



King Cotton

Suggested Grade Level: 9-12

Time: 3 hours

Subject: Social Studies, History, Atlantic Slavery, Abolitionism, Popular Sovereignty, English Language Arts, Informational Reading, Literature Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Agriculture, Cotton

Overview: Students will investigate the impact of cotton on the history and culture of the United States. Students will discover the growth and processing requirements for cotton, recognize how the invention of the cotton gin affected slavery, explain how the plantation system was organized, and ultimately understand the role of cotton in the Civil War.

Objectives:

1. Describe how the cotton gin changed cotton production and labor demands.
2. Demonstrate how Eli Whitney's cotton gin separates cotton fiber from seed using a diagram.
3. Explain the plantation system.
4. Identify the connection between cotton expansion and the Civil War.
5. Analyze primary sources to determine cotton's influence on the culture of the United States.

Background Information:

Cotton and Slavery

It's common knowledge that slavery was a source of conflict between the North and South leading up to the Civil War. But why did the South want or need slaves? Cotton. Cotton picking was a job given to healthy, adult slaves. These slaves handpicked cotton in the fields all day. Then, by candlelight, they would join the elderly, infirm, or children to gin the cotton by hand. Ginning cotton means removing the lint or fiber from the seed. The more lint one removed from the seed, the more profit could be made from each boll. It would have been important for slaves to remove as much lint as possible from each seed. Your students may find anywhere from fourteen to forty-two seeds per boll, as did the slaves. A slave could gin approximately one pound of cotton a day, or about 120 cotton bolls.

Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin

Eli Whitney is generally credited with the invention of the cotton gin. His idea for this machine came while he was watching a cat try to catch a chicken in the barnyard. The cat's unsuccessful attempt left him with a claw full of feathers and no chicken (more details about Eli Whitney's machine can be found in the book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond). Whitney decided to try a similar approach with cotton, creating a gin operated by a hand crank that would rake the seeds from the fiber. In 1794, his machine was patented, revolutionizing the production of cotton. One slave could now gin fifty pounds of cotton per day. Did this mean plantation owners needed fewer slaves? No, but it did make cotton a more profitable crop because less time was required for ginning. Plantation owners now wanted more slaves to grow more cotton.

Cotton production increased across the South following the invention of the cotton gin. At the same time, factories that could process cotton were being built across the North. Unlike wool, which is a very long and scale-like fiber, cotton is a short and smooth fiber. These physical differences make wool easier to spin into thread than cotton, either by hand or by machine. Spinning cotton by hand is time-consuming and difficult. Wool, and to some extent linen, was the fabric of choice until machine technology made the production of cotton thread viable. Cotton production in the South was only economical or possible with the manufacturing industry of the North. The Southern economy had virtually no manufacturing and was based solely on production.

Growing Cotton

Cotton requires a long, warm growing season, meaning it cannot be grown in colder, northern climates. Today, cotton is grown across the southern United States from Virginia to California. Cotton also requires ample water but grows well in the arid southwest with modern irrigation technology. California is well-known for their American Pima cotton, which produces a finer, more expensive fiber than the more common American Upland cotton. Cotton gins are now very large machines that work much faster than Eli Whitney's simple machine. What happens to all the cottonseed after it is ginned? Most of those fuzzy seeds are fed to dairy cattle or processed into cottonseed oil, which can be found in nearly every kind of snack food, including chocolate candy bars.

Kansas Connections:

Kansas-Nebraska Act

In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, allowing settlers to decide whether to permit slavery. This act repealed the Missouri Compromise and ignited fierce debate over slavery's expansion. Because Kansas bordered Missouri, a slave state, it became the center of violent conflict as both

pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers rushed in to influence its future. Although Kansas was not considered suitable for cotton cultivation because of its climate, the territory held strategic importance for both the North and the South as each sought to preserve political influence and economic power.

Bleeding Kansas

Tensions escalated as illegal voting and armed clashes erupted between the two sides. Pro-slavery forces attacked the town of Lawrence in 1856, destroying property and printing presses, while abolitionist John Brown retaliated by killing five pro-slavery men along Pottawatomie Creek. These events, known collectively as “Bleeding Kansas,” symbolized the deep divisions that foreshadowed the Civil War. Kansas eventually adopted a free-state constitution at Wyandotte in 1859, but entry into the Union was delayed until 1861 after southern states seceded. Once admitted as a free state, Kansas endured severe internal conflict during the Civil War and suffered the highest fatal casualty rate of any Union state (HISTORY.com).

