TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU

LESSON PLAN: King Cotton and Compromise: The Growth of the Cotton Economy

Grades: 4th and 8th Grade
Subject: Social Studies
Time Required: One 45-minute class period (a second day required for the optional extension activity)
Author: Ethan Morris, TPS-MTSU

OVERVIEW
The antebellum American economy thrived on the production of cotton. Southern plantation owners amassed fortunes planting, harvesting, and selling bales of cotton fiber, and Northerners designed America’s first industrial towns in an attempt to convert the cotton fiber into thread, fabric, and finished clothes. Cotton was king, and the production and price of cotton affected a southern slave as well as a northern mill hand. This lesson explores the cotton cycle, the step-by-step process from cotton seed to finished shirt. In an optional extension activity, it also examines how the cotton cycle influenced national politics. The Missouri Compromise of 1820, which admitted Missouri into the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free state and halted the expansion of slavery above the 36°30’ parallel, is often viewed as a purely political decision; however, it was rooted in economics. Southern soil and northern streams combined to make the South agricultural and the North industrial. The differences between agriculturalists and industrialists in regards to the market, government tariffs, and workers’ wages caused much of the division that split North and South in 1820 and eventually in the Civil War.

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION
How did the cotton cycle shape the national economy?

UNDERSTANDING GOALS
Students will understand the cotton cycle (the step-by-step process from cotton seed to manufactured shirt), the national importance of cotton, the rules of supply and demand, the difference between a consumer and a producer, geographic and economic differences between the antebellum North and South, and the economic factors that resulted in Henry Clay’s Missouri Compromise of 1820.

OBJECTIVES
Students will learn how to put events in chronological order, interpret and examine primary sources (such as advertisements, business reports, and photographs), build critical thinking skills, and make economically-sound decisions.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS
Fourth Grade
- 4.57, Analyze and describe the factors of the Industrial Revolution occurring in the United States and in Tennessee, including: Samuel Slater-factory system, Watermills-influence of geography...[and] Eli Whitney-cotton gin.
- 4.58, Explain the expansion of the plantation system and slavery as the demand for cotton production grew and the impact of the cotton gin.
- 4.59, Contrast the emerging urbanization in the North with the agricultural South....

Eighth Grade
- 8.51 Trace the development of the agrarian economy in the South, the locations of the cotton-producing states, and the significance of cotton, [and] the cotton gin....
- 8.65 Describe the reasons for and the impact of the Missouri Compromise of 1820.
- 8.72 Identify on a map the boundaries constituting the North and the South and delineate and evaluate the geographical differences between the two regions, including the differences between agrarians and industrialists.

LESSON MATERIALS
- Cotton Cycle PowerPoint
- Timeline Analysis Worksheet (half-sheets)
- Ext: Understanding Economics PowerPoint
- Ext: Perspectives Graphic Organizer
- Ext: Perspectives Graphic Organizer (Answers)
- Ext: 5-6 sets of markers (red, green, yellow)
Lesson Plan Procedures: The Cotton Cycle

Step 1 Before class, open up the Cotton Cycle PowerPoint. Print out one copy of the PowerPoint slides three through twenty. Organize these printed handouts into the following sets (each slide is labeled with its appropriate set):
1. Cotton Gin
2. Selling Cotton Within the United States
3. Selling Cotton Overseas
4. Water Wheels
5. Spinning Thread
6. Creating Cloth

Step 2 Warm-up: Open up the Cotton Cycle PowerPoint and post the second slide on the screen. Ask the students the following questions:
- Do you know what this plant is called?
- Have you seen cotton growing in a field?
- Have you handled freshly-harvested cotton?
- List what someone or some company can make out of cotton.
- Do you have any (processed) cotton with you or on you?

Step 3 Explain to the class that they will learn about the cotton cycle, the step-by-step process from cotton seed to finished shirt. The students will be looking specifically at the cotton cycle in antebellum America (the period before the Civil War, ranging in years from 1790 to 1860).

Step 4 Divide the students into six groups. Ask each group to elect a recorder to write down answers for the group.

Step 5 Give each recorder a copy of the Timeline Analysis Worksheet.

Step 6 Give each group one of the six sets mentioned in Step 1 (DO NOT pass out the sets in chronological order).

Step 7 The groups should analyze each of the handouts in their assigned set and help the recorder answer the questions on the Timeline Analysis Worksheet.

Step 8 Once each group completes the Timeline Analysis Worksheet, all the groups should stand up, move to an open space near the front of the room, and try to arrange themselves in chronological order.

Step 9 After the groups are arranged in chronological order, each group should explain their part of the cotton cycle to the rest of the class. While each group presents, open up the Cotton Cycle PowerPoint and project each group’s primary sources on the screen. By the time the last group finishes presenting, the class should have heard a concise chronology of the cotton cycle.

Step 10 After the chronology activity, have the groups divide themselves up into Northerners and Southerners. In other words, if a group’s part of the cotton cycle most often occurs in a southern state they should join the Southern group. The students should rely on the handouts to guide their decision-making. Groups should feel free to dispute each other’s claims. The groups should be arranged accordingly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North</th>
<th>Both (lean North)</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water Wheels</td>
<td>Selling Cotton Within the United States</td>
<td>Cotton Gin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinning Thread</td>
<td>Selling Cotton Overseas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating Cloth</td>
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</table>

NOTE: Due to limited primary sources, some of the photographs used in this activity date from the turn of the twentieth century.

Evaluation

50% Demonstrated knowledge of a portion of the cotton cycle.

