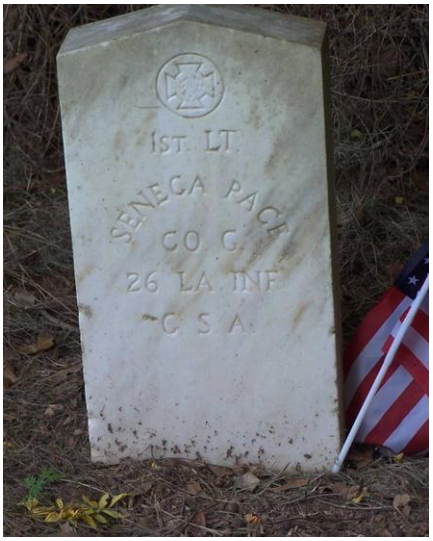
SENECA PACE: OVERSEER OF OAKLAND PLANTATION

The Overseer's House at Oakland Plantation

Background Information

Most large antebellum plantations had an overseer. The overseer was employed by the plantation owner. An overseer was responsible for the plantation's day-to-day operation. He made sure crops were tended to, buildings were maintained, and animals were looked after. The overseer was also responsible for supervising the enslaved laborers. "Overseers were expected to coerce efficient, profitable labor from reluctant slave gangs while simultaneously adhering to their employers' warnings not to abuse the slaves by pushing them too hard."[1] Most overseers did not remain employed on a plantation for more than a year or two.



Seneca Pace would go on to serve with the Confederate army during the Civil War. Today he is buried near Black Lake in Natchitoches Parish.

Seneca Pace was Oakland's overseer just prior to the Civil War. During his time at Oakland, Pace kept a daily record of events. His entries consisted of a few sentences describing the weather and the work accomplished each day. Occasionally he mentioned other events like slave marriages, holidays, and social events.

Objectives/Long-Term Targets

1. I can cite text-based evidence to support analysis of literary text. (RL.6.1)
2. I can prepare and myself to participate in discussions. (SL.6.1)
3. I can express my own ideas clearly during discussions. (SL.6.1)
4. I can determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies. (RH.6-8.4)

Number of days 2

Intended grade/Range: 6

Resource materials:

Primary source: Seneca Pace Journal - actual accounts written by Oakland Plantation overseer, Seneca Pace.

Secondary sources: "Duties of an Overseer"- National Park Service Site Bulletin, and "The Overseer's Job"- Extracts from *The Cotton Plantation Records and Account Book No. 3, by Thomas Affleck 1857*

Teaching/Launch:

- Introduce the lesson with a guided student analysis of duties of an overseer on a Plantation.
- During the 1860's Seneca Pace was the overseer at Oakland Plantation. The overseer is not immediately under his employer's eye, but is left for days or weeks, perhaps months, to use his own judgment to manage the plantation.
- Students will be invited to read orally in their groups, Read the journal entries of Seneca Pace in the months of January 1861 and May 1861, The Duties of the Overseer, and the Thomas Affleck document. Teacher will circulate and support students as they read the entries of Seneca Pace on Oakland Plantation. Students will "stop and jot" (journaling) important facts.

Exploration:

The class will be divided into groups of four: Recorder- records all information for the group, Discussion Director- makes sure that everyone in the group provides input for the answers, Reporter- reports inferences *(and is the only person in the group that the teacher speaks to)*, Task manager- keeps the group on task and settles any differences that may come up in the discussion.

Students will be encouraged to refer to specific words or sentences in the text support their thinking. Based on evidence, students will judge whether or not Senceca Pace should have acted in a particular way. Students will have to support their views and decide what information would they use to support their view…? Students will take the role as an editor on a newspaper; they will use their notes and other resources to create an editorial for the newspaper. Teacher will circulate and support students in their work. Listen for students to be asking each other questions, coach and model as necessary, without giving answers; instead modeling the types of questions should be doing to collaborate effectively. Students will peer-review each other's work for accuracy with grammar and correct subject verb agreement, finally, students will type in their editorial on the computer and share with their work with their classmates.

The Duties of an Overseer

Magnolia Plantation Overseer's House

Oakland Plantation Overseer's House

Who Was the Overseer?

