A Barrel's Journey

Trace how Atlantic exchanges changed three regions.

6-12.US1.2 "Analyze the impact of the Columbian exchange on Europe, Africa, and the Americas, including, but not limited to agriculture, technology, politics, and religion."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one thing that moved across the Atlantic in each paragraph, then circle a change it caused. Connect each underlined thing to its circled effect with a pencil line.

What a Barrel of Sugar Reveals

(1) In the Caribbean, a barrel of sugar could reveal how far the Columbian Exchange reached. After 1492, European colonizers planted sugarcane, a crop brought from the Old World, on land taken from Indigenous peoples. They forced many Indigenous people to work, while diseases brought from Europe, such as smallpox, killed millions across the Americas. Colonizers then forced enslaved Africans to labor on sugar plantations. Mills turned cane into sugar for sale overseas. The crop made fortunes for some plantation owners, but the workers faced violence and loss of freedom. A plant's movement changed both farming and who held power.

(2) In Europe, sugar from Caribbean plantations became more available, though it remained expensive for many people at first. Ships also brought American crops such as potatoes, which later helped feed growing populations in parts of Europe. Merchants and rulers collected money from Atlantic trade, and investors used profits to pay for more voyages. This growing trade tied European wealth to land seizures and forced labor across the ocean. Ships, mills, and improved sailing methods made large-scale trade possible, but these tools did not benefit everyone who helped produce the goods. A sweet food on a European table carried costs that were easy to ignore.

(3) On Africa's western coast, European traders exchanged cloth, metal goods, and guns for captives. Some African rulers used those goods to strengthen their position, but raids and warfare tore families apart. Enslaved people were taken across the Atlantic, many to plantations in the Americas. American crops also crossed the ocean: maize spread in parts of Africa and could support larger food supplies. Meanwhile, Catholic missionaries traveled with European empires to the Americas, where conversion sometimes came with pressure to abandon Indigenous beliefs. Crops, tools, and religion moved through the same expanding networks, but the people caught in those networks did not share equally in their rewards.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did bringing sugarcane to the Caribbean change both land use and people's lives there?

2. How did ships and mills help European merchants profit, and why did those tools not benefit plantation workers equally?

3. How could Atlantic trade increase the power of some African rulers while harming other Africans?

4. Compare the effects of maize and Catholic missionary activity on communities in the regions where each arrived.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label for a barrel of Caribbean sugar. Trace how it reached Europe, connect its sale to a change in Africa, and explain why at least two groups experienced this trade differently.

ANSWER KEY

A Barrel's Journey

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one thing that moved across the Atlantic in each paragraph, then circle a change it caused. Connect each underlined thing to its circled effect with a pencil line. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did bringing sugarcane to the Caribbean change both land use and people's lives there?	**Colonizers planted sugarcane on land taken from Indigenous peoples. They forced Indigenous people and enslaved Africans to work, while plantation owners made fortunes.**
2	How did ships and mills help European merchants profit, and why did those tools not benefit plantation workers equally?	**Mills made sugar for sale, and ships carried it overseas. Merchants profited from the trade, while forced laborers faced violence and loss of freedom.**
3	How could Atlantic trade increase the power of some African rulers while harming other Africans?	**Some rulers gained goods and guns through trade for captives. Raids and warfare tore families apart, and enslaved Africans were taken across the Atlantic.**
4	Compare the effects of maize and Catholic missionary activity on communities in the regions where each arrived.	**Maize spread in parts of Africa and could increase food supplies. In the Americas, missionary activity sometimes pressured Indigenous people to abandon their beliefs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This barrel of sugar began as cane grown on Caribbean land taken from Indigenous peoples. Enslaved Africans cut the cane, and ships carried the finished sugar to Europe for sale. Profits encouraged investors to fund more Atlantic voyages, while trade for captives brought guns and other goods to some African rulers. Merchants and some rulers gained wealth or power, but enslaved workers lost their freedom and faced violence.

Accept other passage-supported cause-and-effect links. For the museum label, look for four sentences that connect the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa while distinguishing gains from harms.