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SPECIAL EDITION

Slavery and the Wheat Economy

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Jr! **Additional Resources and Activities can be found at:**

ConsidertheSourceNY.org

Slavery and the Wheat Economy

When we think of the early economy of New York State, we often think of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and the fur trade. But the fur trade only lasted about 20 years. By the middle of the 1630s, Dutch farmers began to grow wheat. The wheat would be sold at the market and traded. Bread, pancakes and other baked goods made from wheat flour were a large part of the Dutch diet. Wheat was also sent to New York City, then put on ships to the Carribean to feed the thousands of enslaved people on the sugar plantations. Wheat was used as a form of currency (money) in the colony. People often paid their debts and taxes in schepels of wheat.

Wheat was an easier crop to grow. It didn't need much attention once it was planted. During the growing season, the enslaved people who worked with the wheat would have other jobs, like baking, household chores, and working in warehouses. Once the wheat was ready to harvest, it had to be cut using tools like a scythe or sickle. After it was cut, the wheat was thrashed to separate the part of the wheat that can be eaten from the straw. Next comes winnowing, when the wheat kernel or berry, is separated from the chaff. The wheat kernels are then put into the mill and ground into flour. The flour would be packaged in bags to be shipped. On many Dutch farms enslaved persons worked the wheat in all of these stages.

Once the wheat was traded or sold the profits went to the landowner, who was often the enslaver. The landowner could use this profit to meet his family's wants and needs. Enslaved labor contributed to the colony's economy, but the enslaved person did not benefit from it personally.

WORDS TO KNOW:

- **Economy**—a system of allocating resources to meet people's needs and wants
- **Schepel**—a unit of measure for wheat and other grains

The Best Pancakes

6 Eggs
Water
4 cups of flour
Pinch of salt
1/4 teaspoon each: ground cloves, cinnamon, mace, and nutmeg
Butter for frying

Beat the eggs with a little water until light. Measure; you should have at least 2 cups of liquid. If not, add some more water. Combine spices, salt, and flour and stir in the liquid to make a smooth batter. If you prefer thinner pancakes, add more water. Fry in butter in a frying pan. Make them any size you like.

Credit: The Sensible Cook, Peter G. Rose

Gnaw on This

- Wheat is an ancient food. It has been grown around the world for 10,000 years.
- Wheat is used in bread, pasta, breakfast cereals, cookies and other baked goods.
- Millstones could weigh as much as 1 Ton each.
- Wheat was not grown in Western Africa where many enslaved persons were originally from. They had to learn how to work with it.
- Enslaved persons could be "rented" to other people. The money for their labor went to the enslaver.

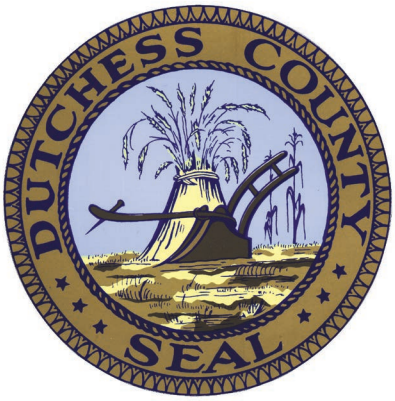
Community Connections

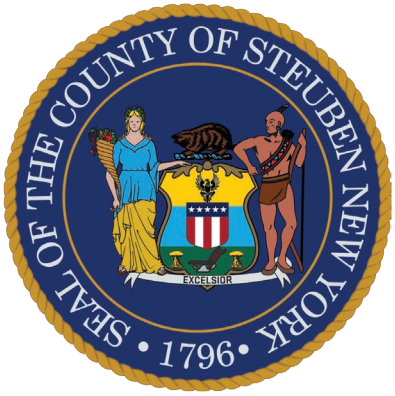
- **Mabee Farm Historic Site,** Rotterdam Junction. Visit the oldest farm in the Mohawk Valley. schenectadyhistorical.org/site/mabee-farm-historic-site/
- **Philipsburg Manor,** Sleepy Hollow. Learn about the enslaved persons who worked this property in 1750. hudsonvalley.org/historic-sites/philipsburg-manor/
- **Stony Brook Grist Mill,** Long Island. Visit a historic, working mill on Long Island. wmho.org/education-programs/the-stony-brook-grist-mill-c-1751/

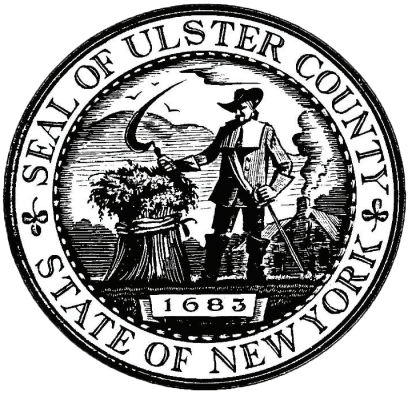
Take a Closer Look

Student Name _____

New York State has 62 counties. Each county has its own seal. The seal is a symbol of the county that is used on official documents. The seal has the name of the county and an image that usually tells something important about the counties' history.







