Cotton's Growing Reach

Trace how a machine changed plantation economies and slavery.

8.C.10.1.B "Explain how the invention of the cotton gin impacted Southern plantation economies by increasing the profitability of the crop and leading to the expansion of slavery."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number three details in the passage 1, 2, and 3 to show how faster seed removal led to greater profits and then to expanded slavery. Circle the field tasks the gin could not do.

What the Cotton Gin Changed

1 Imagine a basket of freshly picked cotton in Georgia in the 1790s. Its seeds cling to the soft fibers. Before a mill could spin the fiber into thread, workers had to pull out those seeds. Cleaning short-staple cotton by hand took so long that selling it often brought little return after expenses. In 1793, Eli Whitney developed a cotton gin, a machine that used moving parts to separate seeds from fiber much faster. The gin sped up cleaning, not the fieldwork of planting, tending, or picking cotton.

2 With faster cleaning, planters could prepare much more cotton for sale. Textile mills in Britain and the northern United States wanted raw cotton, so a larger crop could bring in more money. Even after paying for land, supplies, and transport, many plantation owners saw greater chances for profit. They bought or seized more land and planted more cotton, especially across the Deep South. As cotton production spread, plantations grew larger. The gin did not create demand for cotton, but it helped planters meet that demand on a far bigger scale.

3 More acreage meant more cotton to plant and pick, jobs the gin could not do. Plantation owners responded by forcing more enslaved people to work in cotton fields. Many enslaved people were sold from the Upper South to the Deep South, separating families and strengthening the domestic slave trade. Rising demand for cotton and the gin's faster seed removal together made cotton more profitable for plantation owners, while slavery expanded and enslaved people endured more forced labor and loss of freedom.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the cotton gin change a costly step in cotton production, and why could that raise profits?

2. How did demand from textile mills and the cotton gin work together to encourage larger plantations?

3. Why did faster cotton cleaning lead plantation owners to force more enslaved people into cotton fields instead of needing fewer field workers?

4. How did the expansion of cotton planting affect enslaved families and the domestic slave trade?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence letter to an 1830 reader who believes a faster machine must have reduced slavery. Explain how the gin changed cotton profits and land use, why field labor still grew, and one effect on enslaved people.

ANSWER KEY

Cotton's Growing Reach

GRADE 8 · 8.C.10.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number three details in the passage 1, 2, and 3 to show how faster seed removal led to greater profits and then to expanded slavery. Circle the field tasks the gin could not do. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the cotton gin change a costly step in cotton production, and why could that raise profits?	**It removed seeds from short-staple cotton much faster than hand cleaning, allowing planters to prepare more cotton for sale.**
2	How did demand from textile mills and the cotton gin work together to encourage larger plantations?	**Mills wanted raw cotton, and the gin let planters clean more of it for sale. Greater chances for profit encouraged plantation owners to acquire more land and plant more cotton.**
3	Why did faster cotton cleaning lead plantation owners to force more enslaved people into cotton fields instead of needing fewer field workers?	**The gin did not plant or pick cotton. As plantations expanded, owners forced more enslaved people to do that fieldwork.**
4	How did the expansion of cotton planting affect enslaved families and the domestic slave trade?	**Owners demanded more enslaved field workers. Many people were sold from the Upper South to the Deep South, strengthening the domestic slave trade and separating families.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear reader, the cotton gin removed seeds from short-staple cotton much faster than workers could by hand. Because mills wanted cotton, faster cleaning helped plantation owners sell larger crops and earn more money. Hoping for greater profits, they expanded plantations across the Deep South. The gin did not plant or pick cotton, so owners forced more enslaved people to do that fieldwork. Many enslaved people were sold to the Deep South, and families were separated.

Accept explanations that connect faster seed removal and demand for cotton to greater potential profits, plantation expansion, and increased forced field labor. Students should not claim that the gin planted or picked cotton.