

Guide Title	Educator Overview
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INTRODUCTION

The Owens-Thomas House is a mansion located in downtown Savannah. Shipping merchant Richard Richardson commissioned architect William Jay to build it in 1816. After Richardson sold the mansion it became a boarding house. When famous French general the Marquis de Lafayette visited Savannah in 1825, he stayed at the boarding house owned by Mary Maxwell. In 1833, politician and plantation owner George W. Owens purchased the stately mansion.

Both Richardson and Owens made vast sums of money exploiting the system of slavery. Richardson profited from transporting enslaved people and brokering their sale while Owens owned hundreds of enslaved workers and servants on his many Georgia plantations. The Owens-Thomas House is essentially a living record of wealth and a lifestyle afforded to some southern whites because of slavery in the antebellum South. It is grand in its design and display of affluence. Additionally, there is a slave quarters on the grounds where nine - 14 enslaved servants lived at any one time. This property is unique precisely because it offers a more complete history. Visitors can hear the stories of the individuals enslaved here along with those of their enslavers.

Not only can users explore the lives of the people who lived and were enslaved here, users can also look at two larger views: the economy of coastal Georgia and how all of these systems and interactions played out in the city of Savannah.

STANDARDS

SSUSH2b. Describe the Middle Passage, the growth of the African population and their contributions, including but not limited to architecture, agriculture, and foodways.

SS8H4c. Explain how technological developments, including the cotton gin and railroads, had an impact on Georgia’s growth.

SS8H5a. Explain the importance of key issues and events that led to the Civil War; include slavery and states’ rights.

SSUSH7d. Explain how the significance of slavery grew in American politics including slave rebellions and the rise of abolitionism.

SSUSH9a. Explain the importance of the growing economic disparity between the North and the South through an examination of population, functioning railroads, and industrial output.

APPROACHES

We recognize that the topic of slavery is a challenging one for teachers. Recent surveys and studies have shown that Americans are very hesitant to discuss the issue, and when we do, we often miss the mark in extracting the core lessons and truths of that history.

Resources

- [Teaching Hard History](#) is an excellent framework from the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- [Their podcast](#) of the same name features leading historians offering teaching tips for discussing slavery during different historical periods.
- [Slavery and the Making of Modern America](#) is a series from PBS with lessons and clips.
- [C3 Inquiries](#) hosts several in-depth lessons on slavery throughout American history.
- [The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross](#) is a series hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

SENSITIVITY

We also recognize that words have power. They express meanings, ideas, and relationships. They impact how we relate to the past and to one another. As we share the history, we strive to use words that are empathetic to those whose history has been marginalized.

For example, we use phrases like “enslaved person,” rather than slave. The noun slave implies that she was, at her core, a slave. The adjective enslaved reveals that though in bondage, bondage was not her core existence. Furthermore, she was enslaved by the actions of another. Therefore, we use terms like “enslaver,” rather than master, to indicate one’s effort to exert power over another. You may hear other phrases like “slave labor camp” or “escapee” rather than plantation or runaway. These terms reinforce the idea of people’s humanity rather than the conditions forced upon them.

BREAKDOWN

This virtual learning experience is rather robust. At its heart there are essentially three separate explorations to give users a rich perspective of what this area really looked like:

- Main House and Slave Quarters
- City of Savannah
- Lowcountry Economy

HOUSE AND SLAVE QUARTERS (Sections 1-4)

The Owens-Thomas House & Slave Quarters encompasses two buildings, the mansion and living quarters. The mansion has three levels and the living quarters has two. There is a garden connecting the two buildings. These grounds allow users to explore intimate details of how people lived, worked, and related to one another within an elite slaveholding household. These sections are titled “Main House” and “Slave Quarters.”

CITY OF SAVANNAH (Sections 6-7)

There are two explorations throughout the City of Savannah: investigating the geography of city itself and an in-depth look at the kinds of people who lived there. Users can look at a map of the city and view galleries of different groups to see the places people would go, the work they did, and how they interacted. These sections are called “Inhabitants of the House and City” and “Life and Labor in Savannah.”

LOWCOUNTRY ECONOMY (Section 5)

The map of Georgia’s lowcountry includes a look at the some of the many plantations owned by the Owens family, connecting cities, and a deep dive into the economics of plantations. This section is labeled “Economics of the Antebellum Coast” in the Table of Contents and “Regional Economy” in the Discover wheel.

List of Major Individuals Mentioned

Individual	Role
Diane (Exact Dates Unknown)	Enslaved cook of the Owens family.
Peter (Exact Dates Unknown)	Enslaved butler of the Owens family.
Robert Bolton (- 1802)	Businessman, enslaver, and father of Frances B. Richardson
Sarah Bolton (- 1806)	Mother of Frances B. Richardson
Reverend William Jay (1762-1853)	English non-Conformist minister and father of architect William Jay.
William Jay (1792-1837)	English architect. Designed the Richardson manion (now Owens-Thomas House) as well as several other properties throughout Savannah.
Emma Katin (Exact Dates Unknown)	Enslaved nursemaid of the Owens family beginning before 1834. Remained with the family until after the Civil War.
George W. Owens (1786-1856)	Congressman, lawyer, enslaver, guardian of free people and mayor of Savannah. Married Sarah Wallace. Purchased the Richardson mansion in 1833.
George S. Owens (1825-1897)	Businessman and lawyer. Son of George W. and Sarah Owens. Attorney for the defense during the Wanderer trial.
Sarah W. Owens (1789-1865)	Wife of George Welshman Owens. Daughter of a loyalist and successful merchant. Mother to six children who lived to adulthood: Richard, Mary, John, George Savage, Sarah, and Margaret
Frances Lewis Bolton (1794-1822)	Daughter of Sarah and Robert Bolton. Wife of Richard Richardson
Richard Richardson (1785-1833)	Shipping merchant, banker, domestic slavetrader, and guardian of free people. Commissioned the Owens-Thomas House to be built.
Maria Wallace (1796-1856)	Woman enslaved by the Owens family.