



Abina

Teaching materials

Episode 3

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Introduction to Episode/Chapter 3

Episode 3 takes place almost entirely in the courtroom as Abina testifies about her life in Quamina Eddoo's house under questioning from James Davis, then the judge (William Melton), and finally Eddoo's lawyer, James Hutton Brew. Two parts of her testimony are separated by a brief scene in which Brew explains to Eddoo how to defend oneself against charges of slavery in a British colonial court, in the process revealing a great deal about how British colonialism worked.

The course of the four pathways in the accompanying readings takes advantage of openings made by both the courtroom testimony and Brew's discussion with Eddoo and also builds on the contexts of the readings that accompany Episode 2. The Biography pathway focuses on Abina's testimony that she "had no will of [her] own and could not take care of [her] body and [her] health" by exploring the encounter between African and European health systems in the late nineteenth century. The Individual and Society pathway similarly explores the notion of "will" and contrasts European notions of "free will" and Akan notions of freedom that Abina would have known well. The Slavery pathway builds on Abina's testimony about her daily tasks in Quamina Eddoo's household by looking at what kinds of jobs and responsibilities were assigned to enslaved people in this place and time. Finally, in the Colonialism pathway we build on Episode 2's exploration of Eddoo and Brew by looking closely at William Melton, the colonial "judge" in this case.

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

Episode 3 learning outcomes

- Apply their acquired knowledge and deep reading skills to analyze key statements made by Abina in court
- Compare and contrast two views on the relationship of “work” to “slavery” – that of Melton and that of Abina.
- Use the example of contrasting ideas about “free will” to consider the role of cultural communication and difference in Abina’s testimony .
- Explain the position and background of colonial administrators and make an argument as to how we should describe Melton’s role and that of colonial administrator’s more generally.

Episode 3 Lesson plan and activities

In Episode 3, students have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of Abina’s situation and the world in which she lived. We have already established the key stages of Abina’s journey to the courtroom Cape Coast and know something about her personality and we have learned a bit about the Gold Coast and slavery. Now we travel further on each of these pathways and also begin to understand the role played by the judge, William Melton. Most importantly, we talk about two concepts core to understanding the era -- health (and medicine) and free will (and freedom) – that help us to both connect to the Enlightenment and to think about other ways of understanding outside of the Enlightenment tradition.

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 3 video. It may help for students to have the accompanying materials for the episode available during the lesson.

Medical encounters

Ask students what it is that makes people sick and how we treat illness. How do we know what medicines to give people? What ‘evidence’ do we use?

Then tell them a bit about 19th century medicine:

Health and sickness in the 1870s were still poorly understood everywhere in the world. In Britain a great deal of medicine was still dangerous and false. Quacks still

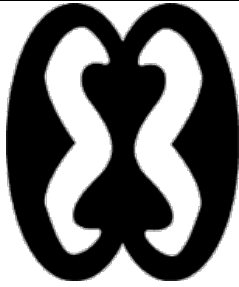
prepared cures from dangerous or bogus materials, including arsenic and mercury. Many people still believed that illness stemmed from bad 'humors' in the body which could be cured by inducing people to vomit or bleeding them. It was also believed that God could intervene in illness, and thus the power of prayer was often invoked to help the ill.

Overwhelmingly, however, British medicine was turning to a '**scientific method**' of determining what made people sick and how they could be treated:

- In London, John Snow studied the pattern of outbreaks of a disease called cholera and figured out that regions of the city where people were drawing their water downstream from sewers had higher rates of disease than regions where water came from pure wells or were upstream of sewers. He figured out that cholera came from microscopic creatures in stagnant or polluted water.
- Scientific breakthroughs like the microscope allowed for the study of such disease-causing agents that could not be viewed by the naked eye.
- The invention of anaesthesia helped with surgery.
- Journals came out in which scientists and doctors could report their techniques and compare what worked and what didn't

You might want to refer students back to the Scientific Revolution and Scientific Method, which you probably already covered in class. If not, you might want to draw on resources like the explanation for the Scientific Revolution at <http://www.regentsprep.org> or the video at <http://www.history.com/topics/enlightenment/videos/mankind-the-story-of-all-of-us-scientific-revolution>.

