

Dear Educator,

This Memorial Day, a new vision of America's identity comes to life when HISTORY® presents a 21st century reimagining of *Roots*. Beginning with the story of Kunta Kinte, a young Mandinka warrior from The Gambia in West Africa who is sold into slavery, *Roots* traces the lives of his descendants through American history, from the 18th century through the Civil War.

Featuring a stellar cast that includes Laurence Fishburne, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Anna Paquin, Anika Noni Rose, Forest Whitaker, and Malachi Kirby as Kunta Kinte, *Roots* airs over four nights on HISTORY at 9pm ET, from Monday, May 30, through Thursday, June 2.

To help you and your students explore the world portrayed in *Roots*, Young Minds Inspired (YMI), in collaboration with HISTORY, has created this study guide, with activities that guide students through the historical sources of this epic saga and identify themes for thought-provoking classroom discussions.

We encourage you to share this resource with your colleagues. Although the materials are copyrighted, you may make as many copies as you need for educational purposes.

Please let us know your opinion of this program by returning the enclosed reply card or by responding through the feedback form at ymiclassroom.com/roots. We depend on your comments and ideas to continue providing free educational programs that make a real difference in students' lives.

Sincerely,



Dr. Dominic Kinsley
Editor in Chief
Young Minds Inspired



TARGET AUDIENCE

High school and college students in American history, film and media, and African American studies courses.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- **Communicate** the historical and cultural significance of the events chronicled in *Roots* and their relevance today.
- **Examine** how identity and culture define our lives.
- **Explore** how resistance to oppression shapes our history and our future.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- This teacher's guide
- Three reproducible student activity sheets
- A wall poster for display in your classroom

STANDARDS

This program aligns with Common Core English Language Arts/History and Social Science Standards for grades 9-12. For a standards correlation, visit ymiclassroom.com/roots.

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

Photocopy this teacher's guide and the three student activity sheets before displaying the poster in your classroom. Make additional copies of these resources to share with your colleagues. Provide students with copies of the activity sheets to enhance their viewing of *Roots*.

Note: *Roots* is rated TV-14, L, V, S. This series contains intense language of the time period, violence, and sexual violence, and therefore we do not recommend it for students under the age of 14.

Activity 1

AN AMERICAN EPIC

This activity provides a general introduction to *Roots*.

Discovery – Students investigate some of the new research that informs this reimagining of the *Roots* epic. Have them complete the short quiz that focuses on the era when the Mandinka were thriving in Africa, and slavery was a vital part of the economy in the Americas. (Answers: 1. T, 2. F, 3. T, 4. F, 5. T) Then have students use the model on the activity sheet to create timelines as they watch the series and put the events it covers into the context of key events in American history.

Discussion – Explain to students that the demand for slaves in British North America

increased in the mid-18th century as a result of colonial expansion and an ever-growing market for crops such as tobacco. A great deal of new research about this period and the brutal realities of the slave trade inform this reimagining of *Roots*. Tell students that they will see the result of new research into The Middle Passage — for example, a slave ship that was built based on dimensions/characteristics of real slave ships that were organized to control slaves and deter rebellion. They will also see examples of the ways enslaved people united, communicated, and acted, and the important role female slaves played as they risked their lives for freedom. Discuss how the experience of The Middle Passage, as portrayed in *Roots*, has left its mark on our national identity. Then examine how slavery persists in our world today in forms such as child soldiers, forced labor, and debt bondage.

Activity 2

YOUR NAME IS YOUR SHIELD: IDENTITY AND FAMILY

This activity ties in with the first two nights of *Roots*.

Discovery – Students research the experience of enslaved people and gather evidence of how the identities of Kunta and his daughter Kizzy develop over the course of the series. They will focus in particular on important traditions, such as Mandinka music and language and the naming ceremony that empower Kunta and his family to maintain some of their Mandinka culture and individuality despite tremendous violence. Students also gather evidence of alterations in the American identity during this era as the North and South evolve regional identities influenced by their distinct social, economic, and political realities.

Discussion – Explain that Kunta and Kizzy, like anyone else, had aspects of their identities they could shape (such as their interests) and others they could not (such as their ethnicity). Their identities were shaped by circumstances as well as by their family and their heritage, as evidenced in Nights 1 and 2 of *Roots*. In Africa, Kunta Kinte was a well-educated warrior with a promising future. This stands in stark contrast with his identity as an enslaved person who is renamed "Toby" and his focus on freedom for himself and his family. His daughter Kizzy's name ("you stay put") influences the development of her identity. Kunta wants her to have warrior-like instincts so that she may find a means to

freedom. Kizzy finds freedom in an unexpected way — by learning to read. Have students explore how identity and connections to their past or family heritage have shaped the ways people have resisted oppression throughout history (e.g., slavery, the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Movement, etc.). How do people draw strength from their family identity?

