

# Van Cortlandt Manor



**A Snapshot of a Traditional Patriot Family  
In the New Nation**

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# OVERVIEW OF VAN CORTLANDT MANOR

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The Van Cortlandt Manor is of great national importance as an artifact of frontier culture of the Hudson Valley Region during colonial times. Here, visitors can see a vast array of furnishings from the colonial period in their original setting. Stephanus Van Cortlandt began purchasing land in the Hudson River Valley from European settlers and Indians. King William III granted this 86,000 acre region as a patent to Stephanus. Information regarding the architect that built the Van Cortlandt Manor on this land is scarce. However, from additional information, one can infer that much of the groundwork for the home was completed by Stephanus' grandson, Pierre, who was the first occupant of the manor.

Pierre served as head of the convention that wrote the first state constitution in Kingston, New York. When New York State came into being, he was also the first Lieutenant Governor until 1795. Pierre and his wife often entertained guests, including good friend George Washington. George Washington made their son, Philip, Colonel of the Second New York Regiment. He commanded troops under Lafayette and was a member of the court that tried Benedict Arnold. He also was a congressman for the State of New York. Pierre Van Cortlandt, unlike many of his peers, lived to a very impressive old age. He eventually passes away at the age of 93 on May 1, 1814.

The manor at this point was self-sufficient with the addition of a barn, carpenter, blacksmith shop, apple orchards, and a brick kiln. The manor house functioned as the center of a commercial farm complex. The family shipped products to New York City by means of the Croton and Hudson Rivers. The Van Cortlandts controlled the land until it was sold to Otis Taylor in 1945. Wanting to restore the manor and its property, John D. Rockefeller purchased it from a later owner in 1953.

# OVERVIEW OF VAN CORTLANDT MANOR

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Several gardens appear on the property, one in particular called 'The Long Walk' features “ornamental flowering plants and bulbs”. This beautiful garden is filled with many different types of flowers, including baptisia, hydrangeas, passion flowers, and tulips. Also, an 18th century vegetable garden has produce that is used in demonstrations of medicinal and culinary arts of the period.

Back in the eighteenth century, the Van Cortlandt's shared their gardens with fellow gardeners by allowing them to take flowers, vegetables, and herbs. In 1997, a special events weekend was held at Van Cortlandt Manor to celebrate its three hundredth anniversary of signing the Royal Patent designating the Lordship and Manor of Cortlandt. The Van Cortlandt's gained most of their wealth through a brewing industry. Because of this the event was focused on the history of alcohol. The apple orchards provided ingredients for cider and there is an example of hops growing ready for beer. Herbs such as woodruff, wormwood and borage were used in wine infusions.

Pierre Van Cortland appreciated the advantages offered by owning land at the confluence of the Hudson and Croton Rivers. Van Cortlandt Manor was neutral ground during the Revolutionary war, but destruction that occurred on the estate gave character to the house and its garden. The pride and patriotism that emerged during this time can be seen in its flora and fauna today. In addition, the Van Cortlandt family as religious, political, and military figures played a key role in its development.

Van Cortlandt Manor is just as significant to the community now as it was back in the 1700's. Back then, it was a self operated farm that was greatly involved with the community. Now-a-days, it continues to play a key role in the community by hosting celebrations, and teaching people more about their past.

# LESSON PLAN

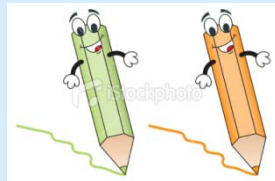
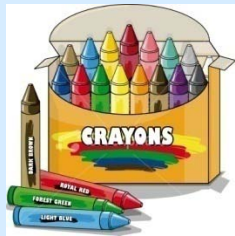
**Location:** Van Cortlandt Manor, Croton-on-Hudson, New York  
Our classroom (5-6 sessions, all after our field trip has occurred)

**Grade Level:** 4th grade

**Materials:**

*At the Van Cortlandt Manor:* pen/pencil, field trip worksheet, disposable camera

*In the classroom:* writing journals (for rough draft), disposable camera  
crayons/markers, an imagination!



**Objectives:**

- 1) Students will explore the Van Cortlandt Manor in their groups, answering all questions assigned to them via pre-created worksheets.
- 2) Students will create a tri-fold "All About Me" poster, containing categories discussed on the field trip envisioning what their life would be like in the 1700's, in present day, and in 2300.
- 3) Students will respond to a Writer's Workshop journal prompt at the conclusion of this assignment.

# LESSON PLAN

**Introduction:** The class will take a day-long trip to the Van Cortlandt Manor and explore the various houses on the property. With the help of experienced tour guides, students will gain an understanding of how a student like themselves would have lived during the time of the new nation.

