



Abina

Teaching materials

Episode 6

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Introduction to Episode/Chapter 6

Episode 6 is all about the outcome of Abina's case and its meaning. The first half of the episode takes place almost in the background. Melton and the jury decide the fate of Quamina Eddoo and Abina Mansah, while in the hot sun common people go about their everyday activities. Most of the second part of the episode follows Abina's reaction to the verdict, which exonerates Eddoo. Having lost the case, Abina wonders whether it was worth even telling her story in court. Yet in the last pages, we bring her story to the present, as it is discovered in the archives and becomes a graphic novel and a film that speaks to tens of thousands of students around the world.

Just as the video/graphics bring Abina's story to a conclusion, the readings that accompany Episode 6 are aimed at helping students to bring together the various episodes and to prepare for the summative assignments that will allow them to take important lessons away from this experience and to connect Abina's story to broader issues.

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

Episode 6 learning outcomes

- converge multiple type of evidence from throughout this project to produce analyses that respond to major questions in Abina’s case.
- apply what they have learned through this case to broader topics of historical enquiry.

Episode 6 Lesson plan and activities

Episode 6 is meant to bring the story together and enable students to take steps to produce their own analyses and lessons from the project as a whole. As such, the lesson plans are built around summative assignments of two types. The first type is a series of individual assignments tied to the pathways:

Pathway	Essay assignment
Biography	Was Abina exceptional or representative?
Slavery	Was Abina a slave?
Individual and Society	Why did Abina go to court?
Colonialism	Why did Abina lose her case?

In addition, there is a class-wide summative assignment embedded into the pathways. This assignment imagines a “museum” representing Abina’s story, with students working in groups or individually to provide supporting exhibits from one pathway. The overall assignment looks like this:

Abina Museum Project

Overview: You have now read or watched all that we know about the story of Abina, a real woman who lived in the late 19th century Gold Coast and who challenged the power structure of her society. You are among the few people who know such an important story. Most people, however, never learn about the experiences of “ordinary” people in the past. When we want to teach the larger public about history, we often use another medium: museum galleries. Museums are, in a sense, public educational spaces where the general public goes to learn about interesting topics.

Your Mission: As a class, you will now create a museum gallery with various exhibits about Abina and her world. When it is completed, invite other students, teachers, family members, and friends to visit the gallery and learn about her life and her society. Perhaps you could even hold a special “Museum Night” with snacks and beverages to celebrate its opening.

Potential lesson plans

The material in this section could be delivered in a single day or over several days. If you are planning a museum display, it will probably take students some time to prepare their exhibits. You may wish to read/watch Episode 6 in class: it is quite short. Students will need to have some exposure to the material in Episode 6 before attempting the lesson plan, below. The lesson plans themselves are quite short, as most of the reading and discussion will have taken place at this point. Their main objective, therefore, is to prepare students for the summative assignments.

Exceptional, representative, or neither?

Was Abina exceptional?

Historians differ on the number of enslaved people living in the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate in 1874, when emancipation was promulgated, but it was probably tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands. Similarly, historians don't agree how many of these individuals liberated themselves (see discussion in the Slavery pathway for Episode 4). What we do know is that approximately 130 cases having to do with slavery appeared in the courts over the quarter century that followed. Only a very small number of them were brought by young women or girls on their own behalves. Many were either brought by adults self-liberating themselves or by parents or relatives seeking to liberate their kin; others were disputes in which the charge of slavery was used to discredit an antagonist.

Moreover, out of all of these cases, only four were extensive and called multiple witnesses. The others were charges brought against kings or chiefs. Abina's was also the only one that made its way into a locally-published West African newspaper. Quite amazing, really.

This evidence brings out two important linked questions about Abina's story.

