



<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/ncdeaa.B0393>

## Change-Gin for the Better?

A professional development activity for teachers

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**Audience:** Middle School Social Studies Teachers, learning to work with students on reading and writing

### Goals:

- 1) "Content" goal: To examine how the cotton gin changed both cotton production and the institution of slavery in the south.
- 2) "Reading and Writing" goals: a) To use evidence from text to support a conclusion; b) to use signal words for compare/ contrast to aid in reading and writing about history
- 3) "Pedagogical" goal: To serve as a demonstration of how a lesson can meet "reading and writing" goals without straying from important "content" goals.

### List of Primary Sources:

- Cotton gin at Dahomey, Miss. [ca. 1890]: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93510593/>
- Madame Dronet Carding Cotton. Erath, Louisiana [1938 Oct.]: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000012847/PP/>
- O. T. Cardwell from WPA Federal Writers Project, page 2 [1941]: <http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh002200>
- Hall's Self-Feeding Cotton Gins [1875]: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/ncdeaa.B0393>

**Essential Question:** How did the cotton gin change agriculture in the American south?

### Common Core Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2: Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.  
*Especially:* WHST.6-8.2c: Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

### Georgia Performance Standards:

- SS8H5.c.: Explain how technological developments, including the cotton gin and railroads, had an impact on Georgia's growth.

This professional development activity was created by a participant of TPS:BASICS, an online course conducted by the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region Program, coordinated by Waynesburg University <http://tps.waynesburg.edu/tpseasternregion>.

**Procedure:**

**Connect:** Show students a cotton boll with seeds and discuss how difficult it would be to remove the seeds from a large pile of cotton. Explain that you have a photograph of a machine that was invented to remove the seeds. (If teaching in Georgia, point out the original was invented at Mulberry Grove Plantation near Port Wentworth/ Savannah, GA.)

**Wonder:** Provide the photograph *Cotton Gin at Dahoney, Miss*. Have students complete the Library of Congress’ analysis tool for photographs and prints in groups of three. (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>) Make a list of questions that the class has on the board.

**Investigate:** Provide student groups with the other three primary sources, so they have a photograph and a text describing both the cotton gin and the old system of cotton carding. As a group, they will examine each primary source to see:

- a) what they observe in that source; and
- b) what information they can glean from that source about that particular system of getting the seeds out of cotton.

**Construct:** Each group will combine what they learned into a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts cotton carding vs. using a cotton gin.

**Express:** Each student will write a short essay answering the question: If you had a small family farm, would you rather card cotton by hand or use a cotton gin? Why? These essays will be short, but a few minutes spent on pre-writing can make a big difference in improving students’ writing.

**Prewriting Questions:**

- 1) Ask what new vocabulary words they will want to be sure to include in their essay (content words). Point out that they can use their Venn diagram to help them structure their response.
- 2) Point out that this is, in effect, a compare and contrast type of essay, even though it is in the first person. Ask what “writing” (signal) words they might want to include (see table below for suggestions).

**Signal Words and Phrases for Comparison and Contrast**

Comparison Signal Words	Contrast Signal Words
In the same way	However
Just like	in contrast
Just as	on the other hand
likewise	conversely
also	whereas
similarly	but, while, yet*

\*sometimes indicate a contrast

**Reflect:** In a class discussion, pose the following questions--

- 1) How do you think the invention of the cotton gin affected cotton production in the south? (Have students support their prediction with specific information from their research on carding and ginning.)
- 2) After the students have made a prediction, show them the following data table on cotton production. Were their predictions correct? Based on what data?

**American Production of Raw Cotton, 1790-1860 (bales)**

Year	Production	Year	Production	Year	Production
1790	3,135	1815	208,986	1840	1,346,232
1795	16,719	1820	334,378	1845	1,804,223
1800	73,145	1825	532,915	1850	2,133,851
1805	146,290	1830	731,452	1855	3,217,417
1810	177,638	1835	1,060,711	1860	3,837,402

(adapted from <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/cotton-gin/>. Original Data from United States Department of Agriculture, Atlas of American Agriculture, V, Sec. A, Cotton, Table IV, p. 18. )

- How do you think the invention of the cotton gin affected the number of slaves that plantation owners bought? (Once again, ask them to support their answer with information on carding and ginning. There is likely to be some divergence in response here.)
- After students have made a prediction, show them the following data table on slave holding from 1790-1860. Were their predictions correct? If not, how can they reconcile that the cotton gin required fewer workers, yet the slave population increased? (*The cotton gin made cotton extremely profitable, so southern plantations grew more cotton. Growing cotton required many slaves.*)

**Population of the South 1790-1860**

Year	Slave Population	Free Whites
1790	654,121	1,240,454
1800	851,532	1,691,892
1810	1,103,700	2,118,144
1820	1,509,904	2,867,454
1830	1,983,860	3,614,600
1840	2,481,390	4,601,873
1850	3,200,364	6,184,477
1860	3,950,511	8,036,700

(original source: US Census data: [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/overview/1860.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1860.html))

- Have a student summarize: In what ways did this change in technology improve people’s lives? In what ways did this change in technology make people’s lives more difficult?

**Wonder (to prepare for the next class):** How do you think the invention of the cotton gin might have affected manufacturing in the North?

**Possible Follow-up Material:**

“Who Invented the Cotton Gin?” (Activity from the Smithsonian)

[http://invention.smithsonian.org/centerpieces/whole\\_cloth/u2ei/u2materials/eipac1.html](http://invention.smithsonian.org/centerpieces/whole_cloth/u2ei/u2materials/eipac1.html)

**Other Resource Books on Literacy and History:**

Edinger, Monica. *Seeking History: Teaching with Primary Sources in Grades 4-6*. Heinemann, 2000.

Lindquist, Tarry & Douglas Selwyn. *Social Studies at the Center: Integrating Kids, Content, and Literacy*. Heinemann, 2000.

Wineburg, Sam, Daisy Martin & Chauncey Monte-Sano. *Reading Like a Historian*. Teachers College Press, 2012.

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