private businessmen to increase their own profits by having free, skilled labor.

Some enslaved people as the subject of this lesson, learned to improve their lives even as enslaved by use of these skills, as well as learning others that elevated their status with households and communities, and gained them employment after emancipation.

RIDE Standards:

SS4.3.3 Enslaved and free Africans: Analyze the lives of free and enslaved Africans in Rhode Island

Connection to the following Rhode Island Anchor Standards:

H.CC Change/Continuity, H.HP Historical Perspectives, H.IG Individuals/Groups

Guiding Questions for Instruction:

What types of work were enslaved Rhode Islanders made to do?

How did some Black Rhode Islanders obtain their freedom?

In what ways did Black Rhode Islanders, enslaved and free, develop a new culture?

Note for Educators:

This lesson plan is divided into two parts to allow for two sessions when necessary. The use of documents as well as the hands -on activity are designed to further the understanding of enslavement as an economic benefit to the slave holder, and the resilience and fortitude many enslaved had that allowed them to improve their lives while enslaved and after emancipation.

Skills Worksheet:

On a sheet of paper, have students write down a list of five skills they believe that Africans held in their homeland from the following categories. Have students compare their list with the one below:

Farming:

herding cattle, goat herding, planting seed, planting rice, stable hand, horse grooming

Home skills:

Cooking, cleaning, laundry, seamstress (making and repairing clothes), spinning yarn, weaving

Skilled labor:

Carpentry, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, brick maker, potterer, coffee and chocolate grinder.

Take five examples and discuss how each worker would perform their skill:

Documents:

Newspaper advertisements for both runaway enslaved people and others who were advertised to be sold give us an idea of what skills were held by each enslaved person, and the value those skills gave to their owners.

Transcripts:

Maryland Gazette February 28, 1771

TO BE SOLD

A Compleat House Wench, about 25 years old that understands baking, brewing, cooking, washing, ironing and is a compleat seamstress..."

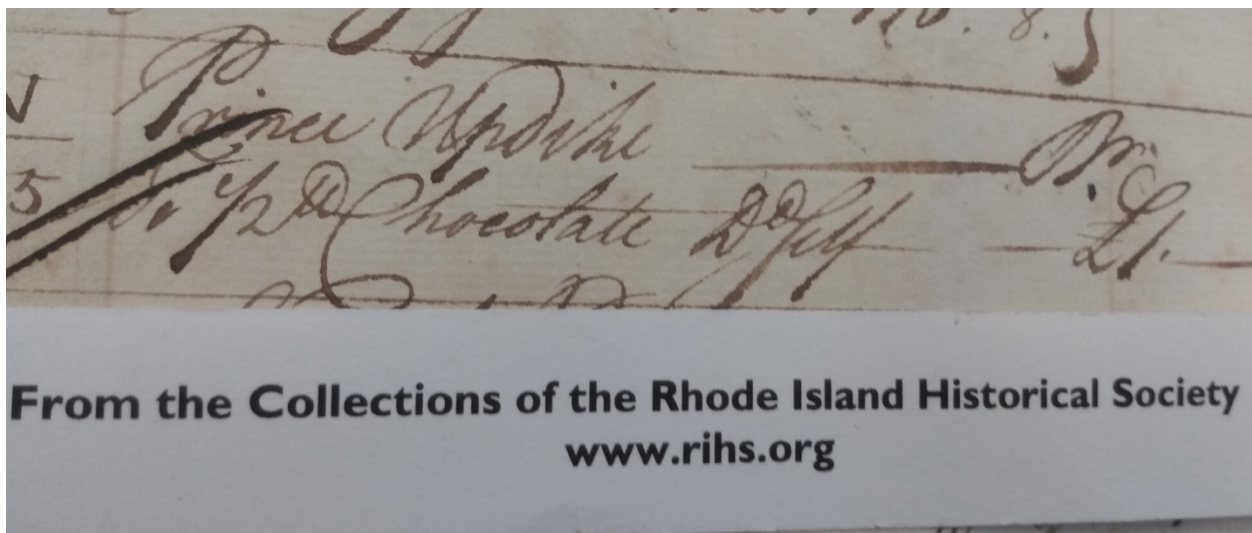
Boston Evening Post August 16, 1773

"A Negro Man about 28 years of Age who is a good Cook and capable of doing any Work both within and out Doors, very honest and not given to Drink

Have students visit <https://adverts250project.org/2021/02/> to view primary documents

The Prince of Smith's Castle Part II: Prince's Story:

As a boy, Prince would have been used as a domestic worker in the household, perhaps as a personal servant to Daniel Updike, but seems later to have been used in the kitchen.

