



## **Abina**

Teaching materials

Episode 2

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### **Introduction to Episode/Chapter 2**

The second episode of *Abina* is made up consists of three scenes. In the first, constables dispatched by William Melton come to Saltpond to bring in Quamina Eddoo. In the second, Eddoo speaks to his lawyer, James Hutton Brew, who explains to him (and to us) how the British courts work. Finally, Abina is called to testify and tells the court about her life story up to the moment when her beads were cut from her body and she knew she had been enslaved,. These four themes -- Abina's biography, the conversation with Hutton and Brew, the meaning of slavery what it means to be a slave, and the cutting of the beads -- make up the contents of the chapter that accompanies this episode and should form the main points of your lesson plans and assignments.

By the end of this episode, students should be able to:

### **Episode 2 learning outcomes**

- Construct a life (his)story of Abina in text, images, or both
- Explain several different definitions of slavery that have emerged over time and evaluate how those definitions fit Abina’s life story
- Demonstrate comprehension of the meaning of beads in Abina’s society, identify similar markers in their own society, and explain what they symbolize
- Explain the position and role of colonial-era middlemen and assess whether and how Brew and Eddoo fit that category.

## Episode 2 Lesson plan and activities

At first glance the themes of this chapter may seem scattered. What do Abina’s life story, beads, colonial middlemen, and definitions of slavery have in common? But in fact, what’s happening here is that we are beginning to dig beneath the surface layers that students encountered in the first episode.

- In the first episode we met Abina Mansah as she arrived in Cape Coast, but we don’t know anything about her backstory until the second episode.
- We read about the history of slavery in the Gold Coast in the first episode, and students were asked to think about what a slave is, but in this episode students encounter historical and contemporary definitions of slavery to help them to broaden and deepen their thinking about this theme.
- In the “Individual and Society Pathway” of the first episode, we learned a little about the history of the Gold Coast. In this episode we use “beads” as a tool for looking more deeply at local society.
- In the first episode, students were introduced to colonialism in the Gold Coast. In this chapter, we look more thoroughly at how colonialism worked, and what its limits were, by talking about colonial middlemen like Quamina Eddoo and James Hutton Brew.

### Potential lesson plans

The material in this section could be delivered in a single day or over several days. It will work whether or not the students have watched the Episode 2 video. It may help for students to have the accompanying materials for the episode available during the lesson.

### Abina’s journey

Abina Mansah was introduced in the first episode (and probably discussed in your first lesson plan), but in this episode we learn more about her and about the mysteries in her background. Through Abina’s testimony in the video (and in

written form in the episode), you and your students can trace her life story. Below is a narrative you can share with your class, along with questions you might ask them as you go proceed. You can also use the map in the episode, which is reproduced here, as well.



1. Abina was born in an area of the eastern section of the Gold Coast commonly called 'Krepi.' The people here were a mix of Twi-speaking Akan and Ewe-speakers (see episode 1). It's not clear what language she spoke when she was a child. One of the few local words that she uses in her testimony – "amerflefle" – is an Ewe term. However, her name is Akan: Abina (Abena) for a girl born on Tuesday and Mensah (Mansa) for the third-born child. However, students should understand that her exact language group or

- ethnicity doesn't necessarily matter. Places like Krepi were mixed and cosmopolitan, rather than 'tribal.' *What do you think this tells us about the usefulness of describing Africans by their ethnicity, alone ?*
2. When Abina was still quite young (perhaps 5 or 6), there was a war in Krepi, in which the vast Asante state intervened both to support their local allies and in hopes of gaining booty and captives. Abina was one of the victims of this war. She was captured by an Asante General named Adu Bofo and brought back to the Asante capital of Kumasi. *How do you think it might have felt to have been in Abina's shoes at that time?*
  3. Abina was then sold as a slave to the province of Adansi, which was part of Asante but nominally independent and closer to the coast than the city of Kumasi. We know something about her life here, and her tasks were described in the episode text. Most importantly, Abina tells us at one point in her testimony that "At Adansi when a free person is sitting down at ease, the slave is working that is what I know". *Why do you think she wanted to convey this information to the court specifically?*
  4. While Abina was living in Adansi, another war broke out – this time between the British and their allies on the coast on the one hand and Asante on the other. Adansi was in the middle, and some fighting occurred there in which Abina was captured again, this time by the former king of Asante, Kofi Karikari, who lost the war. *Why do you think Kofi Karikari, having lost the war, wanted to capture slaves?*
  5. Kofi Karikari took Abina to a marketplace in Asante where he sold her to Yaw Awoah. Yaw bought her, and at the same time told her that she was now his wife. There is a debate that runs throughout later episodes as to why Yaw married her – just to fool her into coming with him into a territory where slavery was illegal? Or perhaps because he needed a wife? You can ask students to speculate now: *Why do you think Yaw married her at the same time as he bought her.*
  6. Yaw then brought Abina to Saltpond. With the war now over, Britain had claimed the whole coast as the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate and declared (among other changes) that slavery was now illegal. *Why do you think Yaw brought her to Saltpond?*
  7. Finally, Yaw left Abina with Quamina Eddoo, telling her he would come back for her. It is at this point that the teacher can engage discussion of the story of the cutting of the beads, which students will have watched in Episode 2, by asking *what made Abina think she had actually been sold as a slave?*

