Beyond the Bale

Trace the people, labor, and traditions behind cotton.

SS24.US1.8 "Explain how the acquisition of new land in the South and the invention of the cotton gin contributed to the growth of the cotton economy and increased demand for enslaved labor. 8a Analyze the domestic slave trade/forced migration, labor..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two causes of cotton's expansion, circle two effects on enslaved people, and number two ways enslaved people sustained community. Use your marks to trace how the cotton economy changed lives.

What a Cotton Bale Cannot Show

1. Imagine a bale of cotton leaving a river landing in Alabama in the 1840s. Its journey began long before it reached the boat. Federal policies and violence forced Native nations from land that white settlers then acquired, including land taken through treaties made under pressure. Settlers established plantations across the expanding South. In 1793, Eli Whitney patented a cotton gin that quickly separated seeds from short-staple cotton fibers. The machine made this cotton profitable to grow across a wider area. More land and faster seed removal encouraged planters to plant more cotton, not less.

2. Cotton still had to be planted, tended, and picked by hand. To expand production, planters demanded more enslaved workers, even as the gin sped up processing after harvest. Traders and enslavers sold many people from the Upper South to the cotton-growing Deep South in a domestic slave trade. Some were forced to walk in groups called coffles; others traveled by ship. Sales separated parents from children and partners from one another. In Virginia, enslaved people also worked on tobacco farms and in households, while in Mississippi many labored on large cotton plantations. Conditions varied, but enslavement denied people freedom everywhere.

3. Enslaved people built communities despite the violence of slavery. Families and neighbors passed down skills and stories from African ancestors while creating new traditions in the United States. Cooks used ingredients such as okra and rice in dishes shaped by African knowledge and local conditions. Some worship services blended Christian beliefs with African-derived practices, including call-and-response singing; beliefs differed among communities. At weddings or funerals, people might sing, dance, or share stories to mark events and strengthen ties. Enslavers tried to control these activities, but people found ways to protect relationships and express identity. Their cultural choices showed creativity and endurance, not acceptance of bondage.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the acquisition of land and the cotton gin work together to increase demand for enslaved workers?

2. How did the domestic slave trade move people to meet cotton planters' demand, and what was one effect on families?

3. How does the passage show that enslaved labor varied by region while slavery remained oppressive everywhere?

4. How could a tradition described in the passage help enslaved people sustain a community?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum label titled "A Cotton Bale's Hidden History." In your own words, connect land acquisition and the cotton gin to forced labor, explain an effect of the domestic slave trade and a regional difference in labor, and show how one cultural tradition helped sustain community.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Bale

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two causes of cotton's expansion, circle two effects on enslaved people, and number two ways enslaved people sustained community. Use your marks to trace how the cotton economy changed lives. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the acquisition of land and the cotton gin work together to increase demand for enslaved workers?	**Land taken from Native nations allowed plantations to expand, and the gin made short-staple cotton more profitable. Planters grew more cotton and demanded more people to plant, tend, and pick it.**
2	How did the domestic slave trade move people to meet cotton planters' demand, and what was one effect on families?	**Traders and enslavers sold people from the Upper South to the cotton-growing Deep South, sometimes moving them in coffles or by ship. Sales separated family members.**
3	How does the passage show that enslaved labor varied by region while slavery remained oppressive everywhere?	**In Virginia, enslaved people worked on tobacco farms and in households; in Mississippi, many worked on large cotton plantations. All were denied freedom.**
4	How could a tradition described in the passage help enslaved people sustain a community?	**Accept a supported example, such as sharing stories at gatherings to pass down knowledge and strengthen ties, or preparing food shaped by African knowledge to maintain cultural connections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A Cotton Bale's Hidden History: This bale represents crops grown after Native peoples were forced from land that white settlers acquired. The cotton gin sped seed removal, so planters expanded cotton fields and demanded more enslaved workers to plant and pick the crop. Traders forced many people from the Upper South to the Deep South, tearing families apart. Enslaved people in Virginia might work on tobacco farms or in households, while many in Mississippi labored on large cotton plantations, though both groups were denied freedom. By preparing foods shaped by African knowledge, families shared traditions and built community despite enslavement.

Accept other passage-supported traditions and accurate regional comparisons. The museum label should make the causal chain clear without treating enslaved people's experiences as identical.