What kinds of healing were in practice in the Gold Coast in this period? As students read in the Biography pathway for this episode, there were several types of medicine in the Gold Coast. You may want to have them read this section out loud in class. Much medicine had to do with herbal remedies, for example, and healthy lifestyle choices in terms of food and cleanliness. Overwhelmingly, however, sickness was ascribed to bad relationships or problems in relationships – with spouse, family, neighbors, or ancestors. Medicine, therefore, tended to involve trying to mend relationships through discussions or rituals or public demonstrations. This principle of relationships strengthening a person is demonstrated by the metaphor of the chain: every link (or person) depending on each other. If one link fails, they all do. This is shown in the *adinkra* (traditional symbol) called Nkonsonkonson.



Nkansonkonson, “chain links”

You might ask students to talk about what this symbol represents and to discuss the metaphor of the chain and how it might relate to health through community.

What does this have to do with Abina’s biography? Abina very forcefully tells the court that she knew she was a slave because she “could not take care of her body and her health.” This was clearly an important statement to her. Ask students what she might have meant, given the explanation of “health” and “medicine” in local (Akan) society at the time.

They might come up with the answer that seems most likely to historians: that she was referring to the fact that she had no family around her, she had no strong relationships, and she was being forced to marry someone she didn’t know. This leads directly into the assignment (below).

Encounters in “freedom”

Just as “health” had different interpretations in different parts of the world, so did “freedom.” That might be quite surprising to students, but ask them to define freedom and see what kinds of definitions come up. Then ask them to consider a number of ideas that came out of the Enlightenment about freedom:

Free trade – trade governed by the market and not by intervention from a government or other body, in which prices are set by supply and demand

Free labor – a system in which laborers are paid a wage and anyone is free to try to sell their labor to employers, with wages set by supply and demand as well as the skillset of the laborer and needs of the employer

Free will – the idea that a person can act based on his/her own individual autonomy and at his/her own discretion, without the constraint of restrictions (including those from people who can exert control over an individual)

Freedom of speech – the right to express one’s ideas and opinions without any outside restraint or censorship

These terms were at the forefront of the minds of men like the judge, William Melton. They all signify some kind of “freedom” and all come from the same society – North-West Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. -- but they connote quite different ideas. One means that the government doesn’t interfere in trade, one means that people aren’t enslaved. One means that people aren’t controlled by destiny, and that they can say whatever they want. And these ideas all come from just about the same place and time!

In Abina’s society (Akan) and language (Twi), there were also many words or terms that related to freedom. Share these with students:

- di bere, “to enjoy one’s time, to live a luxurious life”
- fa ne ho di, “to obtain the free use of one’s self, to become free, be emancipated; to live independently, to enjoy one’s liberty or freedom”.
- aho-de(e), “personal property, effects, things, possessions; substance, goods”
- e-ho-de, “independence, liberty”
- aho-fa-di, “emancipation, manumission, liberty”
- ô-hofadifo, “an emancipated slave”
- adehye-di, “liberty, personal freedom”.

Some of these terms for being “free” mean a person who isn’t a slave. Some mean to live independently. Some mean to have property or things or live a luxurious life.

How does this apply to Abina? Abina didn’t speak English. When asked whether she had “will of her own” or whether she was “free,” several times during the case, the word was translated into Twi. We don’t know, however, which translation was used, or what she was asked! She also didn’t know the European concepts of “free will,” for example. Thus she understood the question differently from the English-speakers in the courtroom.

Ask students what other words appear in the episode (or elsewhere in the case) that might have had different meanings for Abina and for William Melton. This will lead directly into the assignment for this pathway segment.

The work slaves did

Students usually have a single vision of the kinds of occupations and labor done by enslaved people, or at best they see a dichotomy between the (higher suffering) field laborer and the (less maltreated) ‘house slave.’ Consider asking your students what they know about the kinds of work assigned to slaves to see what they have to say. Possibly, they will already know that among enslaved people (and even among enslaved Africans) there were many different types of labor. These included:

- gang-style plantation cultivation, especially in tobacco and sugar,

- piece-work, where individuals and groups were assigned to take care of and harvest the crops of a particular area, particularly in rice,
- artisanal activities like leatherwork, blacksmithing, sewing and weaving, and boat-making, particularly in port cities (including St. Louis in Senegal and New Orleans in Louisiana). Often, the slave-owner would make a profit by selling the services of these skilled enslaved people,
- domestic work like cooking, cleaning, and caring for children,
- soldiering, particularly in European forts in Africa,
- medicinal/healing work, especially in Latin America (although this was rare),
- carrying/transportation, as sailors or 'porters' (who carried goods on their heads,
- in many African societies, enslaved people also served in social or ritual roles as assistants, guards, and court officials