Cotton in Kansas

Kansas farmers didn’t begin growing cotton on a large scale until the mid 1990s, over 100 years after the abolition of slavery, after restrictions were lifted in the 1995 Farm Bill. The first modern gin opened in Winfield in 1996 and ginned over 4,000 bales that year. Since then, cotton production has expanded across southeast Kansas (Kansas).

Materials:

Engagement

- *America's Heartland*, California Cotton Harvest
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSqinChTT70>

Activity 1: Why did plantation owners in the South want slaves?

- Cotton Field Image
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cotton_field_kv17.jpg
- Mapping History: The Spread of Cotton and Slavery 1790-1860
<https://mappinghistory.uoregon.edu/english/US/US18-00.html>
- Cotton bolls*

Per student

- “Paul Smith, Ex-Slave Federal Writers Project” excerpt (provided)

Activity 2: How did the invention of the cotton gin affect slavery?

- Cotton bolls*
- Scale
- “Paul Smith, Ex-Slave Federal Writers Project” excerpt (provided)

- “Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin” by Jessica Gunderson
- Cotton Gin Before and After Answer Key (provided)

Per student

- Linking History and Technology handout (provided)
- Cotton Gin Diagram (provided)
- Cotton Gin Before and After graphic organizer and cards (provided)

*If you do not have local access to a cotton farm to obtain cotton bolls, the Cotton Boll Kit <https://agclassroomstore.com/cotton-bolls/> is available for purchase from agclassroomstore.com.

Activity 3: How was the plantation system organized?

- Plantation System doodle notes
https://cdn.agclassroom.org/media/uploads/2020/05/12/Plantation_System_Doodle_Notes.pdf doodle notes, 1 copy per student

Activity 4: What role did cotton play in the Civil War?

- US Secession Map
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Secession_map_1865.svg
- Civil War Topic Pages
https://cdn.agclassroom.org/media/uploads/2020/02/27/Civil_War_Topic_Pages.pdf
- Slave Advertisement
<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/cotton-gin-and-the-expansion-of-slavery/sources/1882>
- Cotton Plantation Illustration
<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/cotton-gin-and-the-expansion-of-slavery/sources/1883>

Instructional Format:

1. Review Background Information and Kansas Connections.
2. Conduct engagement exercise.
3. Complete Activity 1: Why did plantation owners in the South want slaves?
4. Complete Activity 2: How did the invention of the cotton gin affect slavery?
5. Complete Activity 3: How was the plantation system organized?
6. Complete Activity 4: What role did cotton play in the Civil War?
7. Conduct assessment exercise.

Engagement:

Compelling Question: How did cotton impact the history and culture of the United States?

1. Optional: This would be a great time to read the Background Information and Kansas Connections sections aloud if time allows for it.
2. Tell students that the most commonly used phrase describing the growth of the American economy in the 1830s and 1840s was "Cotton is King." Explain that cotton textiles were one of the first industrially produced products worldwide. Three-quarters of the world's cotton came from the American South.
3. To begin to understand the process of growing cotton, inform students that you will be watching a short video clip about modern cotton production. Watch America's Heartland: California Cotton Harvest <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSginChTT70>. As students watch the video clip, have them take note of what they would NOT have had in the 1800s for the process of growing and processing cotton.
4. Have students share their observations from the video of what we have today in cotton farming compared to what they likely had back in the 1800s. (*Technology such as tractors, machinery, and highly sophisticated harvesting and processing machines.*)
5. Ask how cotton plantation owners accomplished the tasks that are now performed by machines.
6. On the board, display the question, "How did cotton impact the history and culture of the United States?" Explain to the students that they will be investigating this question.

Procedures:

Activity 1: Why did plantation owners in the South want slaves?