The overseer on a plantation was the "middle man," whose responsibilities included the management of the enslaved laborers according to the master's orders. The overseer lived in a separate house away from the 'big house," near the quarters or cabins occupied by the slaves and attended to the day-to-day farming activities of the plantation for the owner. The many duties of the overseer allowed the plantation owner the freedom to be away from daily plantation management. The overseer was often responsible for disciplining the workers and was a more active participant in the running of the plantation's daily operations than the master himself or herself.

Magnolia Plantation

W. B. Eddins was the Magnolia Plantation overseer in the early 1850s. In several of his letters, he apprises the owner, Ambrose LeComte II, of a number of issues of which overseers were responsible. These included the health (or death) of slaves, construction work, the progress of the crops, weather, the livestock, and business transactions. Family history says that in 1864, retreating Union troops threatened to burn the main house. The overseer at the time, Mr. Miller, said they would do that "over his dead body." The troops then shot Mr. Miller and burned the house.

Oakland Plantation

Seneca Pace was the overseer for Phanor Prud'homme on Oakland Plantation between the years 1852–1867. Pace left behind seven books of extensive records concerning the events on the plantation. The events of 1860 are chronicled on a daily basis and provide a detailed look at the activities of the enslaved work force.

By the standards of the day, Pace managed Oakland Plantation scientifically. A copy of *The Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book No. 3* by Thomas Affleck was found in Pace's possessions. In addition to providing a place to keep plantation records, this book contained a "how to" guide for the overseer and included strict guidelines for the running of the plantation and in the treatment of the enslaved laborers.

The Overseer's Job

Extracts from *The Cotton Plantation Records and Account Book No. 3*, by Thomas Affleck, 1857

-On entering upon your duties, inform yourself thoroughly of the condition of the plantation, negroes, stock, implements, etc.

-The health of the negroes under your charge is an important matter. Much of the usual sickness among them is the result of carelessness and mismanagement. Overwork, or unnecessary exposure to rain, insufficient clothing, improper or badly cooked food, and night rambles, are all fruitful causes of disease.

-It is indispensable that you exercise judgment and consideration in the management of the Negroes under your charge. Be *firm*, and at the same time *gentle* in your control. Never display yourself before them in a passion; and even if inflicting the severest punishment, do so in a mild, cool manner, and it will produce a tenfold effect. When you find it necessary to use the whip—and desirable as it would be to dispense with it entirely, it is necessary at times—apply it slowly and deliberately, and to the extent you are determined, in your own mind, to be needful before you began.

-You will find that an hour devoted every Sabbath morning to their moral and religious instruction, would prove a great aid to you in bringing about a better state of things amongst the negroes. The effect upon their general good behavior, their cleanliness and good conduct on the Sabbath, is such as alone to recommend it to the Planter and Overseer.

-Next to the Negroes, the Stock on the place will require your constant attention. You can, however, spare yourself much trouble by your choice of a stock-minder, and by adopting and enforcing a strict system in the care of the stock. It is a part of their duty in which Overseers are generally most careless.

-The implements and tools require a good deal of looking after. By keeping a memorandum of the distribution of any set of tools, they will be much more likely to be forthcoming at the end of the month.

-Few instances of good management will better please an employer, than that of having all the winter clothing spun and woven on the place.

-Few plantations are so rich in soil, as not to be improved by manure. Inform yourself of the best means, suited to the location and soil of the place under your charge, of improving it in this, and in every other way.

-In conclusion,-- Bear in mind that *a fine crop* consists, first, in an increase in the number, and a marked improvement in the condition and value of the negroes; second, an abundance of provision of all sorts for man and beast carefully saved and properly housed; third, both summer and winter clothing made at home; also, leather tanned, and shoes and harness made when practicable; fourth, an improvement in the productive qualities of the land, and

in the general condition of the plantation: fifth, the team and stock generally, with the farming implements and the buildings, in fine order at the close of the year; and young hogs more than enough for next year's killing; *then*-- as heavy a crop of cotton, sugar or rice, as could possibly be made under the circumstances, sent to market in good season and of prime quality.

