

Eli Whitney's cotton gin

1793 | Grade 2 · Read & notice

Words to know

invent — create a new tool, process, or idea

labor — work done by people

consequence — a result of an action

Look closely



Modern topic illustration created for Massachusetts History Explorers. It is not a historical artifact.

Read the story

Eli Whitney, born in Westborough, developed a cotton gin. It separated seeds from cotton fibers. The machine sped up one task. Cotton growing expanded, and so did the demand for enslaved labor.

Think, talk, and show evidence

1. What happened in this reading? Tell one fact.
2. Who or what is this reading mostly about?
3. Choose a word from the word bank. Explain it in your own words.
4. Look at the picture and its caption. What does it help you notice? Is it from the time of the event?

Follow-up reading: USS Constitution is launched

1797

The sailing warship USS Constitution was launched in Boston. Many workers helped build it. It later became famous as Old Ironsides. The ship connects Boston to naval history and the War of 1812.

How are the two readings alike or different? Tell a partner one connection. Which event came first?

Teacher guide & source trail

Original classroom adaptation. Suggested reading levels are instructional choices, not standardized readability certifications. Use professional judgment and learner feedback.

ELA practice: RI.2.1: ask and answer questions; RI.2.2: identify a main topic; RI.2.7: use images and words; W.2.2 and SL.2.1: explain and discuss.

These tasks support selected skills in the [Massachusetts 2017 ELA framework](#); they do not establish mastery of an entire standard.

Answer guidance

Factual anchor: Eli Whitney, born in Westborough, developed a cotton gin. It separated seeds from cotton fibers. The machine sped up one task. Cotton growing expanded, and so did the demand for enslaved labor. An invention can have harmful social consequences even when it saves work at one stage. Cotton linked southern plantations, northern factories, finance, and world markets. Technology's effects depend on the system using it.

Accept accurate main ideas and explanations supported by the text. Vocabulary meanings are in the opening word bank. For picture questions, use the caption and credit below; distinguish what is visible from what is inferred. For comparison, accept a specific connection supported by both readings. Do not require personal accounts of trauma.

Continue the inquiry

[Research source for this event ↗](#)

[Research source for follow-up ↗](#)

[Event page, accessible HTML reading, and vocabulary game ↗](#)

Image: Original site illustration.

[Image source and rights record ↗](#)

The PDF contains selectable English text and embedded fonts. For adjustable text and browser reading tools, use the event's [HTML page](#). External sources may need adult guidance.