1. Find a local source for cotton bolls or order the Cotton Boll Kit from agclassroomstore.com. Note that the cotton in this kit has a longer fiber than the cotton harvested in the 1800s. Each cotton boll contains 4-5 sections of fiber.
2. Provide each student with a copy of the "Paul Smith, Ex-Slave Federal Writers' Project" excerpt.
3. Explain to the students that Paul Smith had been a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia when he was a child. When he was 74 years old, Mr. Smith was interviewed about his experiences as a slave.
4. Read or show the excerpt to the class: *Us chillun sho did lak to see 'em run dat old gin, 'cause 'fore dey ever had a gin Marster used to make us pick a shoe-full of cotton seeds out evvy night 'fore us went to bed. Now dat don't sound so bad, Missy, but did you ever try to pick any seeds out of cotton?*
5. Ask the students if they have ever picked seeds out of cotton. Clarify that cotton, a common fabric for our clothing, comes from a plant. When the cotton is

harvested, the cotton seeds have to be separated from the cotton fiber through a process called *ginning*. Let the students know that they will have the opportunity, if they would like, to experience firsthand the task of hand ginning cotton.

6. Ask the students, "Why did plantation owners in the South want slaves?" After listening to the students' ideas, use the following points to discuss how cotton was grown and harvested in the 1800s. *Note: As the lesson progresses, students should recognize that cotton was only grown in the South. Northern climates are not suitable for cotton farming.*
 - Cottonseed is typically planted in April when the soil is warm enough for the seeds to germinate.
 - The cotton plant grows in climates with long, hot, dry summers.
 - Cotton fields need to be kept free from weeds, insects, and disease.
 - A healthy plant will flower, turning yellow-white and then red. When the flower dies, it leaves a boll, which bursts open, exposing the cotton to dry in the sun.
 - Cotton is fully mature and ready for harvesting approximately 160 days after it is planted.
 - After being picked, cotton bolls need to be ginned to remove the seeds from the cotton fibers.
7. Project the Cotton Field Image onto a large screen. Give each student or group of students a cotton boll. Have the students examine the dry, woody stem of the cotton boll. Explain to the students that the sharp plant material makes it painful to pick cotton bolls by hand.



8. Go through the Mapping History Module “The Spread of Cotton and of Slavery 1790-1860” <https://mappinghistory.uoregon.edu/english/US/US18-00.html>. Point out that as more cotton was planted, more labor was needed to grow and harvest the cotton.
9. Revisit the question, "Why did plantation owners in the South want slaves?" (Producing cotton required a lot of labor. *Southern plantation owners believed that the path to wealth and opportunity was owning land and having slaves to work the land.*)

Activity 2: How did the invention of the cotton gin affect slavery?

1. Discuss the following points about cotton and slavery:
 - After hand-picking cotton in the fields all day, slaves would join the elderly, infirm, and children to gin the cotton by hand.
 - Slaves were required to remove as much lint as possible from each seed. The more fiber removed from the seeds, the more profit could be made from each boll.
 - A slave would typically hand gin about one pound of cotton (about 120 cotton bolls) a day.
2. Using the cotton bolls from the previous activity, ask the students to predict how many seeds are in each boll. After recording their predictions, allow time for any students who would like to hand gin the cotton.
3. After ginning, have the students compare their prediction to the actual number of seeds from their cotton boll. Refer back to the excerpt of the Paul Smith interview (from Supporting Question 1 of the lesson). Ask the students to consider the work involved in filling a shoe with ginned cotton seeds.
4. Have the students weigh the fibers from one boll and compare the boll to a pair of jeans. A pair of jeans is almost one hundred percent cotton (minus the zipper and buttons).
5. Ask the students to guess how many cotton bolls are needed to produce a pair of jeans. (*approximately 360 bolls*)
6. Read the book *Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin* by Jessica Gunderson.
7. While discussing how Eli Whitney's cotton gin worked, show this short video: Cotton Lessons: Eli Whitney Cotton Gin - How it works <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ur-IssVtWnI>. Use the Linking History and Technology Handout (provided) to provide additional information.
8. Give each student a copy of the Cotton Gin Diagram (provided). Instruct them to write a description of how Eli Whitney's cotton gin worked on the back of the

diagram. Using the cotton and seeds the students ginned, glue the fiber and seeds to the appropriate spots on the diagram.

