



Abina

Teaching materials

Episode 5

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Introduction to Episode/Chapter 5

Episode 5 begins with a morning conversation between Abina and Davis as they discuss her motives in bringing this case against Quamina Eddoo. They are interrupted by a message that the judge is calling additional witnesses. While Abina must still complete her testimony first, much of the chapter revolves the testimony of other witnesses, including Quamina Eddoo's sister Eccoah Coom and Yaw Awoah, Abina's husband who allegedly sold her to Quamina Eddoo. In addition, one of the other girls who lived in the household, Adjuah N'yamiwhah, testifies on Abina's behalf.

The additional witnesses both help and hurt Abina's case, and in the end much rests on the weight Melton and the jury give to place on the evidence each gives. The readings accompanying the episode focus on the issue of the value that judges (and historians) give to different kinds of evidence: the importance of Abina's own experiences, the weighing of contrasting testimony given in a courtroom (and available to the historian!), and – finally – the slipperiness of definitions, such as whether Abina was a slave or a wage laborer.

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

Episode 5 learning outcomes

- explain and evaluate the author's argument as to what constitutes Abina's "truth"
- identify factors that may have influenced Melton and the jury in giving different values to the testimony of various witnesses
- discuss some ways that personality and bias affect historians' readings of evidence
- define capitalism and determine whether Abina's situation fits the definition of a wage laborer in a capitalist system or not.

Episode 5 Lesson plan and activities

Episode 5 is really all about evidence. On the first level, it's about evaluating the truth of testimony given by a series of witnesses who contradict each other (and Abina, to some extent). Beneath this level, this chapter is about the weight the judge, William Melton, gives to each witness. At the deepest level, the lesson plans below are intended to push students to think about themselves (and historians) as judges as well, and how *we* choose to evaluate different evidence from various sources or individuals.

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 already watched the Episode 5 video. It may help for students to have the accompanying materials for the episode available during the lesson, and in some cases you may wish to read sections out loud in class. You may also find it useful to have students read or perform directly from the original court transcript, which is also available to them and to you.

Abina's truth

You may want to begin this lesson plan (or set of linked lesson plans) by reminding students of what we know about the judge, William Melton, and how he seems to weigh evidence. This is based on all of the earlier episodes and lesson plans. Students may come up with some of these values, or you may have to remind them:

- Melton has a sort of formula to determine "who is a slave" that especially relies on what kind of work a person was doing, whether money changed hands, and whether they were physically abused
- Melton values the opinions of a jury he has selected, all of whom are wealthy and/or important adult males
- The prevailing gender constructions of this time and place mean that Melton probably did not value the testimony of women/girls very highly

Putting all of these ideas together can help students to understand Abina's testimony in this episode and the Biography pathway that accompanies it. Ask them this question:

- Melton's "truth" is based on the values above. What is Abina's "truth" based on?

Students may or may not have any immediate answers, but they should be able to think of some by reviewing Abina's testimony and especially by studying the Biography pathway. One of the key elements in this chapter is Abina's refusal to answer Brew's question of whether or not the other girls in the house were slaves. Instead, she says "he did nothing good for me." In saying this, Abina is expressing that the "truth" of the case, to her, can be found in her own experiences. Consider testimony she gave earlier in the case:

- She said she was being forced to marry someone she *did not want* to marry
- She told of how she was maltreated, how she was verbally abused, and the work she did
- She complained that she "could not take care of [her] body and [her] health

Abina's "truth," in other words, was not derived from some formula, but from her own experiences.

This, in any case, is the interpretation of the author/historian. Do students agree or disagree?

The testimony of Eccoah and Yaw

The testimony Eccoah Coom and Yaw Awoah is meant to exonerate Quamina Eddoo. Both were clearly coached by James Hutton Brew, and their words are aimed directly at addressing Melton's formula.

