Behind the Sugar Bowl

Trace how exchanged goods and forced labor shaped colonial economies.

MWH.C.2.5.D "Describe the major economic and cultural effects of the Columbian Exchange and explain how the enslavement of Indigenous peoples and Africans was used for the development of colonial economies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways exchanged plants or animals changed daily life. Circle two ways enslaved people were made to support colonial economies, and number one cultural change that grew from the exchange.

What a Sugar Bowl Hides

1. Imagine a sugar bowl on a table in a Caribbean port in the 1700s. Its contents began with sugarcane, a plant carried from Asia through Europe and then planted in the Americas. Ships took Caribbean sugar to European markets, where it became an increasingly common ingredient in drinks and desserts. European merchants and plantation owners gained wealth from this trade. The same Atlantic networks carried American maize and cassava to parts of Africa and potatoes to Europe. These crops offered new foods and changed everyday meals, although their benefits did not erase the violence tied to colonial trade.

2. The exchange moved more than food. Europeans brought horses, cattle, wheat, and unfamiliar germs to the Americas. Horses changed travel and hunting for some Indigenous communities, while cattle grazing took land that Indigenous people had used for farming. Wheat appeared in colonial fields and meals. In Caribbean colonies, Europeans enslaved Indigenous people to mine gold, grow food, and build settlements. Disease, warfare, and forced work killed many Indigenous people and shattered communities, though survivors resisted. As those populations declined, colonizers increasingly forced enslaved Africans to work in their colonies.

3. European traders and colonial buyers forced millions of Africans across the Atlantic. In the Caribbean, enslaved Africans planted, cut, and processed sugarcane under brutal conditions. Their forced, unpaid labor let plantation owners claim more of the money earned from selling sugar abroad. Colonial ports grew as ships carried sugar out and goods and enslaved people in. Africans also preserved and adapted food traditions, music, and religious practices, shaping Caribbean cultures despite efforts to suppress them. The sugar bowl therefore tells two linked stories: new foods changed daily life across oceans, and colonial wealth depended on people denied freedom and control of their work.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the movement of American crops change meals in Africa and Europe, and how did sugar play a different economic role?

2. Explain one change horses brought to Indigenous communities and one cost of cattle grazing.

3. How did colonizers use enslaved Indigenous people to build Caribbean economies, and what contributed to the decline of their communities?

4. How did enslaved Africans contribute to both the sugar trade and Caribbean culture?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 95 word museum label for a colonial Caribbean sugar bowl. Explain how exchanged crops and the enslavement of Indigenous people and Africans supported the economy behind it, and include one cultural change linked to the exchange.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Sugar Bowl

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways exchanged plants or animals changed daily life. Circle two ways enslaved people were made to support colonial economies, and number one cultural change that grew from the exchange. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the movement of American crops change meals in Africa and Europe, and how did sugar play a different economic role?	**Maize and cassava became new foods in parts of Africa, and potatoes did so in Europe. Caribbean sugar was shipped to European markets, earning wealth for merchants and plantation owners.**
2	Explain one change horses brought to Indigenous communities and one cost of cattle grazing.	**Horses changed travel and hunting for some Indigenous communities. Cattle grazing took land Indigenous people had used for farming.**
3	How did colonizers use enslaved Indigenous people to build Caribbean economies, and what contributed to the decline of their communities?	**Colonizers forced Indigenous people to mine gold, grow food, and build settlements. Disease, warfare, and forced work killed many people and shattered communities.**
4	How did enslaved Africans contribute to both the sugar trade and Caribbean culture?	**Enslaved Africans planted, cut, and processed sugarcane, allowing owners to profit from their unpaid labor. Africans also preserved and adapted food traditions, music, and religious practices.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This sugar bowl held a crop that traveled from Asia through Europe to Caribbean plantations. Plantation owners sold sugar overseas, but their profits rested on stolen labor. Colonizers enslaved Indigenous people to mine gold, grow food, and build settlements; disease, warfare, and forced work devastated their communities. As those populations declined, colonizers increasingly forced enslaved Africans to cultivate and process sugarcane. Across the Atlantic, American crops changed meals in Africa and Europe. In the Caribbean, Africans preserved and adapted food and music traditions despite oppression. A sweet ingredient could hide a violent economic system.

Accept other passage-supported cultural changes, such as horses changing hunting or wheat entering colonial meals. For the museum label, look for a clear link between exchanged goods, colonial profit, the distinct forced work described for Indigenous people and Africans, and a cultural effect.