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Lesson Title:
Slavery in the South

Level:
This lesson plan and activities are targeted to middle school social studies students.

Objective:
Upon completion of this lesson, students will understand:

1. how terrible the daily reality of slavery really was
2. how very hard and sad it was to be a slave.

Standards:

SSA4.3.3

This connects with any lesson on slaves, the middle passage, plantation life, slave codes and so forth. In almost any U.S. History textbook, many pages are devoted to this. Look in the index to find all the relevant pages.

Activity Type: Teacher-led activity

Materials: Cotton to work with during the activity
Tools that were commonly used in the plantation era

Pre-Visit:

Before the visit to Kingsley Plantation, make sure your students understand how slaves were captured, what the middle passage was like, the fear they must have endured, and the awful reality of what happened to them when they arrived in this strange new country. In addition to the textbook, there are many other primary sources you could use for “read alouds.”

After this discussion, the students will get in groups of two or three and read the passage below to each other. They can discuss it and talk about the following questions. When they have finished, one student from each group can give a short summary of their feelings.

1. What was the amount of cotton a slave had to pick each day?
2. Explain how it must have felt to do this for 12-14 hours a day.
3. What might slaves have done to break the monotony of this day?
4. Do you think they were inclined to sabotage this plantation owner?
5. What do you think life was like day after day for the slave?

Reading

When the order to halt was finally given, it was weighing-in time. Each slave was expected to pick at least 200 pounds of cotton each day. That was the minimum for everybody. Generally, the overseer learned how much more that each slave could pick, and that was his daily task.

The day's work over in the field, the baskets are "toted", or in other words, carried to the ginhouse where the cotton is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary he may be - no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest - a slave never approaches the ginhouse with his basket of cotton but with fear. It falls short in weight- if he has not performed the full task appointed to him - he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability, his master will measure the next day's task accordingly.

It was rare that a day passed by without one or more whippings. This occurred at the time the cotton was weighed. The delinquent, whose weight had fallen short, was taken out, stripped, made to lie upon the ground, face downwards, when he received a punishment proportioned to his offense. It is the literal, unvarnished truth that the crack of the lash and the shrieking of slaves can be heard from dark till bedtime on Epps' plantation, any day of the cotton-picking season.

The number of lashes is graduated according to the nature of the case. Twenty-five are deemed a mere brush, inflicted for instance, when a dry leaf or a piece of boil is found in the cotton, or when a branch is broken in the field. Fifty is ordinary penalty following

all delinquencies of the next higher grade. One hundred is called severe; it is the punishment inflicted for the serious offense of standing idle in the field.

Northrup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. Buffalo: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1854.

On-Site:

Upon getting to the plantation, the students will listen to the ranger or teacher tell of what it was like to be a slave on Kingsley Plantation (different from the reading they did in class).

A number of students will be chosen to stand in the front and hold a bag that represents the weight of the cotton they had to pick or perhaps hold some instruments they might have used in their work. All students should be able to hold the bag at some point.

As you walk to the slave's houses, allow the students to stand in the house and see how bad the living conditions would have been.

Post-Visit:

When the students return to their schools, they can make a Venn diagram of the Gang System and Task System. They can use this diagram to write a comparison of the two systems. Include in the paragraph which one might have been a little better and why.

Variations:

Have students make comparisons to their own life experiences. This could be done as an art drawing that makes the comparison, a short essay, or a peer presentation.

- Their homes vs. slave homes
- Their daily school/work/chores schedule vs. slave work schedules
- Their career choices vs. a slave's life work
- Their family life (and security) vs. slave family life