Daily Record of Passing Events on *P. Prudhomme* Plantation
During the week commencing on the first day of Jan. 1860
Seneca Pace Overseer

First Sunday-Cold ground froze hard fair sun
Shine all day froze all day in shade
Negroes dance last nite to day all day
Good conduct none drunk out the way
Stock in bad order

2-Monday- Cold ice all day disagreeable cold
Negroes dance all nite stop at day
Negroes sleep all day evry thing still
I find they have danced enough
Once all well satisfied

3-Tuesday- At work men cut coal wood
Teems hall it trash gang cut stalks
Gin run this side saw mill stop
Shaft broke at top plate of steam chest

4-Wednesday- Warm and pleasant except
mudy roads finish gathering corn
Geather for negroes much ate by black
Birds and crows

5-Thursday- Threaten rain gather negroes corn
teems fail. Bad days work

6-Friday- Finish gathering corn to 11 o'clock
Rain began lite at 11 o'clock got harder
And harder to dark no intermition
Evry thing covered with water
Moved cattle on this side in field

7-Saturday- Warm sun shine all day
Wet and mudy sun set fair hall
Negroes corn to stable P.M.
Press cotton this side

Daily Record of Passing Events on *P. Prudhomme* Plantation
During the week commencing on the 8th day of Jan. 1860
Seneca Pace Overseer

8-Sunday- Pleasant day heavy fog in
Morning. Then fair and pleasant hall
Negroes corn to stable finish to one o'clock
Stock improve slow clover none

9-Monday- Press cotton with men
Trash gang cut stalks carts hall
Pails cover coal kill Work on corn mill
Quite warm fogg heavy in morning threaten
Rain P.M. rain bow cloudy

10-Tuesday- Rain lite morning and evening
Not stop work in evening strong
South wind threaten rain
Much hall cotton to river cut wood in
Field repair road cut stalks

11-Wednesday- Rain lite change coal north wind
Rain at dark cut wood finish cutting
Stalks other side in morning
Hall cotton 50 bales 5 teems
Road heavy full of mud

12-Thursday- Rain last nite heavy today near
All day cold south wind disagreeable
Evry thing flooded with finish pressing
Other side 10 bales thins side 16 bales
Hall 25 bales cotton nothing else done

13-Friday- Rain cool north wind wet and disagreeable
Hall 50 bales cotton
Work on bone due road not much
Done gin finish what cotton in
mageazine hall from new gin
Not much done

14-Saturday- Pleasant day except mudy disagreeable
time hall cotton 50 bales hall cotton from new gin to mule gin
trash gang spin work bank &c

Daily Record of Passing Events on *P. Prudhomme* Plantation
During the week commencing on the 13th day of May 1860
Seneca Pace Overseer

13-Sunday- Some appearance of rain south wind
Crop improve corn doing well very
Uneave cotton grow slow plenty of vines
& grass need sweeps bad land in fine
order for work teem good stock fine river continue to rise

14-Monday- threaten rain in morning & evening hot day
25 sweeps run round cotton this side slow
Work googd work plenty of vines 5 feet roe
Clean 6 feet not so good hoes in corn good work
River change red or mudy water
One teem for plank

15-Tuesday- warm hot sun to late P.M. then heavy
Cloud north west cool wind hard thunder
& lighten no rain threaten much
25 sweeps good headway run round cotton
Hoes in corn work thin and sucker slow
One teem for plank

16-Wednesday- Threaten Rain Quite warm sun hot
Sweep finish this side to twelve all except
Front that had been sweed sweep cane
Cross P.M. other side run round cotton good
Hoes scrape second time elem tree cut bad
Slow 2 on roe hall piano from favrons

17-Thursday- Some appearance of rain lighten south
& east at dark quite hot day
24 sweep run round new ground then behind
Hoes finish cotton in corn land scraping late
Then one on roe slow work
Corn roll in heat of day

18-Friday- hot sultry to twelve then fine breeze
from north fine day for work
sweeps finish other side run round to
twelve cross on this side P.M. begin at cane
slow bad roughf work hoes finish new
land other side put to one stalk singe hand