9. Ask the students, "How do you think the invention of the cotton gin affected slavery?" After listening to the students' ideas, watch this video. TED-Ed: How Inventions Change History (for better and for worse)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SMNYivhGsc>.
10. Give each student or small group of students a copy of the Cotton Gin Before and After graphic organizer and cards (provided). Instruct the students to cut out the cards and then decide if each statement is descriptive of the time before the invention of the cotton gin or after. Have the students place the cards in the appropriate section of the graphic organizer and check their work.
11. Revisit the question, "How did the invention of the cotton gin affect slavery?" (*The cotton gin made cotton more profitable and farmers in the South began to grow more cotton. Growing more cotton meant an increased demand for slaves.*)

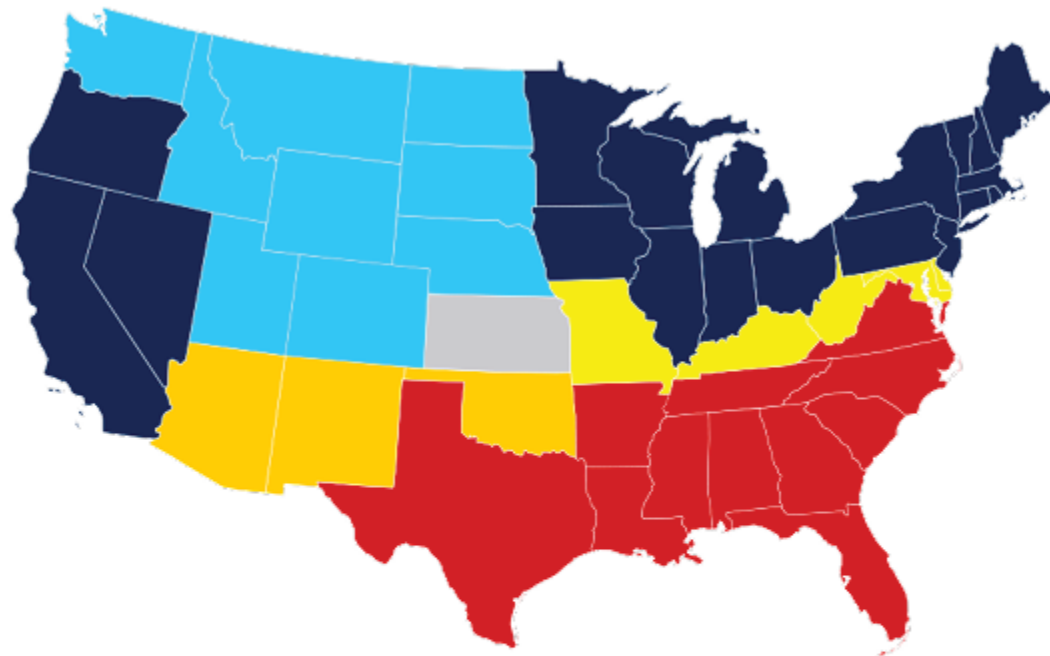
Activity 3: How was the plantation system organized?

1. Ask students to define the word *plantation*. As you discuss, ask guiding questions to stimulate thought. Examples include:
 - What kind of buildings would you see on a plantation?
 - Who lived on plantations?
 - What did they grow?
 - Who performed the labor?
 - What kind of labor was necessary to perform?
2. Give each student one copy of the Plantation System doodle notes (provided). Instruct them to take notes as you continue your discussion.
3. Define a plantation as an estate on which cash crops such as coffee, sugar, cotton, or tobacco were cultivated by resident labor. Clarify that a cash crop is a crop produced for its commercial value rather than for use by the grower.
4. Continue describing the plantation system and encouraging students to continue adding to their doodle notes with the following resources:
 - Show George Washington's Mount Vernon
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=76&v=gylNHHmTLAw&feature=emb_logo.
 - Browse the "Slavery" webpage on the Mount Vernon website
<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/> to learn about what enslaved workers ate, where they lived, what they wore, family life, and more.

- Explore the “Biographies” webpage on the Mount Vernon website <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/enslaved-people-at-mount-vernon/> to learn more about the lives of enslaved people at Mount Vernon.
 - Take a virtual tour of George Washington’s Mount Vernon plantation <https://virtualtour.mountvernon.org/>.
5. Summarize and share answers to the question, "How was the plantation system organized?"

Activity 4: What role did cotton play in the Civil War?

1. Ask the students, "What role did cotton play in the Civil War?" After listening to the students' ideas, show the US Secession Map. Explain that the Civil War began on April 12, 1861, and was fought between the Union (the Northern states) and the Confederates (the Southern states that seceded from the United States).