- First, *was Abina somehow exceptional, that her case should be so distinctive and well-recorded?* What was it that made this case so special? Discuss with your students, drawing on the biographies that began this pathway. They may point out her language in court, her insistence on being heard and presenting her own views, and the way she recruited Davis to represent her. For someone who didn't even speak the language of the court or know how it operated, this was pretty exceptional.
- Second, *if Abina was for some reason exceptional, does this mean she wasn't a good representative of others like her* – the tens of thousands of young girls and women in positions similar to hers just in the Gold Coast, - whether they were slaves or not? Ask students whether they think her experiences were representative of those suffered by other young women or girls, and also whether her testimony might represent their thoughts and emotions.

Why learn about Abina? (broader lessons)

You may want to use these questions as a jumping-off point for a wider discussion of *broader lessons about the experiences of those disadvantaged in this colonial context: poor, enslaved, young, female, African*. A few answers might include:

- We can understand the kinds of attitudes and rules that were used to restrict and control them.
- We can get a sense of their experiences – workload, punishment, verbal abuse, an inability to take care of themselves.
- Finally, we may be able to understand something of the emotions that they went through – the shame attached to slavery, the search for respectability, the desire to be heard, the disgust at being forced to marry someone they don't want to, etc.

This discussion should lead effectively into the two proposed summative assignments for this Pathway.

Was Abina a slave?

What is a slave?

At the end of the Slavery pathway, students have to answer the same question as Melton and the jury: Was Abina, in fact, enslaved? The question of whether or not Abina was a slave should lead students through several different thoughtful exercises, all of which have been embedded in this the Slavery pathway.

The first step in answering the question is to define what a “slave” is. Students can look back at their definitions from the first episode, and the alternative definitions they worked with in Episode 2. But ask them, “is there a single, universal definition of a slave?”.

Most discussions about definitions of slavery lead students to accepting that there are contingent, localized definitions. So what is the definition that should be applied in Abina's case? They may consider Melton's formula, for example, or Abina's own statements about labor, health, and abuse.

The class may successfully come up with a working definition of slavery, or possibly not. That's okay. In going into the assignment, they can have different definitions, as long as they are able to justify their definition.

Was Abina a slave?

With a working definition of slavery in place, students can now begin to answer the question “was Abina a slave?”

If you're going to continue this discussion in class (instead of just assigning the essay), consider leading students to evaluate the different evidence. What parts of

Abina's and Adjua's testimonies suggest she was a slave? What is the response from Eccoah and Yaw's testimony? What is James Hutton Brew trying to prove by his questioning of Abina? You may want students to consult either the video/graphic or the original testimony in answering this question. Don't forget to warn them to consider their own biases, and that of the author, as factors in their answer. Is their answer guided by the evidence or by their own preconceptions and biases?

At this point, students should be ready for either summative assignment.

Why did Abina go to court?

Why did Abina go to court?

For students working in the Individual and Society pathway, the question is why Abina went to court. For anyone unversed in this case, the answer is easy: she wanted to escape from slavery, to become free. But we know, of course, that slavery was *de jure* illegal, and that Abina had already *de facto* liberated herself by fleeing to Cape Coast. She wasn't in any real danger of being re-enslaved, so why go to court?

Scattered throughout the episodes are clues to Abina's motivations, and these are brought together in Episode 6's Individual and Society pathway. It may help to review these motivations:

- Abina was all alone and wanted her experiences to be heard by someone
- Abina had suffered, and she wanted the perpetrators to be punished
- Abina felt she had moved somewhat from being a 'slave' to being a 'wife' with Yaw, and now she was being treated as mainly a 'slave' again. She wanted to prove she was virtuous, and to be healthy, by proving she was Yaw's faithful wife rather than being forced to be Eddoo's slave (and only secondarily the wife of Tando, a man she did not like),

Students may come up with motivations of their own, of course, but putting together a combination of the explanations above will demonstrate that they understand the material.

Studying motives

Students may note that some of the explanations above require a certain amount of speculation. That's true, because the study of motives is linked to the study of emotions, and in history capturing emotions can be very difficult. This is why we often fall back on **instrumental** explanations. These are explanations that are easily connected to material gain. For example: people do things in order to gain wealth, or status, or land, or position.