Investigating the kind of work slaves did gives you an opportunity to have students work with images. In particular, the Slavery Image Database is a collection of excellent images, including numerous paintings and sketches of enslaved people laboring, mainly in the Americas. These include:

Plantation labor

<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/return.php?categorynum=7&categoryName=New%20World%20Agriculture%20and%20Plantation%20Labor>

Domestic slaves and other kinds of 'servants'

<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/return.php?categorynum=9&categoryName=Domestic%20Servants%20and%20Free%20People%20of%20Color>

Other kinds of labor including market-selling and artisanal activities

<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/return.php?categorynum=10&categoryName=Miscellaneous%20Occupations%20and%20Economic%20Activities>

Working with these images, you can help students to understand that enslaved people did many different jobs. This is important in terms of Abina's testimony in this episode. Ask students what kind of work Abina was assigned. They should be able to pick out her domestic labor roles – cooking, cleaning, getting firewood and water. Are these surprising roles for an enslaved person? Or not really? Point out also, that she was a 'porter' for Yaw Awoah, carrying his goods to the coast.

This lesson might culminate with asking students why Melton questioned Abina as to the work she did for Quamina Eddoo. What was he trying to learn? The author's interpretation is that Melton thought certain kinds of labor (like working on a plantation) were more likely to be the work assigned to slaves than others (like domestic work). Given the evidence above, was Melton correct, do you think?

Finally, you might ask students how they think Abina felt about this work. Did she resent having to do it? Was it part of the evidence *she* had that she was enslaved? Or

was it something that she thought she might normally have to do even if she wasn't a slave?

Important man: William Melton

Having described Brew and Eddoo, two representatives of very important groups in the colonial administration of the Gold Coast, the Colonialism pathway now takes some time to engage students in thinking about William Melton and other European colonial officials. We must understand Melton if we are to understand Abina's testimony and experiences, and learning about Melton and men like him can help us to understand more about how colonialism worked.

There are four questions that you might want use to help frame Melton and other colonial officials for your students.

What was the background of most colonial officials, and what were their beliefs?

Most colonial administrators in the British Empire, especially those in intermediate ranks in medium-sized colonies like the Gold Coast, came from the British middle classes. Why is this important?

- The British middle classes of the late nineteenth century were avid consumers of Enlightenment ideas. They especially represented the idea of the "civilizing mission." Back in Britain, this meant that they supported hospitals and schools meant to "raise" the lower classes. In the Empire, it meant that they believed they had a duty and a right to educated colonial subjects as to how to behave. This civilizing mission had a positive side (like abolitionism) but was also very problematic because it meant that colonial officials often tried to make Africans conform to British rules and laws, often without caring about their opinions.
- One British middle class value of this era was "paternalism." We will talk about this more later, but you might want to introduce the idea of the colonial administrator thinking of himself as a "father" to Africans, disciplining them but also protecting them. Again, there are both positive and negative sides to this concept. Ask students if they can see both.
- Most middle class Britons were members of "dissenting" churches like the Methodist or Baptist church. This meant that they were "evangelical" in believing in bringing the Bible, but also British civilization, to other people around the world.
- In addition, however, the specter of "race" was beginning to play a very big role in colonial administrators minds at this time. Many of them believed that they had the right to tell Africans (and other colonial subjects) what to do partly because they were racially superior to them.

What were the motives of colonial officials like Melton in their actions and the decisions they made (such as whether to side with Abina or not)?

From the description above, it might seem that the motives of colonial administrators were all wrapped up in their sense of themselves as “superior,” or “fathers,” or “evangelizers.” This is partly true. However, they also had another motive. They wanted to personally be successful and advance (get raises, better positions, etc.) in the Colonial Service to which they belonged. What, then, made a successful colonial official who was well regarded by his superior? Ask students this question, and see what they think.

The principal answer to the question of what made a “successful” colonial official seems to be tied up in two words: stability and economics. In other words, the Colonial Office (i.e. the bosses) wanted colonies where there was no trouble, that didn’t cost a lot, and where British companies could operate profitably. An administrator who helped to deliver a stable, cheap, and profitable colony or district was viewed very positively and was likely to be promoted.