19-Saturday- some appearance of rain wind north
Thence east & south quite warm
Some 50 acres of worst out good work
hoes thin cotton other side to one good
river rise slow cotton improve fast
cotton suffer for rain

Daily Record of Passing Events on *P. Prudhomme* Plantation
During the week commencing on the 20 day of May 1860
Seneca Pace Overseer

20-Sunday- threaten rain much needed for corn & cotton
South wind strong corn wilt in stiff land
New land in places this side leaf drawed
Look lice I see none stock good
Plough teem fine fat & nice

21-Monday- threaten rain in morning south wind high
Blow off clouds-all hands on hoes
Carry 25 roes finish other side to one stalk
On this side at 10 o'clock scrape close &
Clean tite slow work 2 roes
Cotton sill plenty in place

22-Tuesday- threaten rain south wind not strong
Hoes make good headway carry 26 roes
Some lice on old land cotton new land
Cotton leaf small draw up some stalks no leaf
Stalk look green to be growing I cant see
What injure it river on stand

23-Wedenesday- Some appearance of rain much needed
Hoes carry 25 roes good work good headway
New land one hand on roes old land 2 on roe
pusley & vines grow fast corn wilt stiff
Land young corn does not come out of twist
During the nite one cart hall seed on rescue
New moon lies near on her back north

24-Thursday- threaten rain much in morning then
Fair & hot sultry disagreeable hot
23 sweeps on this side sweep out middle
Good headway & good work hoes finish
Back on buy all stiff land near land near gin one
Hand on roe good work fair headway

25-Friday- hot sun shine with power very sultry
Disagreeable hot sweeps make good head way
Good headway single hand on roe
White wash my house one teem carry grate to mill
River I believe falls
Locust make their appearance not injure yet

26-Saturday- hot hot dry dusty & disagreeable hot
Sweeps finish this side to 12 all clean
except little front to Pass with hoes
not any appearance of rain wind north
holleday with hands P.M.

Assessment Rubric

	4. Distinguished	3. Proficient	2. Apprentice	1. Novice
Research-Quality: Information from reputable sources	Included facts, quotes, and paraphrasing from reliable sources. Included research from subject-matter experts.	Included facts, conclusions, and opinions from reliable sources.	Included a mixture of facts from reputable sources and opinions from unreliable sources.	Included more opinion than fact. Information was taken from unreliable sources.
Writing-Ideas: Interesting, informative details	All details were unique, interesting, and related to and supported the profile idea. -Writing included information based on fact.	Writing had many interesting details which supported the profile idea. Writing included interesting information .	Writing had three or more details that supported the main idea.	Writing had few details.
Content-Creativity: Unique delivery	Project demonstrated student's own interpretation and expression of research material. Used pictures, images, or other visual aids to display information in multiple ways.	Used student-created materials as well as existing material from other sources. Student devised a creative way to design or deliver the project.	Information was factual but showed little student interpretation. Project based primarily on sample work. Student added one or more original ideas.	Project was built from a template, designed only as prescribed, or was based entirely on sample work.
Organization-Time Management: Uses time wisely	Used time well. Work was turned in early or on time.	Most work was done on time.	Some work was not done on time. Monitored progress occasionally. Did not change work habits or schedule accordingly. Worked frantically to finish project on time.	Did not use time well. Little or no work was done on time. Did not monitor progress adequately. Project was not completed on time.
Design-Layout and Organization: Organized and easy to read	Content was well organized with headings and subheadings. Text and graphics were neatly organized and made the project easy to read.	Project was organized with headings and subheadings. Text and graphics were placed to make the project easy to read.	Most of the project was organized. The placement of text and graphics sometimes made the project hard to read.	Project was hard to read. There is no clear structure. Text and graphics were randomly placed.

Connections to Louisiana Curriculum Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Site Visit:

Oakland Plantation is a unit of Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Oakland is located about 10 minutes from downtown Natchitoches.

Cane River Creole National Historical Park strives to connect students to our resource, while reinforcing the curriculum that they are taught at home or in the classroom. Regardless of your group size or time constraints, we will do our best to provide a meaningful educational experience.

To schedule a guided tour at Cane River Creole National Historical Park's Oakland or Magnolia Plantations please call 318 356-8441.