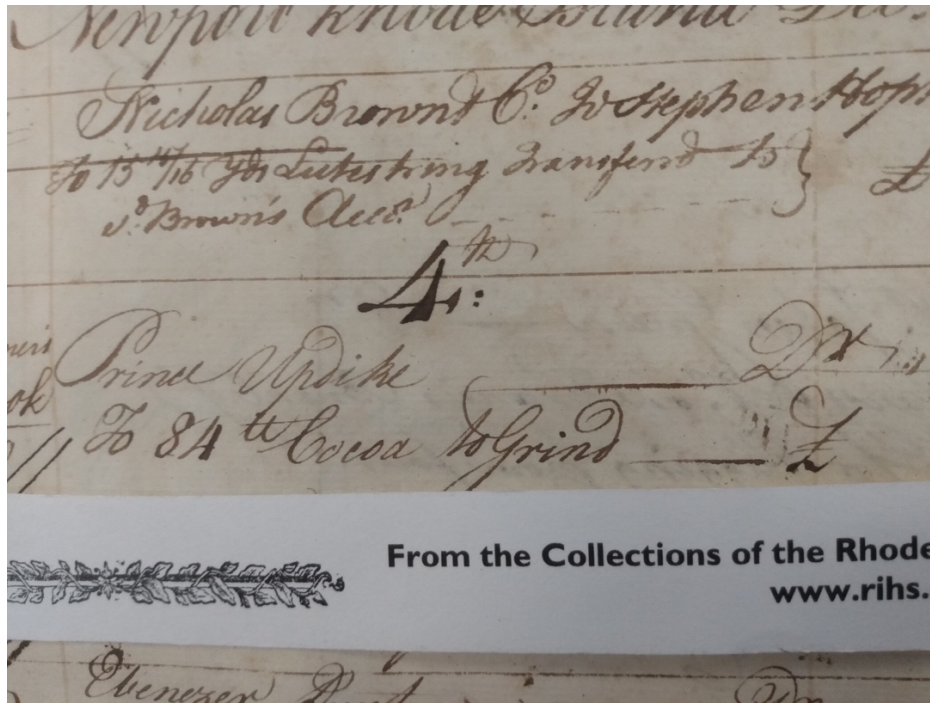


At some point Prince learned the skill of grinding chocolate, most likely from another enslaved worker of West African descent where several regions have practiced cocoa farming, grinding, and drinking chocolate for centuries.

Prince became known for his skill and was soon grinding chocolate for the Newport merchant Aaron Lopez. He did this for some years while still enslaved to the Updike family who would be given the wages for Prince's work, based upon 20% of the profit from the sale of ground chocolate. Lopez obtained the cocoa beans from South America and brought them back to Newport for grinding.

Prince would eventually work for his own wages from Lopez. He is listed as a "master chocolate grinder" in the merchants ledgers and account books. While he received cash for some work, at other times he received wages in Jamaican Rum, the very commodity or goods that Lopez used to buy enslaved people from the Gold Coast of Africa.

Document 2: Ledger of Aaron Lopez showing Prince Updike's name, 1770



Guiding Questions:

How many pounds of chocolate did Prince grind as listed in the ledger?

How much did he earn in wages?

Prince's skill at grinding chocolate gained him good wages and Prince was able to arrange for the purchase and carving of a fine tombstone that was made upon his death in 1781 at the age of 79.

Activity: Grinding chocolate

Materials: cocoa or coffee beans

3-4 cakes of dark chocolate

Wooden board or cutting board

Rolling pin

Mortars and pestles

Several small bowls

Cups and saucers
Hot water
Sugar

Demonstration:

Explain that the task of chocolate grinding chocolate was no easy chore. The beans were delivered in sacks to the chocolate grinder, and with very primitive tools, the beans were broken then ground on a board with the rolling pin, and then swept into a long container.

Teacher will demonstrate method on board.

Instructions for students:

Break chocolate cakes into pieces. Place a few in the mortar bowl and grind it into a fine powder that can be emptied into the bowls. Once ground and placed in bowls, blend in sugar with the chocolate.

Teachers:

Heat hot water. While water is heating spoon chocolate and sugar mixture into the cups.
Fill these with hot water and stir.