Key to this kind of success, of course, was a good relationship with powerful locals who were part of the structure of indirect rule of the colony (see Episode 2 Colonialism pathway). In other words, Melton and his colleagues had to keep local palm oil growers, chiefs, and other men on whom they depended reasonably happy. Now, many of those men owned slaves. This consideration may have weighed heavily on Melton, no matter what he thought about slavery himself.

What did Melton think about slavery?

Ask students what they think Melton thought about slavery, given the questions he has asked so far.

William Melton oversaw dozens of cases involving slavery, and it’s clear that in many ways he was an abolitionist. Abolitionism was part of the middle class values described above: it was a “fatherly” and “civilized” duty and part of British identity in the late nineteenth century. Melton clearly did not like slavery, and especially when it was violent or abusive. Thus, in many cases, he punished men and women who clearly owned and abused slaves.

However, Melton also had been convinced that local, domestic slavery in the Gold Coast was not the same as plantation slavery in the Americas and wasn’t always abusive. He accepted that many young people, especially girls, were really ‘apprentices’ or ‘adopted daughters’ rather than slaves, especially when there was no evidence of violence or abuse.

What does this mean for his decision in this case? Which way do they think he will rule, and why? Why does he ask the questions he asks?

Homework assignments or classroom activities

Biography Pathway activity

This is an activity that students will best be able to answer after discussing the Biography Pathway in Episode 3. You may wish to discuss these in class or assign them as homework.

1. Discuss Abina's statement: "I had no will of my own and could not look after my body and my health. Therefore, I knew I was a slave!" Given the explanation of how health and medicine was believed to work in the Gold Coast, what might she have meant? Given the way that British people at the time tended to think of health and medicine, how do you think William Melton might have interpreted her words?

Individual and Society Pathway activity

The activity below pertains to the Individual and Society Pathway of Episode 2, and specifically the question of communications and different understandings in the courtroom. You may wish to discuss it in class or assign it as homework

1. Abina's experience in the courtroom highlights the existence of many intersecting races, ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures in the Gold Coast at the time. This courtroom experience is also probably one of the first times she experienced such intimate contact with so many Westernized people. Discuss the ways in which the courtroom experience placed Abina outside of her cultural comfort zone. What words are spoken that she might not understand?

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. Magistrate Melton takes various approaches to try to find out whether Abina was a slave. First, he asks about the symbolic transaction of cloths and the cutting of beads to attempt to determine if she was purchased. Then, he asks about the type of work that she did to find out if it was "slave work." Which do you think is more important in determining the status of Abina as a slave: whether she was "purchased" or how she was treated? Why?
3. Create three more graphic boxes of Abina doing the slave work she describes. In each one, include a thought bubble describing her thoughts at those moments.

Colonialism Pathway activity

Below are three questions that could be assigned to students after they have read the Colonialism Pathway for Episode 2.

4. Write a sample Wikipedia biography entry for Melton. What are the most important aspects of his identity to discuss in the entry? Will your entry take a positive or negative view of him?
5. How should we feel about men like Melton, British administrators in Africa who seem to have made attempts to be good and fair people but yet were working on behalf of a colonial enterprise? Write 1-2 paragraphs explaining your view of their role in the Gold Coast colony.
6. What was the conundrum Melton faced in deciding either for or against Abina in terms of his convictions and his aspirations (aside from the evidence)?

Episode 3 Glossary

biomedicine – the medical science method that uses the scientific method and especially the application of biology to determine how to diagnose and treat illness.

colonial administrator/ colonial official – Colonial administrators were the official representatives of the empire (in this case the British Empire) whose job it was to oversee and manage the governance of a colony. They included soldiers, judges, government bureaucrats, as well as sometimes teachers, medical professionals, and engineers.

free will – Free will is the idea that a person can act based on his/her own individual autonomy and at hi/her own discretion, without the constraint of restrictions (including those from people who can exert control over an individual).

paternalistic/paternalism – the concept that a person or institution (in this case the colonial official and administration) is in a relationship to colonial subjects similar to that of a father to children with both a duty to discipline the subjects under its/his control and to protect them.

proverb – A proverb is a simple saying, usually widely shared in a community, that expresses an idea that is also commonly held.

scientific method – The scientific method is a set of processes in which analyses and hypotheses are formulated by using consistent observation, measurement, experimentation, and testing to develop evidence. The scientific method was refined and became extensively used in the modern era, including in medicine.