

Cotton: How Much Do We Really Know About It?
2010 Memphis Experiential Learning Trip
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Abstract: This summer I visited the Memphis Cotton Museum and learned an abundance of information about cotton and how important it is to our lives. This set of lessons will give the students an overview of the history of cotton and many interesting facts about it, and learn a bit about Eli Whitney. These two lessons are geared towards 4th and 5th grade students.

Essential Questions: How long has cotton been in existence? How has cotton affected our lives? What can primary documents tell us about a person?

Setting the Purpose: Cotton is an important product that affects our lives every day in some way. It is important for the students to learn the history of cotton and its impact on the many things we use and depend on daily.

Lesson 1: The History of Cotton: An overview (Mini-web study)

Lesson 2: Eli Whitney's Letter (Analyzing Primary Documents)

Materials/Resources:

www.cottoncampus.org

Web Study Sheet

Eli Whitney's letter

Transcript of Eli Whitney's letter

Written Document Analysis: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/>

Lesson1: This lesson will encourage the students to challenge their prior knowledge of cotton. This lesson also will provide an overview of the history of cotton.

Essential Questions: What do you know about cotton? When was cotton first discovered? Where does cotton grow?

Enduring Understandings: There is more to cotton than meets the eye! Cotton has affected our lives in numerous and some surprising ways.

Assessment: The students will share their prior knowledge of cotton before the lesson begins. At the end of the lesson, the students will have a web study sheet to complete.

Setting the Purpose: Cotton is an everyday part of our lives. We wear cotton, we sleep on cotton, and we use cotton for many other things. But do we really know where it comes from?

Materials:

Scratch paper or post-it notes

Web study sheet

Pencil

Suggested Procedures:

1. Find out what students already know about cotton. Give the students scratch paper and a pencil, and ask them to find a partner in the class and have a conversation about what they know about cotton. Encourage the students to come up with at least 3 things together. They will need to decide who will record their findings. Give the students about 5-6 minutes to do this.
 2. Bring the class back together to share out what they learned from one another. The person who did not do the recording should share the responses.
 3. Tell the students that they will visit a website called Cotton Campus to learn some important information about cotton and some interesting facts about it. The students will have some questions they will need to answer. The students will need to follow directions and pay close attention to what they see and hear to be able to complete their task.
 4. Hand out the web study sheets and go over the directions and let the students work and explore. First, they will go to <http://www.cottoncampus.org>. The web study sheet will explain what the students will need to do.
- This lesson may take two class periods to complete.

Lesson 2: This lesson will encourage students to learn more about Eli Whitney by examining a letter written to his father.

Essential Questions: What was Eli's message to his father? What was his goal? What can we learn about a person from a letter they wrote?

Enduring Understandings: Historians study people, places, and events often by researching and analyzing information. The students will be encouraged to think as a "historian."

Assessment: As the students are working in their partnerships, listen and perhaps take notes on their discussion and their interpretation of the letter. This is intended to be used as an informal assessment

Setting the Purpose: Now that the students have gotten some background information about the cotton. Eli Whitney was introduced in Lesson 1. This lesson will challenge the students to think deeply and analyze Eli's letter and determine if any idea(s) came into existence in the letter.

Materials:

Eli Whitney Letter

Transcript to Whitney's letter

Written Document analysis sheet

Suggested Procedures:

1. Tell the students that we can learn about people who are no longer living by reading their writings, interviewing people who may have known them, and by looking at photographs. Explain to the students that their task is to read a letter that Eli Whitney wrote to his father in 1793. Tell the students that they will work as historians, people who study history and think deeply about what they read and see.
2. The kids will need to find a partner to work with. Give each student a copy of Eli's letter to his father to read and analyze the contents of the letter and to find out what they can learn about him. The students will look at the original letter and the transcript of the letter. The students will have a discussion about what they read. Give the students the following questions to guide their discussion session: You may have the students share out what they learned with the entire class.

Write the discussion questions on the board:

Do you understand Eli's letter?

What does his handwriting tell you about him?

What is Eli's letter was about?

What do Eli's words tell us about him?

What was Eli's goal?

3. The students should complete a document analysis sheet on Eli's letter.