- Union States
- Union Territories, not permitting slavery
- Border Union States, permitting slavery
- Kansas, entered Union
- Confederate States
- Union Territories, permitting slavery

2. Ask the students, "What was the central cause of the Civil War?" After listening to the students' ideas, organize the class into small groups. Assign each group one of three topics about events leading up to the Civil War—The Tariff of 1828, Westward Expansion, and the Election of 1860. Provide each group with the Civil War Topic Page for their assigned topic.
3. Have the groups read through the information, click on the QR codes for more information, and discuss their topic. Civil War Topic QR Code URLs:
 - The Tariff of 1828 – How it Happens: How THE NULLIFICATION CRISIS Happened <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0P3JOoEtDg>
 - Westward Expansion – An Act to Organize the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1501722>; mrgreen1066: Causes of the Civil War - Popular Sovereignty and Westward Expansion https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQQJDR_rX30 (Start at minute 1:00 and end at minute 3:26)
 - The Election of 1860 – Republican Banner for the 1860 Presidential Election <https://sacramento.pastperfectonline.com/photo/5F984589-2A16-4241-B591-220901827064>; Mr Bacalles: Story of US Election of 1860 and Secession <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tavwNI08GXk> (Watch until minute 4:00)
4. Bring the whole class back together. Ask the students, "What issue was central to each of the topics?" (*Slavery*) Revisit the question, "What was the central cause of the Civil War?" (*Slavery*)
5. Project the Slave Advertisement and Cotton Plantation Illustration primary sources onto a large screen and examine each primary source.
6. Use the following talking points to lead a discussion about the main cause of the Civil War—slavery:
 - The North and South had very different opinions about slavery.
 - In 1860, there were almost 4 million slaves in the South.
 - Slavery existed for a time in the North.
 - By the 1800s, there were very few slaves in the North.
 - Many in the North opposed slavery and even helped runaway slaves escape from the South.
 - Agriculture in the South, especially the production of cotton, relied heavily on the use of slaves.
 - Many people in the South felt that they would be financially ruined if the right to own slaves was taken away from them.
 - The Confederate states went to war to preserve the institution of slavery.
 - The Northern states went to war to preserve the United States as a whole unit.

7. Revisit the question, "What role did cotton play in the Civil War?" (*The cotton industry was the greatest contributor to the Southern economy. The South depended on slave labor for the production of cotton. The Confederate states went to war to preserve the institution of slavery. Slavery was the central cause of the Civil War.*)

Extension:

1. Ask your students to listen to or read some of the arguments for ending slavery. Can they also identify why abolishing slavery would have been seen as a problem for those farmers who were trying to grow crops? What would have to be done differently without the use of slaves on a cotton farm? What did a general farm laborer earn in the 1800s?
2. Share the slideshow Cotton: From Field to Fabric in Forty Frames, <http://www.cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/fieldtofabric/forty-frames.cfm>, which describes the major steps of modern cotton production and processing.
3. Visit the *Interactive Map Project* website and view the map representing Cotton Production in the United States <http://nefbmap.org/map.php?P=21&PV=0>. Identify the state that produces the most cotton, then find where your state ranks for cotton production. Many states do not produce cotton. Based upon the map, what climate does cotton grow best in?
4. Read *Working Cotton* by Sherley Anne Williams. The African American dialect used in the book can provide language arts integration by stimulating discussion of regional dialects and cultural differences. Other resources to share may include the book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor.
5. Watch How It's Made: How Cotton is Processed in Factories <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHgNoSYlhYs>.
6. Review the Career Information. If there were Agricultural Policy Analysts during slavery, what positions would they have considered? What contemporary issue might an Agricultural Policy Analyst be interested in?

Vocabulary:

- **Boll:** the part of a cotton plant that contains the seeds; the pod or capsule of a plant
- **Gin:** to separate cotton fiber from seeds and waste material
- **Plantation:** An agricultural estate, generally centered on a plantation house, meant for farming that specializes in cash crops. It is usually planted with a single crop, with perhaps ancillary areas for vegetables to eat, and so on.
- **Civil War:** a war between citizens of the same country.

- **Cash crop:** a crop produced for its commercial value rather than for use by the grower.
- **Slave:** a person held in forced servitude.
- **Capitalism:** An economic and political system in which private owners control a country's trade and industry for profit, rather than the state.
- **Profit:** a financial gain, especially the difference between the amount earned and spent in buying, operating, or producing something.

