

## Nova Classroom Activity: Search for the Lost Cave People

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/programs/2507\\_laventa.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/programs/2507_laventa.html)

The Maya are often credited with inventing the first complex writing system on the American continent, but recent archeology shows that a little-known people called the Zoque developed a sophisticated script long before the Maya. Who were the Zoque? Were they responsible for such technological advances as a calendrical system and sophisticated numerical systems?

Some 300 caves carved into canyon walls in the Rio la Venta Gorge, located in the Chiapas jungle in Central America, may hold some answers. The relative inaccessibility and extreme dryness of the caves have preserved clothes, rope, and wooden implements—artifacts that rarely survive in Central America. NOVA follows a team of archeologists as they uncover artifacts that could reveal new understandings about the Zoque and their place in Mesoamerican history.



### Objective

To examine primary source documents to draw inferences about 17th century American colonists.

### Materials:

- copy of "Material Possessions" student handouts
- Materials Possesions Godbertson Household Inventory

### Procedure:

1. Scientists in the program make conclusions about the Zoque by analyzing artifacts found at the sites. Students can draw inferences about seventeenth-century American colonists by examining a primary source document that describes the possessions of one household.

2. Divide students into small groups and distribute copies of the "Material Possessions" and "Godbertson Household Inventory" student handouts.
3. Tell students they will analyze a probate inventory from 1633 and draw conclusions about the people who owned the possessions. Explain that probate inventories list the contents of houses and properties of deceased individuals for tax purposes.
4. Have groups examine the list and make interpretations about the people, their lives, and the period in which they lived.
5. Conclude by having groups compare their findings and discuss why they think an interpretation is valid.

**Activity Answer:**

This probate inventory lists the belongings of Sarah and Godbert Godbertson. This husband and wife lived on the Plimoth Plantation and died when an epidemic of "infectious fever" (probably smallpox) killed more than 20 of the colonists in 1633. Sarah came from England and Godbert, Sarah's third husband, originated from Holland. The Godbertsons were farmers and members of the Separatist Church. They had several children who were adults and probably not living with their parents and whose possessions are not included in the inventory. The Godbertsons' belongings were of average worth among the colonists.

Because the document is written in seventeenth-century English, students may find some of the words and spelling unfamiliar. Many similar items are grouped together, such as cooking utensils or clothing. Students can use these groupings to help them identify unfamiliar items. Students might also find it helpful to cut individual items from the list and then group items into categories. Students might also compare the relative value of items and infer which items were considered to be of value to the people.

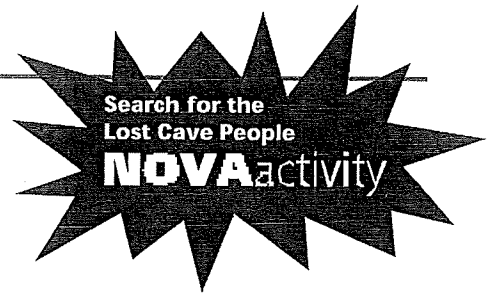
Students' interpretations will vary. From the list, students might make the following interpretations:

- the clothing such as a gowne, petticoate and stockings suggests that one individual was female; breeches suggests one individual was male
- the number of coats and cloakes and the fact that the inventory was taken in New England during October suggest a cold climate
- the writing table suggests that the person(s) knew how to read and write
- the bible, communion, and commandments suggest that the person(s) practiced Christian religion
- the animals and corn suggest that the people were farmers
- the worth of the animals and land suggests that these items were considered most valuable

Encourage students to do further research to expand their interpretations of the list and to determine the identity of any "unknown" items. The Plimoth Plantation Web site has You can find primary and secondary sources, a bibliography, and related Web links at the [Plimoth Plantation Web site](#).

# Material Possessions

How much can you tell about people by what they own, wear, and use in their daily lives? Archaeologists make conclusions about people from past cultures by studying artifacts from the time period. Try it yourself by interpreting the list of possessions owned by a real seventeenth-century household. What do you think their life was like?



## Materials

- copy of **Godbertson Household Inventory**

**1** Examine the list of possessions belonging to a seventeenth-century household. As you identify and analyze the possessions, try to:

- determine how many people were in the household, what their education level might have been, and what their primary profession was.
- categorize and group items based on what you think they are or how they are used. For example, you might have a category for clothing.
- compare the value of the items.

