

Cotton's Cruel Growth

Trace how a new machine helped expand slavery.

SS.68.AA.2.2 "Explain the effect of the cotton industry on the expansion of slavery due to Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show how the cotton gin changed cotton production. Circle details that show how those changes increased slavery.

A Faster Way to Clean Cotton

- ① Before the 1790s, growing cotton was not always very profitable in the South. Removing sticky seeds from short-staple cotton by hand took a great deal of time. In 1793, Eli Whitney developed a cotton gin, a machine that separated seeds from fibers much faster. Whitney received a patent in 1794. The gin did not pick cotton or plant it. Instead, it made cleaning harvested cotton quicker, so growers could prepare far more cotton for sale.
- ② As cleaning became faster, cotton farming became more profitable. Planters expanded cotton fields and moved production into new lands, especially across the Deep South. Cotton mills in Britain and the northern United States wanted a steady supply of fiber, increasing demand. The cotton gin helped growers meet that demand. Yet larger harvests still required people to clear land, plant, hoe, and pick cotton by hand. Planters therefore sought to control more enslaved workers, whose forced labor produced the crop.
- ③ The result was a cruel contradiction. A machine reduced one part of cotton processing, but it increased the value of growing cotton on a large scale. From the late 1790s through the decades before the Civil War, slavery expanded with the cotton economy. Enslaved people were forced from older slaveholding states to cotton-growing areas in the South through the domestic slave trade. The gin was not the only cause, but it helped make cotton profitable enough to strengthen and spread slavery.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What slow task did the cotton gin make faster, and how did that change the amount of cotton growers could sell?

2 Explain the cause-and-effect chain from faster cotton cleaning to planters seeking more enslaved workers.

3 Why did the cotton gin not eliminate the need for workers on cotton plantations?

4 Identify one factor besides the cotton gin that increased the demand for cotton. Explain how it added to cotton's growth.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label titled "Cotton, Profit, and Forced Labor." Explain one change made by the cotton gin, two ways planters responded, and why this expanded slavery. Use the terms *cotton gin*, *profitable*, and *forced labor*.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that show how the cotton gin changed cotton production. Circle details that show how those changes increased slavery. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What slow task did the cotton gin make faster, and how did that change the amount of cotton growers could sell?	It separated sticky seeds from short-staple cotton much faster. Growers could clean and prepare far more cotton for sale.
2	Explain the cause-and-effect chain from faster cotton cleaning to planters seeking more enslaved workers.	Faster cleaning made cotton farming more profitable and encouraged larger fields and harvests. Larger harvests still needed workers to clear land, plant, hoe, and pick cotton, so planters sought to control more enslaved people.
3	Why did the cotton gin not eliminate the need for workers on cotton plantations?	The gin cleaned harvested cotton, but people still had to clear land, plant, hoe, and pick cotton by hand.
4	Identify one factor besides the cotton gin that increased the demand for cotton. Explain how it added to cotton's growth.	Cotton mills in Britain and the northern United States wanted a steady supply of fiber. Their demand gave growers a reason to produce and sell more cotton.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The cotton gin made it much faster to separate seeds from harvested cotton. As cotton became profitable, planters expanded fields into new lands and produced larger harvests. They also sought to control more enslaved workers to clear land, grow, and pick the crop. This forced labor helped the cotton economy expand slavery across the South.

Accept equivalent cause-and-effect explanations supported by the passage. Students should distinguish the gin's seed-removing job from the field labor that enslaved people were forced to perform.