Career Information: Agricultural Policy Analyst

Today, human rights, environmental protections, and fair labor practices are written into federal and state laws that guide how crops like cotton are grown and traded. Agricultural Policy Analysts study current and proposed laws, government policies, and regulations to understand how they affect farmers, agricultural businesses, and communities.

Assessment:

Using evidence from historical sources, construct an argument (e.g., essay, project, video production, portfolio, detailed outline, poster) that addresses the compelling question, "How did cotton impact the history and culture of the United States?"

Taking Informed Action

- **Understand:** Create a list of currently available consumer products that might be produced through inhumane means.
- **Assess:** Choose one product of focus and determine the inhumane practices used to produce the items.
- **Act:** In small groups, create a public awareness campaign to raise awareness of the inhumane production practices of the chosen product.

Supporting Resources:

Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin book by Jessica Gunderson

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/867/>

Levi Strauss and Blue Jeans book by Nathan Olson

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/991/>

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry book by Mildred D. Taylor

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/422/>

Cotton Reader by Kevin Daugherty and Monica Pastor

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/companion-resources/16/>

Cotton Boll Kit by Utah Agriculture in the Classroom

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/130/>

Cotton Education Kit by [CottonAcres.com](https://cottonacres.com) <https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/764/>

America's Heartland: Cotton Episodes

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/companion-resources/15/>

Cotton: From Field to Fabric

cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/fieldtofabric/upload/Cotton-From-Field-to-Fabric-129k-PDF.pdf

How It's Made: Cotton Yarn <https://agclassroom.org/matrix/companion-resources/388/>

Planet Money Makes a T-Shirt <https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/567/>

A World of Cotton <https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/967/>

Cotton Campus <https://agclassroom.org/matrix/resource/521/>

Cotton Counts Educational Resources

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/companion-resources/435/>

Kansas Standards:

History, Government, and Social Studies

Standard 1: Choices have consequences.

1.1 The student will recognize and evaluate significant choices and consequences that have impacted our lives and futures.

1.2 The student will analyze the context and draw conclusions about choices and consequences.

Standard 3: Societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.

3.1 The student will recognize and evaluate how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.

3.2 The student will analyze context and draw conclusions about how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.

3.3 The student will investigate and connect how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups with contemporary issues.

3.4 The student will use their understanding of how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups to make a claim or advance a theory using evidence and argument.

Standard 4: Societies experience continuity and change over time.

4.1 The student will recognize and evaluate continuity and change over time.

4.2 The student will analyze the context and draw conclusions about continuity and change.

4.4 The student will use their understanding of continuity and change to make a claim or advance a thesis using evidence and argument.

Standard 5: Relationships among people, places, ideas, and environments are dynamic.

5.1 The student will recognize and evaluate dynamic relationships that impact lives in communities, states, and nations.

English Language Arts



9-10th Grade

Reading: Literature

Craft and Structure

RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view based on cultural experience reflected in a work of literature.

Reading: Informational

Craft and Structure

RI.9-10.6 Determine an author's perspective (viewpoint) and purpose in a text and analyze how an author's use of rhetoric advances the perspective (viewpoint) and purpose.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums, determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Language in Reading: Informational

RI.9-10.10 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style and to comprehend more fully when reading.

Range of Reading and Text Complexity

RI.9-10.13 Read and comprehend high-quality informational text of appropriate quantitative and qualitative complexity for grades 9-10.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

W.9-10.2 Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Range of Writing

W.9-10.12 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

11th-12th Grade

Reading: Literature

Craft and Structure

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

Reading: Informational

Craft and Structure



RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's perspective (viewpoint) and purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the persuasiveness of the text.

Language in Reading: Informational

RI.11-12.10 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style and to comprehend more fully when reading.

Range of Reading and Text Complexity

RI.11-12.13 Read and comprehend high-quality informational text of appropriate quantitative and qualitative complexity for grades 11-12.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Range of Writing

W.11-12.12 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes.