It's much harder to get at motivations that are **affective**. This means that people are driven by their emotions and closely-held ideas about the world – anger, love, shame, desire, honor, respectability. These are often shared across societies. So, for

example, in Akan society at this time being a slave was 'shameful' but being a wife was 'respectable,'

You may want to point out to students that most of their textbooks, for example, depict decisions made by people and groups as being moved by desire for material gains, but that they may also describe decisions as being 'culturally motivated,' which often means they at least partly have affective motives.

Why did Abina lose her case?

Why was Eddoo exonerated?

In the end of the case, Quamina Eddoo is **exonerated** and freed. This is ultimately Melton's decision, but it is one recommended by the jury. For a brief moment, Melton considers trying Yaw for having brought Abina in as a slave, but he then abandons the plan, possibly because he believes Yaw just brought her as his wife and never intended to sell her.

Ask students: "Why was Eddoo exonerated?" and "Why do you think Abina lost this case?" They may come up with many different answers, which may include both factors having to do with the evidence and external factors having to do with the colonial context of the case.

Here are some possible responses that hinge on evidence in the case:

- Abina couldn't prove money had changed hands
- The kind of work Abina did was done by both slaves and free people, so it wasn't proof she was a slave
- Abina wasn't physically abused
- Abina and Adjuah couldn't prove that Abina's beads had been torn away
- Eccoah and Yaw both testified that Abina wasn't a slave, and their testimony was convincing
- Tando and other witnesses managed to avoid coming to court and testifying at all

Here are some possible factors having to do with colonialism:

- As young girls, Abina and Adjuah faced gender discrimination in the value given to their testimony
- Gender also played a role in that Melton believed that Abina should really be under a male's authority
- Melton was convinced by the jury, who were wealthy men and probably slave-owners themselves. These men were the kinds of middlemen/grandees on which colonialism relied for stability and economy, so Melton (and other colonial administrators) tended to side with them.

- Quamina Eddoo himself was an important man, the kind Melton was likely to listen to and respect
- Eddoo had the money and power to have a proper lawyer; Abina only had James Davis, a lowly court interpreter

How did 'colonialism' affect this one small case?

What broader lessons about colonialism might students take away from this decision? Ask your students to brainstorm, possibly in groups, to come up with some ideas. Here are a few that I consider important:

- Although colonialism was full of violence, fighting was expensive and damaging to trade and stability. Thus colonial officials often relied on some cooperation from a group of locals and sided with them on important issues
- Colonialism generally functioned as an alliance of important men – colonial administrators and powerful chiefs (and/or a few educated elite men) who excluded everyone else from power. This was the reality of “indirect rule”
- Colonialism had a “language” and codes, like Melton’s formula as to who was a slave, and important men were most likely to understand these
- Everyday people, like Abina, could sometimes use the systems and institutions of colonial rule, like courts, to get their voices heard or try to make changes. Often, however, they were unsuccessful in getting what they wanted, especially if it threatened the interests of administrators and their local allies

As a final note: Colonialism itself would only end when powerful and everyday people in the colonies saw a common interest in ending it and came together in “nationalist” and “pan-African” movements. This would take some time, but was exactly what ultimately happened in the mid-to-late 20th century.

Homework assignments or classroom activities

Biography Pathway activity

The activities below culminate the Biography pathway:

Essay question:

1. How do you think historians should portray Abina, and why? Was she an exceptional individual with unique experiences and skills? Were her experiences representative of a large number of women and girls? Based on your answers, why is it worth learning about a young woman like Abina in a history class?

Museum activity:

Imagine a museum with a special exhibit about “Abina and her World.” Museums have the role of teaching the public about important people, events, and works of art throughout history. An exhibit called “Abina and her World” would, of course, have to have a special section devoted to the woman at the center of our story. Most gallery rooms have a special plaque at the start introducing the topic of that particular room. Write a plaque entitled “Abina” in 500-1000 words.