Consider having students read the testimony from both witnesses direct from the original source, which is included (as part three of the written volume or as Episode 7 of the application). Both are quite short. As they read the testimony, ask them to think about the ways that their testimony would influence Melton to rule that Abina was not a slave. They may come up with the following:

Eccoah testifies that:

- Abina was a guest in her house
- she did not threaten Abina with punishment (verbal 'scolding' or physical abuse)
- the work she did was the normal kind of assistance that a guest would give a host, nothing like 'slave labor,' and was voluntary

Yaw (written in the testimony as 'Yowahwah') testifies that:

- Abina is his wife, and he got her by paying 'head sum' (brideprice) not by purchasing her as a slave
- he left her with Quamina Eddoo and Eccoah as a guest
- he left her behind because he had to visit his sick brother
- he never took her beads away
- he didn't give her any money to pay for goods while he was away because she was not good with money (note the gender aspect of this response)

You may want to ask students what they think Melton would have made of this testimony. Do they think he would have believed Eccoah and Yaw's testimony? Why or why not?

The testimony of Adjuah

Now we come to the testimony of Adjuah N'Yamiwheh. This young woman was enslaved with Abina in Adansi, claims to have witnessed Yaw purchase her, and then ended up in Quamina Eddoo's house.

Some important points of her testimony:

- Adjuah states that Abina was Yaw's wife (note that, as described in earlier episodes, "slave" and "wife" were not exclusive categories)
- She claims Yaw purchased her in Adansi, and she witnessed it
- She states that Abina told her she had been sold to Quamina Eddoo the day that Yaw left and also that Yaw told her that he had sold Abina to Quamina Eddoo

This testimony largely agrees with Abina's. At the same time, Brew catches her in a small disagreement (about carrying goods).

Ask students whether they think Melton would have placed a high value on Adjuah's testimony, and why or why not. They may come up with various answers about her personality and identity (age, gender) and about Brew's ability to identify some differences between her testimony and Abina's and to use that to attack their credibility. On the other hand, they may point out that her testimony gives an eyewitness account of Yaw admitting that he sold her and to Abina stating that she had been sold well before she ran away.

Capitalism, slavery, colonialism

The final part of the lesson for this episode seems to be unrelated to the others. It is about the way that capitalism ties into this story. However, there is a piece of evidence in this episode that is very much about capitalism and that probably will weigh heavily in Melton's considerations.

Part of the lesson here is one of global history. Just as this is a story about a very local experience of slavery and colonialism, so, too, the rise of global capitalism was having its effect in this region.

Capitalism is defined in students' readings for this episode as:

- a mode of economic organization in which companies and productive assets are typically owned by private individuals or groups of individuals, rather than the government.
- a system in which, these goods and the land on which they are produced are then offered for sale on an open market.
- a system in which people can lend or invest their money -- or *capital* – in companies or economic undertakings.

This kind of modern capitalism is an economic system like we have today, and it was central to growing European empires like the British Empire in the 19th century. Your students will probably have encountered ideas about capitalism either in learning about the Enlightenment or the Industrial Revolution. If not, there are a number of quick primers they can look at. Some of these even directly address relationships between slavery and capitalism, including this one at PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/west-got-rich-modern-capitalism-born/>.

The more important distinction for this episode (one that will take students back to earlier episodes, where we addressed “freedom”) is that by definition most conceptions of capitalism promoted wage labor (a form of free labor) over slavery. In the minds of Adam Smith and other intellectuals, capitalism should make slavery disappear.

Under the system of slavery, the worker was forced to do work he/she didn't want to do, without pay or compensation. This was, they thought, inefficient. Consider, for example, this quote from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*:

From the experience of all ages and nations, I believe, that the work done by free men comes cheaper in the end than the work performed by slaves. Whatever work he does, beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance, can be squeezed out of him by violence only, and not by any interest of his own. – Adam Smith
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Smith thought that slavery would be driven out by wage labor. Under the wage labor system, the “free market” operated by supply and demand. People offered their labor, employers offered jobs, and people would pick the jobs they wanted or needed and try to get the best price for their labor, while employers would try to get good workers at low wages. The result would be something in the middle.

The vast majority of the British at this time, men like Melton, believed in the “free market.” Bringing capitalism as an economic system to their colonies was, in their minds, part of the “civilizing mission.”