### **Important characters: Quamina Eddoo and James Hutton Brew**

Now that we know a little bit more about Abina's background, we will be able to listen more closely and effectively to the message of her testimony. But we still need to learn more about the people with whom she interacts, which influenced both her experiences and her testimony. Two of the most important of these were James Hutton Brew and Quamina Eddoo. To understand the attitudes and actions of Brew

and Eddoo, however, we need to go a little bit deeper into the way that the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate worked.

British colonialism in Africa generally followed a model called **indirect rule**. In this model, relatively few Europeans ruled the colony through partnerships with many locals. Therefore, they had to find many Africans who were willing to work with them as partners or subordinates. This policy had the impact both of making the colonies cheaper to rule (because Africans were paid much less in salaries or stipends than Europeans) and more stable (because Africans were more likely to accept other Africans in positions of power).

Indirect rule was practiced to some degree in British colonies outside of Africa, and to some degree by other Europeans in their African colonies. Colonies where there were many European settlers tended to not follow the indirect rule model as much. Nowhere was indirect rule more practiced than in British West Africa, including the Gold Coast. In fact, the “Protectorate” -- the majority of the Gold Coast -- was really a type of indirect rule in which local kings and chiefs remained in power, so long as they followed certain British laws and supported British military aims. Kings and Chiefs were important partners in indirect rule, but so were local men (less frequently women) who were western-educated and could work as clerks, sergeants, and other minor officials. Most importantly, these chiefs, kings, clerks, and sergeants served as cultural **middlemen**, cultural and linguistic interpreters who helped the British work with their African subjects. Without these two types of individuals, the colony could not have functioned.

How should we feel about such middlemen? Ask your students what they think (see also the assignment below). Many of them might feel very strongly that middlemen were “collaborators” who should be scorned. But its important to see the other side of their work. These middlemen explained the ideas and concepts of Africa to the colonizers. They represented Africans in disputes with the British. In time, it was this kind of person who would become the foundation of anti-colonial movements, not least because they used their time as middlemen to comprehend and to know how to fight colonial rule.

James Hutton Brew was one local individual who “faced both ways.” We know more about Brew than about any other person in this story. The only trained lawyer among the “important men” with whom Abina interacted, Brew was the descendant of an Irish merchant who had married into a powerful local family of chiefs and traders. James Hutton Brew was related to many important local leaders, and he had strong ties to the British authorities.

○ Irishman **Richard Brew** arrived in Gold Coast in 1750 and acted as Governor of Anomabu 1750-1764. Sold slaves to Jamaica, as well as other goods. Built “Castle Brew” to run his trade. Richard Brew had two children with Afina Anson, the daughter of a local paramount

Chief – Eno Baisie Kurentsi (John Currantee). He also had two other sons.

- One of these sons, **Henry Brew**, married Abba Kagbah and had three children.
- Of his children, one son (also Richard Brew) was a court interpreter and magistrate for the British in the Gold Coast.
- The other, **Samuel Kante Brew**, was a “scholar” and slave trader who operated under the Spanish flag and was accused of “comb[ining] European dress with the grossest superstition, idolatry, and fetish.”
- *His* son, **Samuel Collins Brew** (a bad merchant but successful magistrate), married the daughter of the paramount chief of Abora Dunkwa.
- *His* son, **James Hutton Brew**, became Prince Brew of Dunkwa, founded newspapers, and was a great lawyer.
- *His* daughter, **Mary Brew**, married Rev. Joseph de Graft Hayford and thus was the mother of a line of great scholars.

