Behind the Tobacco Fields

How plantation growth increased reliance on enslaved labor

5.C.2.2.C "a growing reliance on enslaved labor considered essential to the plantation system."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail that shows why tobacco plantations needed many workers. Circle two details that show how owners kept relying on enslaved labor.

Who Worked the Tobacco Fields?

1. In colonial Virginia, many planters grew tobacco to sell across the Atlantic Ocean. Tobacco needed workers to plant seedlings, pull weeds, and pick and dry leaves. Large fields meant many hours of work. Early in the colony, some planters used workers who had agreed to serve for a set number of years. As tobacco farms grew into large plantations, owners wanted more workers they could control for life.

2. During the 1600s and 1700s, Virginia plantation owners increasingly forced enslaved Africans and their descendants to do this work. Owners did not pay them wages for the work they demanded. Colonial laws treated enslaved people as property and made slavery last a lifetime. In Virginia, a child born to an enslaved mother was also enslaved. These cruel laws helped owners keep a large workforce as plantations expanded.

3. Owners viewed this forced labor as essential to their plantation system. When they planted more tobacco, they demanded more workers to tend the fields. More workers could help produce more tobacco, which owners sold for profit. This cycle tied the growth of plantations to a growing reliance on enslaved labor. The people forced to work suffered lost freedom and family separation, even as their labor built the owners' wealth.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did growing tobacco on large plantations create a need for many workers?

2. As owners planted more tobacco, why did they demand more enslaved workers?

3. Why did owners view enslaved labor as essential to their plantation system?

4. How did Virginia's laws help owners keep relying on enslaved labor as plantations grew?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum visitor says, “Plantations grew because owners worked alone.” Write a three-sentence museum label correcting this idea. Explain how growing tobacco plantations came to rely more on enslaved labor, include one detail about the laws, and describe one human cost.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Tobacco Fields

GRADE 5 · 5.C.2.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail that shows why tobacco plantations needed many workers. Circle two details that show how owners kept relying on enslaved labor. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did growing tobacco on large plantations create a need for many workers?	**Planting, weeding, picking, and drying tobacco across large fields took many hours of work.**
2	As owners planted more tobacco, why did they demand more enslaved workers?	**They wanted more people to tend the expanding fields and help produce tobacco to sell.**
3	Why did owners view enslaved labor as essential to their plantation system?	**Enslaved workers tended the fields that produced tobacco for owners to sell, and owners did not pay them wages for that work.**
4	How did Virginia's laws help owners keep relying on enslaved labor as plantations grew?	**The laws made slavery lifelong and made a child born to an enslaved mother enslaved too.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As Virginia planters grew more tobacco, they forced more enslaved people to work the expanding fields. Virginia laws made slavery last a lifetime and made children born to enslaved mothers enslaved too. Plantation owners gained wealth from this work, while enslaved families could be separated.

Accept answers that connect expanding tobacco fields to owners' increasing use of enslaved labor. For the museum label, look for a correct law detail and a human cost, such as lost freedom or family separation.