Your Central Question: Why is Abina’s story important for us to learn about?

Supporting Questions:

- Who was Abina?
- What was her story?
- Is her story an exceptional or ordinary one? Why does that matter?
- What is the meaning that we should take from Abina’s story?

Slavery Pathway activity

The activities below culminate the Individual and Society pathway:

Essay question:

2. Was Abina a slave? Defend your answer using evidence. Also, explain the definition of ‘slave’ you are using, and why it is appropriate to this setting or if it is universally applicable

Museum activity:

Imagine a museum with a special exhibit about “Abina and her World.” Museums have the role of teaching the public about important people, events, and works of art throughout history. An exhibit called “Abina and her World” would, of course, have to have a special section devoted to the topic of slavery in the Gold Coast. Most gallery rooms have a special plaque at the start introducing the topic of that particular room. Write a plaque entitled “Abina and Slavery” in 500-1000 words.

Your central question: Was Abina a slave?

Supporting Questions:

- Who was Abina?
- What did slavery mean during the time and place in which she lived?
- What is the evidence on both sides of the argument?
- What is the meaning that we should take from the case regarding Abina’s slave status?

Individual and Society Pathway activity

The activities below culminate the Individual and Society pathway:

Essay question:

3. Why did Abina choose to take Quamina Eddoo to court? Note that she may have had more than one motive for doing so. Defend your answer based on the evidence in this case and what we know about Abina and about the motives of people in her kind of situation.

Museum activity:

Imagine a museum with a special exhibit about “Abina and her World.” Museums have the role of teaching the public about important people, events, and works of art throughout history. An exhibit called “Abina and her World” would, of course, have to have a special section devoted to her relationship with the people around her, including the “important men.” Most gallery rooms have a special plaque at the start introducing the topic of that particular room. Write a plaque entitled “Abina and the Important Men” (or “Abina and Power”) in 500-1000 words.

Your central question: Did Abina’s actions alter the power structure in her town? In other words, through her case, did a former slave, someone with less power, succeed in gaining more power?

Supporting Questions:

- Who was Abina?
- What was her relationship like with the “Important Men” before the case?
- At the end of the story, what was her relationship like with the “Important Men?”
- What meaning should we take from the relationship between Abina and the Important Men?

Colonialism Pathway activity

The activities below culminate the Colonialism pathway:

Essay question:

4. Why was Quamina Eddoo found not guilty? Be sure to consider the evidence in the case as well as the historical context of the court, including the way colonialism operated and ideas of gender in this time and place. Also, what does his exoneration tell us about colonialism more broadly?

Museum activity:

Imagine a museum with a special exhibit about “Abina and her World.” Museums have the role of teaching the public about important people, events, and works of art throughout history. An exhibit called “Abina and her World” would, of course,

have to have a special section devoted to the role of the British in the colonial Gold Coast and their impact on Abina's life. The prevailing narrative of European colonialism in Africa is that powerful countries like Great Britain took over African nations and unjustly despoiled deprived? African communities of their wealth, cultures, and power. Most gallery rooms have a special plaque at the start introducing the topic of that particular room. Write a plaque entitled "Abina and British Colonialism" in 500-1000 words.

Your central question: What does Abina's story and her encounter with the British colonial justice system tell us about colonialism and how it was experienced by colonial subjects?

Supporting Questions:

- Who was Abina?
- What took place in her encounter with the colonial British justice system? What were her goals?
- Did her experience and did the outcome help her achieve justice?
- What meaning should we take from this story of colonialism in the Gold Coast?

Episode 6 Glossary

affective – a type of motivation that is connected to emotion, and emotional relationships

exonerate – to find a person free from guilt or blame, 'not guilty'

instrumental – a type of motivation that can be clearly connected to material gain