

# Impact of the Cotton Gin

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## **Standards of Learning**

Social Studies USI.8

English 5.7, 5.8, 5.9

## **Objective**

Students will:

- Use the internet to: read information about the invention of the cotton gin; view pictures of the cotton gin; and read about the impact of the invention of the cotton gin on slavery
- Create a chart comparing and contrasting the impact that the invention of the cotton gin had on the slave holders and their slaves
- Write a one-page paper on the impact the cotton gin had on the southern economy and the lives of slaves

## **Materials**

- The Cotton Gin sheet (handout provided)  
*\*Before beginning the lesson, make this page into an overhead sheet or make copies for all the students.\**
- Cotton boll (provided in AITC Cotton Kits)
- Computers with the internet and word processing software  
*\*If you do not have access to computers, you can print off the pages from the internet website and make copies for the students and they can write their answers rather than using word processing software.\**

## **Background Knowledge**

This lesson focuses on the invention of the cotton gin and its impact on the economy in the South, particularly for the slave population. Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793. He invented it in order to speed up the process of separating the cotton seeds from the cotton fibers. Before the invention of the cotton gin, it took ten hours to separate the seeds from a pound of cotton fiber by hand. The cotton gin could separate fifty pounds a day. The invention of the cotton gin led to a massive growth in cotton production in the United States. By 1815, cotton was America's most important export, thus earning its title of "King Cotton." The invention of the cotton gin also led to the expansion of slavery into the far southern and western parts of the country. Southern life became dependent on the use of slave labor for its cotton production.

## **Procedure**

1. Ask the students the following questions:
  - What is a cotton gin?
  - What does a cotton gin do?
  - Who invented the cotton gin?
2. Tell the students that today they will be learning about the invention of the cotton gin and the impact it had on the economy, particularly the lives of slaves.
3. Put The Cotton Gin sheet up on the overhead.
4. Ask the students to take turns reading the bulleted points aloud to the rest of the class.
5. Ask the students if they have any questions about what is on the overhead.



6. After going over this information, pass around the cotton boll for the students to look at and feel. Tell the students that if they feel the cotton of the boll, they can feel the cotton seeds in the fiber.
7. After all the students have had a chance to feel the cotton seeds, ask the students to go to their computers to work (or break them up into groups to work on the computers).
8. Tell the students to go to the following web page to read about the invention of the cotton gin and find a picture of it: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h1522.html>
9. After they have read this page and looked at the picture, tell them to go to the following web page to read about how the cotton gin impacted slavery: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3i3126.html>
10. After the students have read this page, ask them why the impact of the cotton gin on slave holders versus slaves was so different.
11. Ask the students to open a word processing document to create a chart that compares and contrasts the impact of the cotton gin on plantation owners (slave holders) and slaves.
12. Tell them to use information from the overhead sheet as well as the websites.
13. Tell the students to print out their chart once they have completed it.
14. After printing their charts, ask the students to write a one-page paper on the invention of the cotton gin and its impact on the southern economy, particularly for slaves.
15. Tell the students to make sure they check their work for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
16. Ask the students to print out their papers when they are complete.
17. Allow some of the students to share their one-page papers with the class.

### **Extension**

Ask the students to research the following questions:

- How is cotton made into clothing today?
- Where in America can we currently find cotton gins?
- Are there any cotton gins still in Virginia?

### **References**

"Cotton Gin," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2005. <http://encarta.msn.com>.  
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Cotton Kit. This kit was distributed during your AITC workshop.

Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom. *What's Growing on in Virginia?*  
Spring 2004, volume 15, no. 1. [www.agintheclass.org](http://www.agintheclass.org)

WGBH Educational Foundation. *Eli Whitney's Cotton Gin*.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h1522.html>

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# The Cotton Gin



- Invented by Eli Whitney in 1793
- Created to allow the cotton seeds to be removed from the cotton fibers much quicker than could be done by hand.
- Before its invention, it took 10 hours to separate a pound of cotton fiber from the seeds. The cotton gin could separate 50 pounds of cotton fiber from seed in one day.
- Invention led to the massive growth in the United States' cotton industry.
- By 1815, cotton became America's most important export.

## Cotton Gin's Impact on Slavery

- Led to the dramatic expansion of slavery into the southern and western parts of America.
- Southern life and economy became dependent on the use of slave labor.