Yet Brew was also viewed somewhat suspiciously by many British of the time. Partly this was because many of them distrusted people of mixed heritage, whom they saw as “uppity” or “polluted.” More importantly, Brew himself had been involved in a scheme called the Fante Confederation in the early 1870s. The goal of this plan was to create an independent local state around Cape Coast. While Brew and his compatriots had hoped to get British support for this state, the administration had in fact seen it as a threat and shut it down quickly, briefly imprisoning Brew and others. This did not mean that Brew was anti-European. In fact, he and the other conspirators had modeled their proposed state on Britain and Germany, and his writings suggest that he truly believed that British “civilization” had much to offer Africans, but certainly he would have preferred to build an independent African state on the coast.

Eddoo was a different kind of middleman: a wealthy country “gentleman” who owned many slaves and other dependents, interacted with merchants and traders, and could afford the leading lawyer in the region. He probably didn’t speak English, and was not literate, but he and others like him traded with the British in goods like palm oil and saw British rule as a better alternative than domination by Asante. Certainly, he understood that he had to accept the authority of British courts of law, although he probably chafed at being called in by the accusations of a mere girl. For these reasons, he too was a middleman.

### **Defining slavery**

One of the assignments that accompanied the first episode asked students to think about how they would define slavery. In this lesson, you can give them a sense of

some competing definitions of slavery by different scholars, and ask them to think about what each definition means and whether they agree with it.

In 1847 **Karl Marx** wrote that: "Slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among the institutions of the peoples." A slave, to Marx, was someone who worked without being paid. Marx identified an ancient form of slavery in which people were forced to work but generally weren't bought and sold. He also identified a modern kind of slavery in which the slave had a financial value, much like an animal or piece of land. This is called **chattel** slavery. Marx believed that chattel slavery was a tool of the wealthy classes who sought to profit by not paying their laborers.

In 1926 the **League of Nations** (an early version of the United Nations) sponsored a conference to help end slavery, and one of the first tasks the delegates took on was a definition of this terrible institution. They decided that slavery was "...the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised....." In other words, what defined slavery was when one person owned another as if he/she were his or her property. In 1930 this definition was extended to include the conditions under which a person labored. The new addition stated that slavery is "...all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily."

In the 1970s **Suzanne Miers**, **Igor Kopytoff**, and **Claude Meillasoux** independently began to argue that some societies, like most in West Africa, historically did not have this kind of slavery at all. Instead, the kind of slavery that occurred in these societies was one in which slavery was the opposite of "belonging." Most people were full members of extended families and of society: they truly belonged. However, there were also people who, for one reason or another, weren't members of families and of society: maybe they were war captive, or their family had been broken apart some other way. These individuals became "enslaved," meaning they were forcibly or financially attached to another family but not as full members and without full rights.

In 1982 **Sociologist Orlando** Patterson added a factor common, he believes, to slavery in many societies. Slaves, he argues, experience a **social death**.<sup>1</sup> In other words, they are not considered to be full members of their society. Instead, they are seen as being dishonored and shameful, restricted from many social functions and in the clothes they can wear, food they can eat, and activities in which they can participate. Socially, therefore, they are at the bottom of society.

The modern organization Anti-Slavery International defines a slave as someone who is:

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- Forced to work -- through mental or physical threat;
- owned or controlled by an 'employer,' usually through mental or physical abuse or threatened abuse;
- dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property';
- physically constrained or has restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.

### **The meaning of beads**

The culmination of Chapter 2 comes when Yaw strips the beads off Abina's body. In the readings attached to Episode two, students read much of what we know about the importance of beads in Gold Coast society. They read the interpretation of noted scholar Kwasi Konadu.

There are two important lessons for students in Abina's story. The first is understanding what the episode with the beads meant to Abina, what lessons she learned from it and how it affected her. The second is extending this learning to think about the way that symbols and signs – including things we wear on our bodies – has meaning for all societies, including our own.