**Purpose:** This activity will cause students to think critically. They will need to pay attention during the field trip and record answers to the questions provided; this will be the framework for which the assignment is based. Their skills of reflection and prediction will also be strengthened as they apply what they see on the field trip and predict what the life of a 10 year old will be like in 2300.

**Procedure:** Once the class arrives at Van Cortlandt Manor, tour guides will give a presentation and then the class will split into groups of 5 for a walking tour of the property. Prior to the tours, the teacher will hand each group a disposable camera. The students are told that this camera is for field trip purposes only. The camera is not to be used for any other reason, and if it is used inappropriately all group members will be unable to complete their assignment. As guides explain different activities or interests of children who lived at the Van Cortlandt Manor, one group member should take a photo.

- Photos will be taken of the following things: 1) Typical foods eaten by the children 2) Typical pattern of dress 3) Typical chores 4) Typical homes of the period.
- At this time, a worksheet will be handed out to each student. This worksheet will ask the student to write down specifics of the items they are photographing. This will make pictures easier to label and explain when they need to create their poster. Students will be required to fill the worksheets out on their own as they complete the tour.
- After the tour has finished, students will return to a quiet place on the property to ask any questions and finish worksheets.

# LESSON PLAN

**Procedure Continued:** For the remainder of the school day, the teacher will describe the class project to them. The teacher will explain that the students just spent the day researching what children did in 1700's. Their homework for the night is to go home and make a list of the things that they do, following the same format as their worksheet (ex. the food they eat, clothing style, chores, etc.)

- The next day in class, the homework assignment will be discussed. The final step of the project is to use prediction to think about what the life of a child will be like in 2300. They will use the same categories as with the 1700's and 2000's.

- During Social Studies in the following week, students will work individually to create a tri-fold "All About Me" poster. One panel will be from the past, one from the present, and one from the future. Each side will feature photos, original writing, and drawings in these categories. The finished result will be a snapshot of three children – one living in the 1700's, one living in the 2000's, and one living in the 2300's.

**Enrichment:** Students will respond via Writer's Workshop journals to the following critical thinking question. "What time period would you want to live in, and why?" Students will reflect on the tour guide's presentations from Van Cortlandt Manor and predict what new technology will be available in the next 300 years when making their decision.

**Conclusion:** Through successful completion of three objectives, students will expand their knowledge of "the life of a 4th grader" through an art activity, field trip observations, and a reflective journal entry. The combination of these three elements will give students a better grasp of how children have lived in the past and will live into the future.

# VAN CORTLANDT MANOR



525 S Riverside Avenue  
Croton-On-Hudson, NY 10520  
(914) 631-8200



**Hours:** April-October daily (closed Tuesday): 10am - 5pm, Last Tour at 4pm. November & December weekends Only: 10am - 4pm, Last Tour at 3pm.

**Guided Tours of Site:** Tour the historic buildings and gardens led by costumed guides. Tours last about 45 minutes and leave approximately every 30 minutes. Demonstrations throughout the day.

**Admission:** Tour & Grounds - Adult: \$10, Senior (62 +): \$9, Child (5-17): \$6, Historic Hudson Valley Members + Children under 5: FREE Grounds only - Adult: \$5, Senior (62 +): \$5, Child (5-17): \$3, Historic Hudson Valley Members + Children under 5: FREE

**Historical Description:** Named after its original inhabitants, the Van Cortlandts, the historical site is positioned on the confluence of the Croton and Hudson rivers. The manor was self-sufficient with a barn, carpenter, blacksmith shop, orchards, and a brick kiln on site. During the revolutionary war, the manor was neutral ground and when the Van Cortlandt family returned to the property after service to the patriot cause, it was reestablished as a productive estate. Adding to the heritage and importance of this manor, John D. Rockefeller purchased the estate in 1953. Today, the site is one of six historic sites operated by Historic Hudson Valley, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to preserving the history of the area.

**The site:** Includes an 18th-century manor house and tavern and a reconstructed tenant farmhouse. Even the gardens and orchard, tended by workers in period dress, are historically accurate: only species available during the post-Revolutionary period are grown. Tours emphasize not only the Van Cortlandts, but their slaves and tenant farmers. Also on the grounds are a restored ferry house, built before 1750, and a reconstructed tenant house, where demonstrations of textile-making and open-hearth cooking are offered. A walking trail affords a vista of the property and the Croton River. Interpreters demonstrate blacksmithing, brick making, and hearth-cooking skills. A museum of living history, Van Cortlandt Manor offers glimpses into the life of a Hudson Valley Patriot family.



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