50% Participation in the group work and classroom presentation.
OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITY: *THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE OF 1820*

Step 1  Warm-up: Students should summarize the cotton cycle and recall which parts of the cotton cycle occurred in the South and which occurred in the North.

Step 2  Open up the *Understanding Economics PowerPoint*. Review the definitions on slide two and discuss the questions on slides three and four.

Step 3  Explain to your students that they will apply the economic concepts they just discussed to an activity on the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

   **NOTE:** If you or your students need some background information on the Missouri Compromise, take a look at the Library of Congress article, *Monroe’s Balancing Act* and the Independence Hall Association article on the Missouri Compromise. Additionally, feel free to peruse the primary sources on the Library’s web guide.

Step 4  Tell your students that for the upcoming activity, a consumer is someone who grows cotton (and needs to consume manufactured goods) and a producer is someone who manufactures raw cotton into finished products.

Step 5  Divide the class up into groups of five students. In the event of uneven groups, groups can be more than five but no less than five.

Step 6  Hand each student a *Perspectives Graphic Organizer*.

Step 7  Hand each group a red, green, and yellow marker.

Step 8  Within their groups, students should assign each group member one of the roles listed below. The roles are listed on the *Perspectives Graphic Organizer*. If there are more than five group members, the sixth student should be a Southern Slave.

   1. Southern Plantation Owner
   2. Small Farm Owner in the South
   3. Southern Slave
   4. Northern Manufacturer
   5. Northern Factory Worker

Step 9  The group will read the different scenarios listed on the *Perspectives Graphic Organizer* one at a time. After reading a scenario, each group member should decide how his or her chosen character would respond to the scenario. Each student should put their answer in the appropriate space on the *Perspectives Graphic Organizer*. Everyone should record their own answers as well as other group members’ answers. Group members should feel free to discuss their answers with their fellow group members.

Step 10  After each group finishes all nine scenarios, the groups should break up and reform according to their roles (e.g. all the Northern Manufacturers form a group together). Within these new groups, students should compare answers. Did all the Northern Manufacturers put the same answers? Different answers? Why? Students should discuss and come to a consensus for each scenario.

Step 11  After the groups come to a consensus, open up the *Understanding Economics PowerPoint* and go to slide five. Go through each scenario and ask the groups to give their answers as you fill in the answers on the slide. Encourage discussion.

Step 12  Exit slip: After the class answers are recorded on the PowerPoint, go to slide fifteen and ask your students to pull out a slip of paper and list the economic factors that resulted in the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

**EXTENSION EVALUATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Students’ individual <em>Perspectives Graphic Organizers</em> and Exit slips.</td>
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<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Participation in group work and class discussion.</td>
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**Timeline Analysis Worksheet**

*Directions:* Elect a recorder. As a group, read the first sheet in the set. Based on what you read, analyze the primary sources on the second and third sheets. The recorder will write the group’s answers to the questions below:

**Observe**
1. Do you see any cotton in the pictures? What does it look like?
2. Do you read anything about cotton? What has been done to the cotton?
3. If you do not see anything about cotton, what do you see?
4. Who created the pictures, photographs, or documents? When were the sources created?

**Reflect and Question**
1. What do these sources tell you about the cotton cycle?
2. What stage or step in the cotton cycle do you think is depicted? Is this early in the cycle, late in the cycle, or somewhere in-between?
3. Do you have any questions? Do you need more information?
### EXT: PERSPECTIVES GRAPHIC ORGANIZER—PAGE ONE

**Characters:**
For each scenario, list one of the following reactions:
- (This is bad!)
+ (This is great!)
? (Not sure?)

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1. There is an international surplus of cotton. The United States, India, and Egypt produce more than their usual supply of cotton. With more cotton to sell, the price of raw cotton drops.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. There is an international surplus of manufactured goods. American and English manufacturers produce more thread, fabric, and clothes than usual. With more manufactured goods to sell, the price of fabric drops.</td>
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<td>3. A drought occurred this year, and cotton did not grow well. There is not enough cotton to meet manufacturers' demands. The price of available cotton goes up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The shortage of cotton forces manufacturers to pay more for cotton. Manufacturers make up the financial loss by charging higher prices for thread, fabric, and clothes.</td>
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<td>5. This year, English manufacturers produce more thread, fabric, and clothes than American manufacturers. There are plenty of goods for consumers to purchase, but most of these goods are English-made. Fewer goods are American-made.</td>
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<td>6. The U.S. government decides to protect American manufacturers from their English competitors and raise import taxes at all American ports. Import taxes are often called tariffs. The tariffs force the English to pay higher taxes to sell goods in America. In order to make up the financial loss, the English must charge higher prices for their goods. Now, thanks to the tariff, American and English manufacturers are charging about the same price (and a high price).</td>
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<td>7. Consumers do not like tariffs. High tariffs force them to pay more for foreign goods. Consumers want to get rid of the tariff. Yet, the tariff was passed by the U.S. Congress. To get rid of it, consumers need more representatives in Congress to vote to get rid of the tariff. So, consumers decide to make a new state (which brings in several more representatives and two senators).</td>
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<td>8. Producers are upset that the tariff might be voted down. They need to stop consumers from forming a new state. Besides, the consumers might expand the institution of slavery into this new state. Slavery is not only morally wrong, but it destroys a worker’s initiative because it does not bring any financial profit to the worker.</td>
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<td>9. A Congressman from Kentucky named Henry Clay, who is personally a consumer but publicly a producer, says why don’t the producers get their own state (Maine) and keep the tariff and the consumers get their own state (Missouri) and keep their slaves?</td>
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**EXT: PERSPECTIVES GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (ANSWERS) — PAGE TWO**

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Sources