In addition to Konadu's explanation, students might be able to think a bit more about the meaning of Abina's experience in her own cultural terms through this brief text from Art Historian Edith Suzanne Gott:

In Sarpong's detailed study of the *bragoro* nubility rites traditionally held after a young Asante girl passes puberty and reached marriageable age, he notes that special gifts of *toma*, or waistbeads, and *etam* (the silken woman's loincloth customarily held in place by the beads) would be presented to the girl either by her family or future husband to mark the initiate's attainment of womanhood and sexual maturity.

On the last day of her nubility rites, the richly and beautifully dressed initiate would go with her retinue to thank those who attended. In this procession, it is customary for the initiate to be preceded by a little girl—naked except for several girdles of very precious waistbeads and a costly new loincloth. Dressing the young child in this manner serves to display the new loincloth and special waistbeads worn by the initiate that are hidden underneath her clothing.

The wearing of waistbeads is a tradition that, until recent years, continued throughout a woman's lifetime. In the words of one elderly Asante woman, waistbeads are "women's property," the most essential means of distinguishing women from men:

“When you find a skeleton, how do you know which is the man and which the woman?

By the beads!” .....

At women’s funerals, toma and etam, along with cloth, gold, and toiletries, are presented as gifts to accompany the deceased on her departure into the world of the ancestors. Dressing a woman’s corpse in waistbeads and *etam* signifies that she had married and borne children while in the world, fulfilling the most fundamental and admired accomplishments of Asante womanhood. In the words of one middle-aged Asante woman, dressing the deceased in waistbeads and *etam* means that the deceased has been a “respectable, responsible woman”—a wife and a mother. Yet even women who prove barren will be presented with gifts of toma and *etam*, to indicate that although not a mother in the biological sense, the deceased fulfilled the Asante ideal of maternal “benevolence” by providing for the welfare of the children of her matrilineage.

Edith Suzanne Gott, “Precious beads and sacred gold: Trade, transformation and the unifying principle of generative nurturance in the arts of southern Ghana”, unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 2002, 38-40

Students can perhaps extend this specific example to our own society by thinking about what items of clothing (or things we own) have cultural significance and how we show this value.

## Homework assignments or classroom activities

### Biography Pathway activity

This is an activity that students will best be able to answer if they read the Biography Pathway in Episode 2. You may wish to discuss these in class or assign them as homework.

1. Create a graphic biography of Abina’s early life. Choose six key moments of her life before she was sold to Quamina Eddoo. In each box draw a picture and include text captions that show what you think Abina was thinking or saying at those moments.

### Slavery Pathway activity

Below are two questions that students should be able to answer as they read the Slavery Pathway in Episode 2. You may wish to discuss these in class or assign them as homework.

2. What do you think being a slave meant to Abina? Students should reflect on the buying/selling, the kidnapping, the commercial nature of slavery, and its non-racial nature. Consider comparing her experience of slavery to a slave in the U.S. (especially if you have studied a first-hand account of U.S. slavery). How would a former American slave and Abina explain their situations to each other if they had the chance to speak?
3. Choose two of the definitions of slavery provided in this pathway and draw a picture of what each of them would look like (with captions). Then, compare and contrast those two drawings and definitions .

### **Individual and Society Pathway activity**

The activity below pertains to the Individual and Society Pathway of Episode 2. You may wish to discuss it in class or assign it as homework

4. Think of a piece of clothing that people wear in your culture or community that has great symbolic value. Why and when do people wear it? Who gives it to them? Compare the meaning and role of that piece of clothing to that of beads in Akan culture.

### **Colonialism Pathway activity**

The activity below should be assigned to students after they have read the Colonialism Pathway for Episode 2.

5. Write a sample Wikipedia biography entry for either James Hutton Brew or Quamina Edoe. What are the most important aspects of his identity to discuss in the entries? Will your entries take a positive or negative view of his contribution to the Gold Coast?

## **Episode 2 Glossary**

**chattel** – in terms of slavery, chattel means that people were considered to be property which could be bought, sold, traded, and inherited.

**Indirect rule** – the colonial system that operated on the Gold Coast, in which a ‘thin white line’ of European officers and officials oversees a substantial number of Africans (or other colonial subjects) including chiefs and kings, as well as clerks and other subordinates who wield some power, but only as agents of the colonial state.

**middlemen** – middlemen were the many men (and some women) who were cultural and economic brokers between Europeans and Africans.

**social death** – in terms of slavery, social death is a theory developed by Orlando Patterson that argues that part of the condition of being a slave was one of not having social status, social presence, and full membership in society, no matter what their economic condition.