

Indigo in South Carolina and Midlands History

Lesson Description:

Indigo has been used for dyeing cloth throughout history in many cultures. Indigo, and the practice of dyeing with indigo carries historical, cultural, and economic significance in world, American, and South Carolina history. Indigo production began near Charles Town (today's Charleston), and spread rapidly through the midlands and backcountry of South Carolina during the second half of the 18th century, only to fade from the entire state after the American Revolution. Though indigo production and indigo culture in South Carolina takes up a mere page in the state's voluminous history, it left a lasting mark on the Southern economy and culture.

Using the Museum's historical grounds and collection of artifacts, students will learn about the history and economic importance of indigo in South Carolina, the Midlands and on the Museum's own grounds. Students will also participate in a tie-dye activity using natural indigo dye. During this activity, museum staff will discuss the types of indigo grown, how the plant was cultivated, and the dye making process, which relied heavily on the use of slave labor. Students will also learn about the lasting historic and cultural African influences found in the South's indigo culture.

Standard 1-1: The student will demonstrate an understanding of how families interact with their environment both locally and globally.

1-1.3 – Identify various natural resources (e.g., water, animals, plants, minerals) around the world.

1-1.4 – Compare the ways that people use land and natural resources in different settings around the world.

Standard 3-1: The student will demonstrate an understanding of places and regions in South Carolina and the role of human systems in the state.

3-1.2 – Describe the location and characteristics of significant features of South Carolina, including landforms; river systems such as the Pee Dee River Basin, the Santee River Basin, the Edisto River Basin, and the Savannah River Basin; major cities, and climate regions.

3-1.3 – Explain interactions between the people and the physical landscape of South Carolina over time, including the effects on **population distribution**, patterns of migration, access to natural resources, and economic development.

Standard 3-2: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the exploration and settlement of South Carolina.

3-2.2 – Summarize the motives, activities, and accomplishments of the exploration of South Carolina by the Spanish, French and English.

3-2.4 – Summarize the development of the Carolina colony under the Lords Proprietors and the royal colonial government, including settlement by and trade with the people of Barbados and the influence of other immigrant groups.

3-2.5 – Explain the role of Africans in developing the **culture** and economy of South Carolina, including the growth of the slave trade; slave contributions to the plantation economy; the daily lives of the enslaved people; the development of the Gullah **culture**; and their resistance to slavery.

Standard 4-2: The student will demonstrate an understanding of how the settlement of North America was influenced by the interactions of Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans.

4-2.2 – Compare the various European settlements in North America in terms of economic activities, religious emphasis, government, and lifestyles.

4-2.3 – Explore the impact of the triangular trade, indentured servitude, and the enslaved and free Africans on the developing **culture** and economy of North America.

4-2.4 – Summarize the relationships among the Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans, including the French and Indian Wars, the slave revolts, and the conduct of trade.

Standard 8-1: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the settlement of South Carolina and the United States by Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans.

8-1.4 – Explain the significance of enslaved and free Africans in the developing **culture** and economy of the South and South Carolina, including the growth of the slave trade and resulting population imbalance between African and European settlers; African contributions to agricultural development; and resistance to slavery, including the Stono Rebellion and subsequent laws to control slaves.

8-1.5 – Explain how South Carolinians used their natural, human, and political resources uniquely to gain economic prosperity, including settlement by and trade with the people of Barbados, rice and indigo planting, and the practice of **mercantilism**.

Standard 8-4: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the multiple events that led to the Civil War.

8-4.1: Explain the importance in **antebellum** South Carolina, including the plantation system and the impact of the cotton gin on all social classes.

Vocabulary

American Revolution, Battery Cotton, Cash Crops, Indigo, Indigo Vat, Great War for the Empire, Ferment, French and Indian War, Osnaburg, Oxidize Slavery, Steeper Vat, Task System, Transatlantic Trade, War of Jenkins' Ear

Students Need to Provide

- One white t-shirt or towel to dye

Museum Will Provide

- Dye
- Rubber Bands
- Gloves
- Wipes & Paper Towels
- Bag for T-shirt

Lesson Progression

Part 1: Brief Introduction to the Museum & Midlands History

Museum staff will welcome students to the museum and provide them with a brief introduction to Cayce's history. Staff will discuss the origins of the Midlands and Cayce, SC including Native American settlement, early European settlements, the importance of river trade to the development of the Midlands, and the development of Cayce.

Part 2: Indigo in South Carolina, the Midlands, and Cayce.

Museum staff will take the students to tour of the museum, paying special attention to the plantations and cash crops display. Students will learn about the early history of indigo, and the history of indigo in South Carolina, the Midlands, and in Cayce, SC. Staff will emphasize the important role the crop played in the transatlantic trade and world economy, and in the developing economy and culture in the Southern colonies.

Part 3: Tie-dye Activity

Students will move outside where they will learn how to prepare an Indigo vat, some of the chemical processes that take place during the dying process, and will tie-dye their own t-shirt. While students wait for the dye to develop, museum staff will use Indigo plants, pods and dye cakes to illustrate how Indigo was grown, the process in which the crop was cultivated, fermented, and turned into a dye. They will also learn the importance of slave labor on indigo plantations, and the importance of African culture and knowledge to Indigo growth and trade. Once the shirts have developed, students will be provided a bag to store the shirts in, and instructions for care at home.