**2** What can you infer about the people who owned the possessions? Use the chart to record your interpretations.

**3** Compare and discuss your findings with other groups. Describe any interpretations you disagree with and why.

Evidence	Interpretation	Other possible interpretations from the same evidence	Additional evidence needed to help prove or disprove interpretation
Example: • a pistol • an other pistol	used to defend their home; may have been uneasy relations with local Native Americans	used to kill animals for food	Were there threats from local Native American nations or political battles for territory? What did they eat? How else might animals have been killed for food?

# Godbertson Household Inventory

Search for the  
Lost Cave People

**NOVA**activity

PLYMOUTH COLONY, 1633

An Inventory of the goods of [the Godbertsons] who dyed without will as it was  
tendered in Court upon oath & as they were prised by mr Jon. Done & mr Steph. Hopkins  
the 24th of Octobr. & presented in Court the 11th of Novr Anno Reg Dom.

	£	s	d		£	s	d
1 twart saw	00	06	00	A ffrying panne	00	02	06
1 broade Axe	00	00	06	A drypping panne	00	04	00
An handsaw	00	00	06	4 pewter platters & a bason	00	07	00
2 wedges	00	01	06	5 trenchers & a platter	00	00	08
2 pr of sheeres	00	00	08	A pistoll	00	01	00
1 pr of pinsers a drawing knife				An other pistoll	00	05	00
a file an hamer	00	01	06	A lathing hamer	00	00	06
1 hay hooke	00	00	06	An hatchet	00	00	04
a melting ladle	00	00	06	A felling Axe	00	00	08
3 howes	00	01	06	A spade & 2 Runlets	00	01	00
A picaxe	00	01	06	A whipsaw & box & file	00	07	00
a chisell & Auger	00	00	06	A sickle	00	00	06
A table cloath	00	03	00	old hogsheds bords & hemp	00	05	00
A bed & bolster	00	14	00	3 barrow hogs a sowe & bore	08	10	00
A pillow & pillow beere	00	01	00	A canoe & sayle	01	00	00
2 deare skins & a net	00	01	06	5 Young hogs	03	00	00
Barley wheate & oates	00	15	00	Six shares in a Cow	10	00	00
A pottage pot				Due debt owing my mr Combs			
pothookes & ladle	00	12	00	for a goate & other things	09	00	00
A pair of pothangers & an Iron bar				Due fro mr Weston for a steere	03	00	00
2 hookes	00	05	00	mr Weston debtor for another steer	01	10	00
a slice	00	01	00	A shovell	00	01	06
2 kettles	00	04	00	90 bushels of Corne at 6 shillings			
A writing table of slate	00	00	04	pr bushel	27	00	00
An earthen pan	00	00	06	A box with whiplasses	00	01	06
A Ruggle	00	02	06	A Cloake	01	10	00
A felling Axe & a frow	00	01	04	An other Cloake	01	00	00
A curtaine	00	00	06	A hatt	00	06	00
A warmingpan	00	02	06	A paire of breeches	00	08	00
A paire of sheets	00	06	00	A jerkin	00	04	00
A kettle	00	01	06	A ruff	00	02	00
A great bible	00	10	00	A band	00	03	00
Communion of Sts in ffrench	00	00	06	A wastcoate & kirtle	00	12	00
Dod on the Comets (Commandments)	00	01	00	A yoak	00	01	06
A looking glasse	00	00	04	A wastcoate & petticoate	00	06	00
salt 1 bushell 3 pecks	00	08	00	A Apron	00	04	00
pease wth the tub & oill	00	07	00	a paire of stockings	00	00	08
A trunck	00	06	00	2 Aprons	00	02	00
A peece of Irish cloath	00	02	00	1 old crosclath 2 old quives	00	01	06
A paire of sheets & pillow beere	00	05	00	A paire of shoes	00	00	06
A Rug and blanket	01	10	00	A Gowne	02	00	00
A box	00	00	08	A Coate	00	03	00
A Rownd box	00	02	06	An other Coate	00	02	00
A chest	00	01	06	A wastcoate	00	00	08
A Table	00	01	00	A band	00	01	06
A Chaire	00	02	00	a paire of stockins	00	00	06
A Cupp	00	00	06	coyfes & handercheifes	00	02	00
A porrenger	00	00	06	An old Cloake	00	03	00
A salt	00	00	08	A Coate	00	08	00
3 Traves	00	01	06	The Dweling house & fence & garden	14	00	00