Activity 3

RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE

This activity ties in with the last two nights of *Roots*.

Discovery – Multiple forms of resistance were important to bringing about the end of slavery. In *Roots* we see examples ranging from Nat Turner's rebellion to the continued singing of "Binta's tune," which becomes enmeshed in American culture. Spirituals were also a form of resistance that imparted important values and told of the hardships of slavery. Have students explore spirituals through the lens of identity and how they have played a significant role in the development of African American identity.

Discussion – Students should create a continuum of acts of resistance that they witness in *Roots*, from emotional resistance, such as prayer or song, to plans to run away to freedom. Various forms of resistance illustrate not only the resilience of the human spirit but also how enslaved people continued to imagine freedom even amidst incredible violence. Students can also consider forms of resistance such as Nat Turner's rebellion. How effective was this rebellion, and what were the outcomes? The modes of resistance depicted in *Roots*, when compared with other forms of resistance throughout history (e.g., the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement), offer an interesting perspective on how individuals and communities can triumph over adversity. The discussion becomes even more complex when considering modern acts of resistance or organizing for change, like the use of social media.

Quick Activities:

- Encourage students to explore their own roots by searching for photos of their ancestors or oldest living family members.
- Students can read an excerpt of Alex Haley's classic at www.rootsthebook.com.

RESOURCES

www.history.com/roots
ymiclassroom.com/roots



AN AMERICAN EPIC The epic mini-series *Roots* is a historical portrait of one family's journey from slavery to freedom and their struggle to pass on their cultural identity from one generation to the next. Featuring a stellar cast including Laurence Fishburne, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Anna Paquin, Anika Noni Rose, Forest Whitaker, and Malachi Kirby as Kunta Kinte, *Roots* airs on HISTORY® over four consecutive nights beginning May 30 at 9pm ET.

DISCOVERY

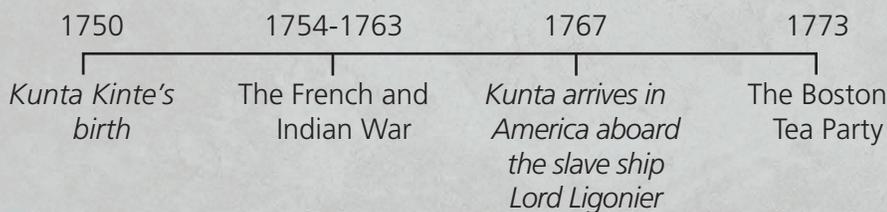
The Mandinka: The story of *Roots* begins with Kunta Kinte, a young Mandinka warrior from The Gambia in West Africa, who is sold to European slave traders by a rival family in his own town of Juffure (also spelled Juffeh). Learn about the Mandinka at mandinkapeople.org. Then complete this short quiz.

1. Many Mandinka were well-educated. (T) (F)
2. West Africa was a primitive part of the world in 1750. (T) (F)
3. The majority of Mandinka people were Muslim. (T) (F)
4. The Mandinka had no knowledge of Europe until the 18th century. (T) (F)
5. Warrior culture was extremely important to the Mandinka people. (T) (F)

The Slave Trade: Use these resources to learn more about the time period in which *Roots* takes place.

- Learn more about the Atlantic Slave Trade at abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=96659&page=1
- See how the Atlantic Slave Trade evolved at www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/slav/hd_slav.htm
- Hear firsthand accounts of former slaves at memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html
- Read a brief excerpt from chapter 1 of Alex Haley's *Roots* at www.rootsthebook.com/excerpt.html

Historical Context: As you watch *Roots* over the next four nights, use the back of this sheet to create a timeline that places events in this family history in the context of major events in American history. Here is a timeline of the opening events of the story to get you started:



DISCUSSION

Use your research and what you learn from watching *Roots* to explore these questions:

- Why was there an increased demand for slaves in the Americas in the mid- and late-18th century?
- What were the conditions on the slave ships? How did the slave traders attempt to control slaves on ships? How did enslaved people resist?
- How did the slave trade affect the colonies in both the short and long term?
- Visit www.notforsalecampaign.org to learn about the persistence of slavery today. Compare and contrast the type of slavery depicted in *Roots* with what is happening in parts of our world. In what ways is slavery the same as it was in the colonial era and how is it different?
- www.notforsalecampaign.org says, "Modern-day slavery is the acquisition of people using force, deception or coercion with the intent to exploit. Slavery is wrapped up in almost every industry's supply chain, tainting the food we eat, the clothes we buy and the electronics we use. After the international drug trade, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second-largest criminal industry in the world." What can be done to stop it? What are some organizations doing to end this kind of slavery?