Look at the images on the five county seals above.

Observe: What do the images on these county seals all have in common?

_____

_____

_____

+ **Infer:** Based on what you've learned, why do you think these five counties all chose this common image?

_____

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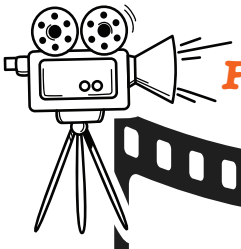
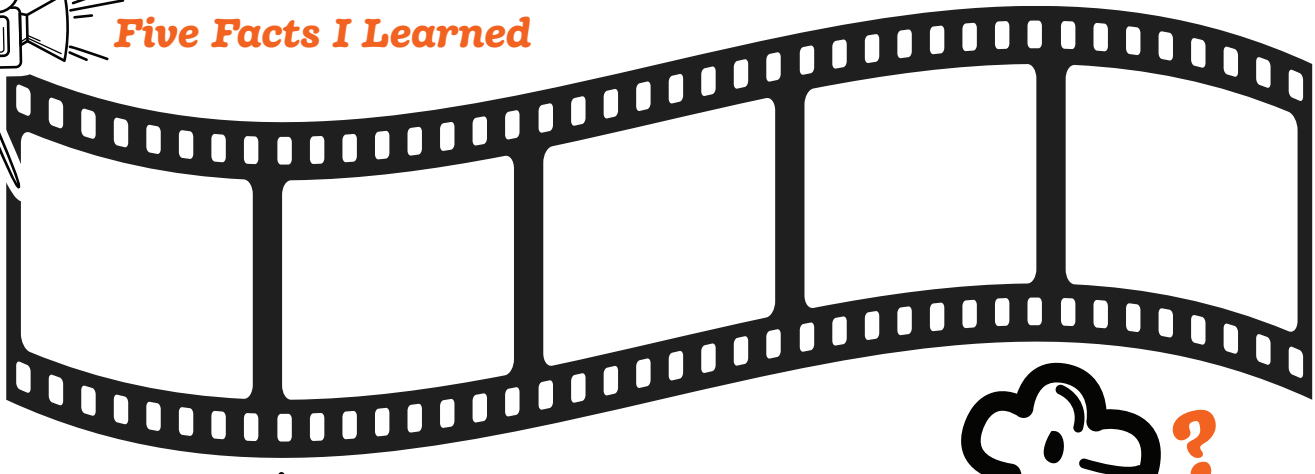
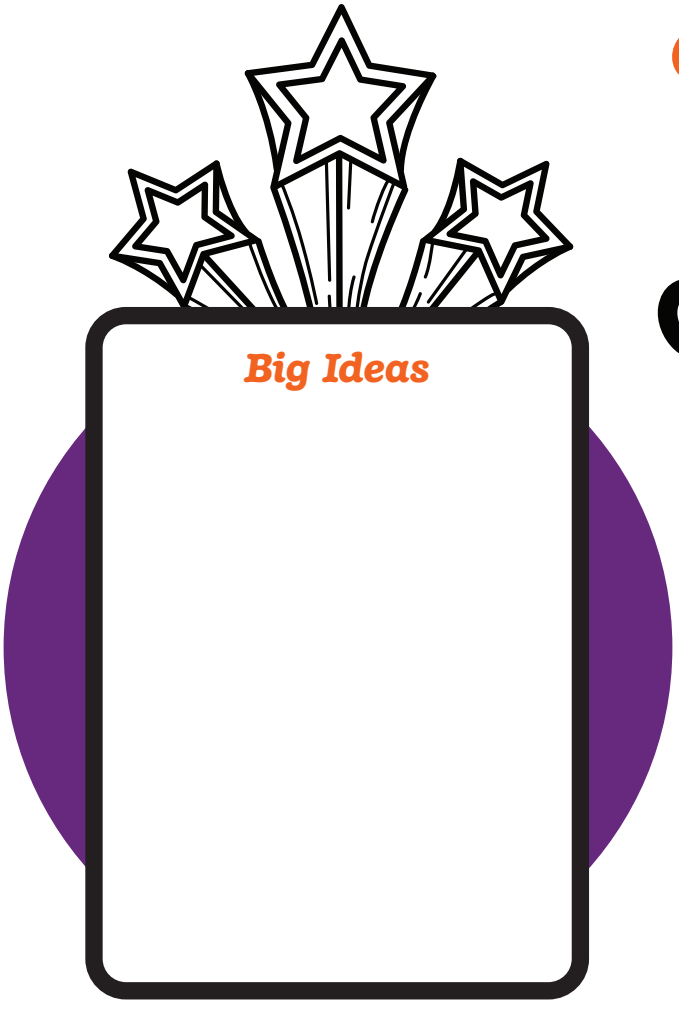
Learning Activity

Watch the video, "Slavery and the Wheat Economy" online at youtube.com/watch?v=lp7iGWXFClk or use the QR code.



Five Facts I Learned





Content written by Toni Stevens-Oliver.