How does this apply to Abina’s case? In this episode, Brew asks Abina whether she received room, board, and cloth from Quamina Eddoo. He is essentially making the argument that she is a wage laborer because she receives these goods and services. He points out that she received all of this as a kind of pay.... Did she want *money* as well? (“Were you also told that people are paid *and* fed and clothed for their work?”)

Ask students whether they think Melton would have accepted the argument that Abina was a wage laborer since she received food, room, and cloth. You might note that technically, wage laborers were paid in money, not goods and services. But might Melton have been convinced anyway? Why might he have been convinced one way or another? Only because of the evidence? or also because of his different view of James Hutton Brew and Abina Mansah?

Conclusion

You may wish to end by reminding students of the exercise at the beginning of the lesson plan (or set of linked lesson plans) for this episode. You began by looking at how William Melton weighs evidence. Now ask students whose testimony they believe, and ask them whether they believe individual testimony because of the logic of the evidence or because of their sympathies for some individuals or for one side of the case. Finally, ask them whether they think the author – who is a historian – chose to elevate some evidence over others based on his sympathies and value as well! This is a valuable way to help students to evaluate the claims to authority of historians and to remind them to think critically, no matter what they are reading or viewing.

Homework assignments or classroom activities

Biography Pathway activity

The activities below can best be completed by students who have read and discussed the Biography pathway in Episode 5.

1. In this chapter, we read and see what Abina says, but we have no evidence for what she is thinking as she says those words. Choose one important statement that Abina makes in this section. Write down that statement. Underneath, write a one-paragraph narration of Abina’s thoughts at that moment. Think about:
 - a. Where is she and how does that affect her thoughts?
 - b. What is important to her? What does she want?
 - c. How does she feel in comparison to the people who surround her?

2. What does the author argue is Abina’s “truth”? Draw an image of Abina surrounded by elements of her truth as an answer to this question.

Individual and Society Pathway activity

Students who have read the Individual and Society pathway in Episode 5 should be able to answer the questions below. You may wish to discuss these in class or assign them as homework.

3. How much value do you think Judge Melton gave to Adjuan N’Yamiwhah’s testimony in support of Abina Mansah? How do you know? Why do you think he chose to value her testimony so much or so little?
4. Read the description of the word *pawned* in the text accompanying the episode, and reflect back on the definitions of slavery described in earlier episodes. Does it sound like a *pawn* was a kind of slave to you or not? Defend your argument.

Slavery Pathway activity

The two activities below should be completed by students who have watched/read the episode and the Individual and Society pathway.

5. Imagine you are James Davis arguing Abina’s case in front of the judge and jury. How would you argue against the testimony of Eccoah and Yaw? What would you say about their characters and about the evidence?
6. Imagine you are James Hutton Brew. What would you tell the judge in support of Eccoah and Quamina Eddoo’s testimony? What would you say about their characters and about the evidence?

Colonialism Pathway activity

The question below could be assigned to students who have read the Colonialism Pathway for Episode 5.

7. James Hutton Brew argues that by getting cloth, food, and a place to sleep, Abina was, in fact, a paid worker and not a slave. What do you think about this argument? If you were the judge, would you be convinced by it? Why or why not?

<h2>Episode 4 Glossary</h2>

capitalism – a mode of economic organization in which companies and productive assets are typically owned by private individuals or groups of individuals, rather than the government. In a capitalist system these goods and the land on which they are produced are then offered for sale on an open market. Under a capitalist system people can lend or invest their money -- or capital – in companies or economic undertakings. Thus as well as markets, capitalist systems have banks and financial institutions that pool and invest money, often for profit.

pawn – in the context of the 19th century Gold Coast, a pawn was a person provided as security for a loan, usually by a member of his or her family. This person had to work for the lender until the debt was paid off.

Sophistry – the use of fallacious arguments, especially with the intention of deceiving. Refers to some arguments that James Hutton Brew uses to try to confuse Abina.

wage – a fixed regular payment, usually in money, in exchange for an amount of labor. In some places and times, wages could be paid in goods or services, including room and board, but this kind of arrangement doesn't usually fit the definition of wage labor.