ROOTS

MAY 30 THROUGH JUNE 2 AT 9PM ET ON HISTORY®

YOUR NAME IS YOUR SHIELD: IDENTITY AND FAMILY

Over the first two nights of *Roots*, you will see how identity is a significant theme in the series. Kunta Kinte and his family members are forced to accept slave names and to give up many meaningful customs and traditions from their cultures. This leads to resistance among enslaved people as they must find ways to maintain their identity and keep their heritage alive while also trying to find freedom in any way possible.

DISCOVERY

For enslaved individuals, identity was a complicated issue. On the one hand, slaves wanted to maintain ties to their homeland and culture, even though doing so meant they risked being punished. On the other hand, enslaved people were often given new names and expected to assimilate to life in the colonies. Use these primary and secondary sources to explore the theme of slave identity, the forces influencing it, and how it developed over several generations.

- Consider the idea of identity development and how it is expressed at worldhistoryforall.sdsu.edu/themes/keytheme5.htm
- Study excerpts from 19th century slave narratives at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/identity/text1/beingaslave.pdf
- Read two poems by George Moses Horton, written when he was a slave, at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/identity/text6/poethorton.pdf
- Investigate “The History of the Idea of Race...And Why It Matters” by Audrey Smedley at www.understandingrace.org/resources/pdf/disease/smedley.pdf
- Examine the speech “I Will Sink or Swim with My Race” by African American abolitionist John S. Rock at www.blackpast.org/1858-john-s-rock-i-will-sink-or-swim-my-race

Now, after viewing Nights 1 and 2 of *Roots*, consider how the development of Kunta's identity and that of his daughter Kizzy reflect changes in America. Cite five specific events in Kunta's and Kizzy's stories that help define who these characters are. Next, list factors and events that influenced the development of the North and the South (both collective and individual) and how slavery impacted the social, economic, and political identities of these regions.

DISCUSSION

- Create identity charts for Kunta and Kizzy, and discuss which aspects of their identities they can shape (such as their beliefs) and which they cannot (such as their ethnicity). Discuss how the identities of each character were shaped by their circumstances as well as by their family and their heritage, focusing specifically on events in Nights 1 and 2 of *Roots*.
- Compare and contrast Kunta's identity in Africa with his identity as an enslaved person.
- Consider how the meaning of Kizzy's name (“you stay put”) influences the development of her identity.
- Assess what Kunta and Kizzy considered the most important elements of their family heritage and personal identity, and explain how they held onto these as enslaved people.
- Discuss which aspects of identity have shaped the ways people have resisted oppression throughout history. For example, how did Kunta pass down his Mandinka heritage and help Kizzy imagine the possibility of freedom? How did people during the Civil Rights Movement think about the past and the importance of identity in making their claims for equality?



MAY 30 THROUGH JUNE 2 AT 9PM ET ON HISTORY®

RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE

In the last two episodes of *Roots*, the descendants of Kunta Kinte try to resist the terms of enslavement through simple acts like singing and through riskier actions like organized revolt. Assess which of these were most effective and why, in addition to evaluating their long-term effects.

DISCOVERY

Resistance takes many forms in *Roots*, ranging from Nat Turner's rebellion to Kunta and his descendants keeping Mandinka culture alive through "Binta's tune." Spirituals were also a form of resistance. Use these resources to explore spirituals through the lens of identity and their role in helping slaves survive and unite amidst incredible violence.

- Learn about the history of spirituals at www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/
- Find out how spirituals evolved and influenced the development of music in America at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zeshN_ummU
- Visit the Library of Congress National Jukebox and listen to several spirituals that chronicle the slave experience:
 - o *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*
www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/10169
 - o *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*
www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000555/
 - o *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*
www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/1797/

DISCUSSION

- Establish a continuum of acts of resistance from spiritual or emotional resistance, such as prayer or song, to running away, to larger scale uprisings like Nat Turner's rebellion. Cite specific examples from *Roots*.
- Compare and contrast the modes of resistance depicted in *Roots* with other forms of resistance throughout history (e.g., the Holocaust, the Anti-Apartheid movement, and the Civil Rights Movement) and with modern acts of organizing and resistance (like the use of social media). Consider how technology has helped or hindered resistance movements over the course of American history.
- Consider how resistance contributed to the slaves' sense of self and identity. Explain how resistance also helped the slaves maintain a connection with their African roots using specific examples from *Roots*.
- Discuss the role of enslaved women in *Roots* and how they were vital to resistance movements.



MAY 30 THROUGH JUNE 2 AT 9PM ET ON HISTORY®

LAURENCE
FISHBURNE

MALACHI
KIRBY

JONATHAN RHYS
MEYERS

ANNA
PAQUIN

ANIKA NONI
ROSE

FOREST
WHITAKER

THE GROUNDBREAKING SERIES REIMAGINED

ROOTS™

MEMORIAL DAY



HISTORY™

HISTORY.COM/ROOTS

