Culture Takes Shape

African traditions and new cultural practices under slavery

SS24.US1.8b "Describe how enslaved people maintained African traditions and created their own unique culture, including foodways, spiritual beliefs, and ceremonies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show an African tradition or skill being maintained, and circle details that show it changing in the Americas. Number one pair of marks that shows both.

What People Carried, What They Created

1 On a rice plantation in the coastal South, enslaved people faced forced labor and restrictions on movement and gathering. Enslavers tried to control daily life, but they could not erase the knowledge people carried from different parts of Africa. In South Carolina and Georgia, some enslaved workers from West African rice-growing regions brought expertise in planting, tending, and processing rice. Under coercion, their skill helped make plantation owners wealthy, while the workers remained enslaved. Outside the fields, people shared memories, skills, and practices with family and neighbors, adapting them to unfamiliar land and limited resources.

2 Food offered one way to preserve and reshape traditions. In some coastal communities, cooks used okra, a plant with African origins, alongside rice and corn, a crop Indigenous to the Americas. They made meals from ingredients they could obtain, whether from rations, small gardens, or nearby waters. No single dish represented every enslaved household, and access to food varied sharply. Still, choices about growing, seasoning, and preparing food drew on knowledge passed between generations. Combining African-rooted techniques and ingredients with local crops created foodways that belonged to a new community, not simply a copy of life in Africa.

3 Spiritual life also took new forms. Some enslaved Christians connected the Bible's Exodus story of liberation to their own longing for freedom. In some communities, a ring shout brought people together to sing, clap, and move in a circle with rhythmic steps. This ceremony joined Christian songs with ways of making music and gathering that had roots in African traditions. Such gatherings could strengthen ties and express hope, although enslavers sometimes restricted them. Foodways, beliefs, and ceremonies differed by place and person. Together, they show how people preserved parts of their heritage while creating distinct cultures under slavery.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a meal made with okra and corn show both a connection to Africa and a change in the Americas?

2. How did some enslaved Christians give the Exodus story meaning in their own lives?

3. How did a ring shout bring together African-rooted practices and a newer spiritual practice?

4. How did slavery shape both the use of rice-growing knowledge and the practice of ring shouts?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of 75 to 100 words explaining how two examples from the passage show both African heritage and cultural change in the Americas. End by explaining why these practices should not be presented as the same in every enslaved community.

ANSWER KEY

Culture Takes Shape

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.8b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that show an African tradition or skill being maintained, and circle details that show it changing in the Americas. Number one pair of marks that shows both. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a meal made with okra and corn show both a connection to Africa and a change in the Americas?	**Okra has African origins, while corn is Indigenous to the Americas. Using them together made a foodway that drew on African heritage and local crops.**
2	How did some enslaved Christians give the Exodus story meaning in their own lives?	**They connected its story of liberation to their own longing for freedom.**
3	How did a ring shout bring together African-rooted practices and a newer spiritual practice?	**It brought African-rooted ways of making music and gathering together with Christian songs.**
4	How did slavery shape both the use of rice-growing knowledge and the practice of ring shouts?	**Enslaved workers used rice-growing knowledge under coercion, and plantation owners profited from their labor. Enslavers sometimes restricted gatherings such as ring shouts.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Enslaved people did not simply repeat traditions unchanged. In coastal communities, cooks drew on knowledge tied to African crops such as okra, then combined available ingredients with corn, a crop Indigenous to the Americas. At some ring shouts, people used African-rooted rhythms and group movement while singing Christian songs. Both practices carried familiar ways of living into new circumstances and helped build community under slavery. They were not universal: enslaved people's practices varied by place and person, and enslavers sometimes restricted gatherings.

Accept other passage-supported pairs of examples if the label explains both continuity and change. Look for language that avoids treating enslaved communities or African traditions as identical.