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

National Agricultural Literacy Standards:

Plants and Animals for Food, Fiber, and Energy

- Discuss reasons for government's involvement in agricultural production, processing, and distribution (T2.9-12 c.)
- Evaluate evidence for differing points of view on topics related to agricultural production, processing, and marketing (e.g., grazing; genetic variation and crop production; use of fertilizers and pesticides; open space; farmland preservation; animal welfare practices; world hunger) (T2.9-12 d.)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

- Correlate historical events, discoveries in science, and technological innovations in agriculture with day-to-day life in various time periods (T4.9-12 a.)
- Describe how agricultural practices have contributed to changes in societies and environments over time (T4.9-12 b.)
- Discuss population growth and the benefits and concerns related to science and technologies applied in agriculture to increase yields and maintain sustainability (T4.9-12 c.)

- Evaluate the benefits and concerns related to the application of technology to agricultural systems (e.g., biotechnology) (T5.9-12 d.)
- Provide examples of how processing adds value to agricultural goods and fosters economic growth both locally and globally (T5.9-12 d.)

Culture, Society, Economy, and Geography

- Communicate how the global agricultural economy and population influences the sustainability of communities and societies (T5.9-12 a.)
- Discuss how agricultural practices have increased agricultural productivity and have impacted (pro and con) the development of the global economy, population, and sustainability (T5.9-12 e.)
- Discuss the relationship between geography (climate and land), politics, and global economies in the distribution of food (T5.9-12 f.)
- Evaluate and discuss the impact of major agricultural events and agricultural inventions that influenced world and U.S. history (T5.9-12 g.)

Author: adapted from Growing a Nation Era 1b: Cotton's American Journey by Debra Spielmaker, Rose Judd-Murray, Lynn Wallin, and Andrea Gardner. Edited by Marissa Cook, Secondary Education at Kansas State University, KFAC intern.

References:

Spielmaker, D., Judd-Murray, R., Wallin, L., & Gardner, A. (n.d.). *Growing a Nation Era 1b: Cotton's American Journey*. Utah Agriculture in the Classroom & National Center for Agricultural Literacy. Retrieved July 2, 2026, from

<https://agclassroom.org/matrix/lessons/129/>

HISTORY.com Editors. (2009, October 27). *Bleeding Kansas*. History. A&E Television Networks. <https://www.history.com/articles/bleeding-kansas>

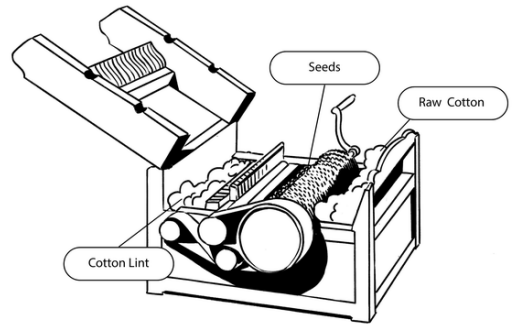
Kansas Cotton Association. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved July 2, 2026, from

<https://kansascotton.com/history/>

Linking History and Technology

Understanding the Cotton Gin

1. Cotton bolls, made up of fiber and seeds, are fed into the cotton gin. The diagram labels show the path of cotton through the gin.
2. As the handle is turned, the cylinder and brushes rotate.
3. Wire teeth catch the cotton bolls and pull them through narrow wire slots.
4. The seeds that are too large to pass through the slots fall to the bottom of the gin.
5. Rotating brushes pull the cleaned cotton from the wire teeth and sweep it out of the gin.



Cotton Gin, Illustrated

What can you make from a bale of cotton?

One bale of cotton weighs 450lbs and is about the size of your refrigerator.

From that bale, you can make:

