Sugar and Ships

Trace how colonial expansion fueled an ocean trade in enslaved people.

MWH.C.2.5.E "Explain how overseas expansion led to the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how overseas expansion increased demand for forced labor, circle the sentence describing an Atlantic crossing, and number two details showing why the trade continued.

From Plantations to the Atlantic

1. In the 1500s, European powers seized land in the Americas and built sugar plantations, especially in Brazil and the Caribbean. Sugar sold for high prices in Europe, but growing and processing cane demanded large numbers of workers. Plantation owners sought workers they could control and force to labor without wages. European conquest, disease, and brutal labor systems devastated Indigenous communities. This loss did not cause slavery by itself, but it intensified colonists' search for other sources of forced labor.

2. Across the Atlantic, Portuguese merchants had already established trading posts along parts of the West African coast. As American plantations expanded, European traders bought captive people from African rulers and merchants, and they also raided or captured people themselves. Some captives had been seized in wars or kidnappings. Europeans shipped them across the ocean in crowded, deadly conditions called the Middle Passage. In the Americas, enslavers sold survivors and forced them to work on plantations. European demand helped expand the scale of this trade.

3. The system linked overseas conquest to a continuing trade in human beings. Plantation owners used profits from sugar sales to buy more land and enslaved workers. Merchants expected earnings from carrying and selling captives, so they financed more voyages across the Atlantic. European laws treated enslaved Africans and their descendants as property, making forced labor hereditary in many colonies. The trade grew because colonial expansion created a steady demand for labor, while merchants and colonial authorities organized and protected the supply.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did European expansion in the Americas increase demand for forced labor?

2. How did the devastation of Indigenous communities affect colonists' search for workers?

3. How did existing trade connections on the West African coast help European traders respond to plantation demand?

4. Why did Atlantic voyages carrying enslaved people continue as plantations expanded?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label explaining how overseas expansion led to a growing trans-Atlantic slave trade. Connect seized land, plantation labor demand, Atlantic voyages, and profits or colonial laws; use at least two cause-and-effect phrases.

Sugar and Ships

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how overseas expansion increased demand for forced labor, circle the sentence describing an Atlantic crossing, and number two details showing why the trade continued. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did European expansion in the Americas increase demand for forced labor?	**Europeans built sugar plantations on seized land. Growing and processing cane required many workers, whom owners sought to force into labor.**
2	How did the devastation of Indigenous communities affect colonists' search for workers?	**It intensified colonists' search for other sources of forced labor, though it was not the only cause of slavery.**
3	How did existing trade connections on the West African coast help European traders respond to plantation demand?	**Portuguese trading posts gave merchants connections along the coast. As demand grew, European traders bought captives and transported them across the Atlantic.**
4	Why did Atlantic voyages carrying enslaved people continue as plantations expanded?	**Plantations kept demanding workers, and merchants expected profits from carrying and selling captives, so they financed more voyages.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

European powers seized land in the Americas and established sugar plantations. Because sugar production required many workers, plantation owners sought people they could force to labor. As a result, European traders carried captive Africans across the Atlantic and sold them to enslavers. Profits from sugar and the sale of captives helped fund further expansion and voyages, while colonial laws protected slavery.

Accept responses that connect colonial land seizure to plantation labor demand and explain how that demand expanded Atlantic trafficking. Students may identify profits, colonial laws, or both as reasons the system continued.