215 pairs of jeans

409 men's sport shirts

690 bath towels

765 men's dress shirts

1,217 men's t-shirts

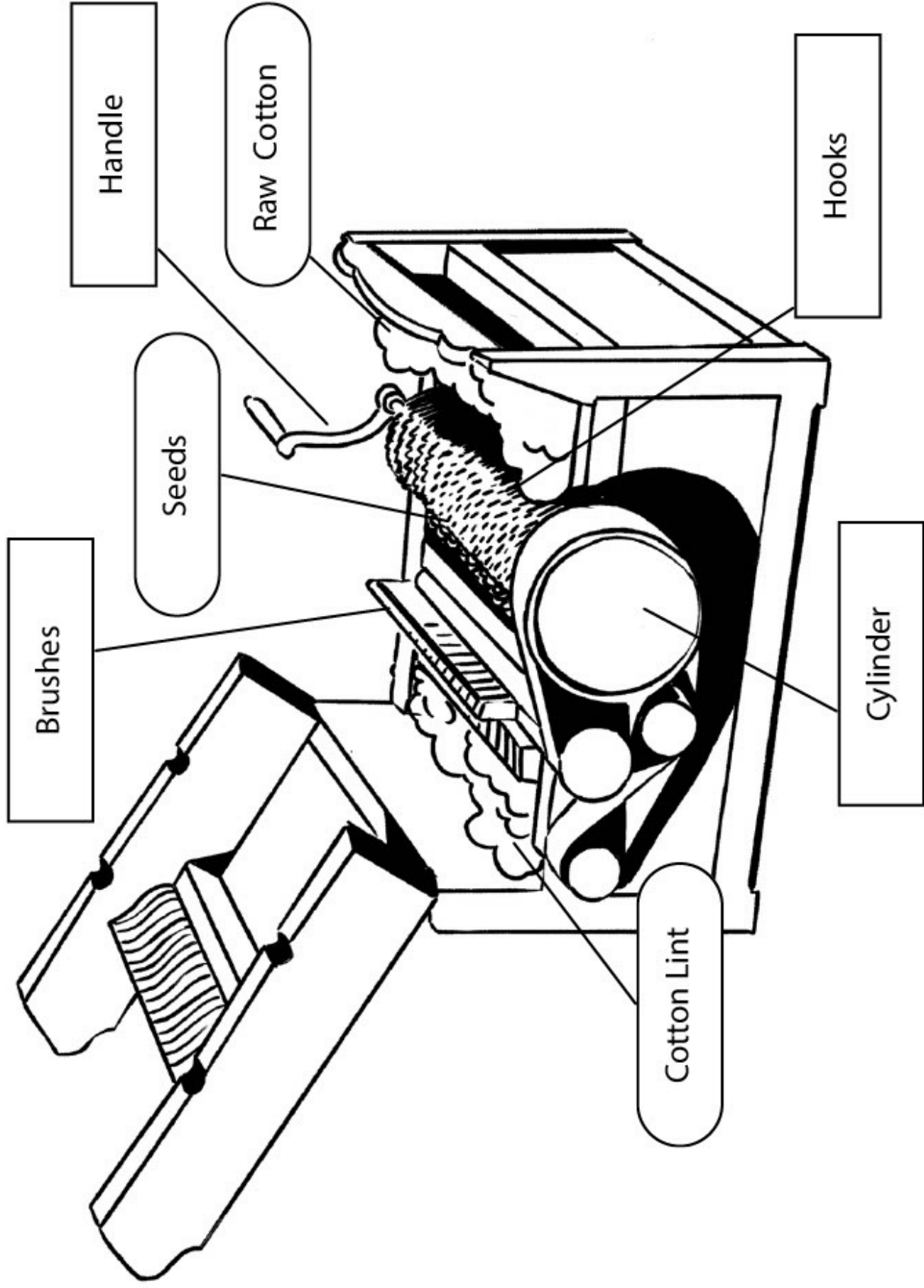
3,085 diapers

4,321 mid-calf socks

313,600 \$100 bills



Cotton Gin Diagram



The Invention of the Cotton Gin

How did the invention of the cotton gin transform the cotton industry?

Before

After

The Invention of the Cotton Gin

Cut and glue the answers into the "Before" and "After" boxes.

Cotton farms were profitable.

100,000 bales of cotton were produced each year.

Cotton farms were not very profitable.

3,000 bales of cotton were produced each year.

There were nearly 70,000 slaves in the United States.

Cotton exceeded the value of all other American products combined.

There were nearly 1 million slaves in the United States.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and many others believed the end of slavery was near.

Removing the seeds from cotton bolls was tedious and time consuming.

Large cotton plantations were established.

Name: _____

The Plantation System

Doodle Notes

What kind of buildings would you see on a plantation?

Who lived on plantations?

What did they grow?

Who performed the labor?

What kind of labor or tasks were performed?

Vocabulary:

Plantation: _____

Cash Crop: _____

Capitalism: _____

Profit: _____

Paul Smith, Ex-Slave Federal Writers Project Excerpt

Us chillun sho did lak to see 'em run dat
old gin, 'cause 'fore dey ever had a gin
Marster used to make us pick a shoe-
full of cotton seeds out evvy night 'fore
us went to bed. Now dat don't sound
so bad, Missy, but did you ever try to
pick any seeds out of cotton?