

SENGBE AND THE AMISTAD

Mark It on the Map

Have students look closely at the map on page 8 and the map on page 13. Then have them locate the area shown on each map on a world map. Using the scale of miles on the world map, have them approximate the number of miles the *Amistad* sailed between June and August 1839. Refer to the map to locate each site as it is mentioned in the issue.

Vocabulary

slave
poro

barracoon
abolitionist

Introduction

Ask students if they have heard of Sengbe and what they know about the *Amistad*. Ask if any have seen the movie *Amistad*. Using the comments of those who answer “yes,” spend a few minutes discussing every person’s desire to control his or her own life. Also discuss the responsibilities that come with freedom—including treating everyone as you wish to be treated.

Questions for Discussion

- How did Sengbe become a slave? Give a detailed answer that explains where and who he was.
- Sengbe’s Mende is part of what country today? When and how was that country founded?
- What discovery made Sengbe’s escape on the *Amistad* possible?
- What role did Pedro Montes play in the *Amistad* mutiny?
- Africans were also involved in the slave trade. What were some of their reasons?
- By tradition, how did many African people record important events?
- Make copies of the four illustrations on pages 24–25, without the answers. Ask students what each is, and what were the clues that led them to these answers.
- Why did Captain Gedney keep Sengbe on the *Washington*, and not on the *Amistad*? Give the circumstances surrounding the incident.
- What fact did abolitionist Dwight P. James uncover? Why was it important? How did it affect the case of Sengbe and his fellow crewmen?
- What role did Professor Josiah Gibbs play in Sengbe’s case? Explain what Gibbs did, and why it was crucial to the outcome of the trial.
- Which four different courts heard Sengbe’s case? When did each case take place? What was the result in each?
- What happened to Sengbe and the other Africans after the trial?

Writing Workout

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Turn to page 48. In essay form, answer the questions at the bottom of the page. For the final paragraph of the essay, choose one of the sayings and apply it to your own life.
- Make a list of the many difficulties encountered by those involved in making the film *Amistad* (include especially those encountered by producer Debbie Allen, director Steven Spielberg, and actor Djimon Hounsou).
- Make a list of at least 10 items Sengbe and his fellow Africans would have never seen before arriving in Connecticut in 1839. Make a list of those items or cultural practices that might have been the same or similar. On another piece of paper, make a list of 10 items an American who lived in Connecticut in 1839 would never have seen were he or she to visit Connecticut today. Make a list of items or cultural practices that have remained the same.
- Make a list of those who rallied in support of the *Amistad*’s crew. Give the profession of each supporter, and how that profession helped promote the cause of the crew.

- Write an essay explaining John Quincy Adams' role in the *Amistad* case. Include a brief biography stating who Adams was.
- Make a list of the difficulties a person faces when he enters a place where he does not understand the language. Next to each difficulty write a suggestion that the people in the place might follow to help the “newcomer” understand them better.

Think About It

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Read the “What’s in a Name?” box on page 5. Why do you think Sengbe was called by so many different names? Think of your own name. Has anyone ever mispronounced it? What were you called? Has anyone ever given you a nickname? What was its significance? Compare and contrast your “names” with those of Sengbe.
- Why did Sengbe’s owners in Cuba give him, as well as the other slaves they bought, a Spanish name?
- With no actual account of Sengbe’s mutiny aboard the *Amistad*, the author of the article on pages 9–13 had to create the story based on research. Read the article carefully and then tell which passages you feel best describe the incident and how the captives felt. Make a list of any details or phrases you think might add to the retelling of the incident. Give reasons for all your answers.
- For the African actors, playing their roles in chains and aboard ship was especially difficult. Think of a role you might play that would be difficult for you—a role that is only acting, but that involves a subject or way of thinking close to your heart. Describe the role and why it would be difficult for you to play.
- Explain how language played a role in the *Amistad* mutiny and trial. Include a paragraph that answers the question, “Would events have been different had all involved in Sengbe’s trip from Africa to the United States spoken English?”
- Read “Prisoners Again” on pages 26–27. Divide a piece of paper into three columns. In one column, list the people mentioned—by name or otherwise. In the second column, list the role each played in “Prisoners Again.” In the third column, tell what human trait/characteristic the person’s actions revealed (people on the tip of Long Island—refusal to interact with Sengbe—fear of the unknown/anything out of the ordinary).
- Why do you think so many rumors, speculations, and tales were being told about Sengbe and his crew? Could the same type of incident happen today? Explain why or why not.
- Why do you think the records are so unclear about what happened to Sengbe after his return to Africa?

Use Your Math Skills

Read “On View for 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢” on page 30. If the accounts are true, how much money did the Pendletons make from charging people to see Sengbe and his crew?

Get Into Art

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Divide the class into six groups. Assign each group one of the following subjects: Sengbe in Mende, Sengbe Captured and Taken to Cuba, Mutiny on the *Amistad*, The Trial, The Journey Home, Home at Last. Have each group make a collage or draw illustrations (with explanations for each image included) that clearly describe its subject. Have a spokesperson for each group present the collage to the rest of the class. Display the collages, numbered and in sequence, around the room.
- Make a collage of Sengbe’s friends on the *Amistad*. Use the photos and silhouettes on pages 20–21 as a guide. Include the name of each, an image, and a brief description.

- ➔ Use one sheet of paper to write each of the questions posed on page 32. Below the question, write the result if the answer is no or the result if the answer is yes.
- ➔ Design a chart that will let you reproduce the time line on page 39 visually. Use descriptive images to explain the key events mentioned; use the text on page 39 as your captions. Make sure the year, months, and days are clearly marked.

At the Movies

After reading the issue, show the class the movie *Amistad*. Then have a class discussion about the film. Ask students what they liked or disliked, what new facts they learned, what changes/additions/deletions they would have made and why, and which actors best played their roles.

Working With Words

Read aloud the words and the definitions that are found on page 35. Ask students to write a sentence using as many of the nine words as possible in the same sentence. The sentence must make senses and each word must reflect its definition.

Hold Your Own Trial

Follow the guidelines on pages 34 and 35, and hold a jury trial for Sengbe.

Listen Carefully

Read “Don’t Talk So Fast” on pages 36–37 and “Helping New Learners” on page 37. Bring tapes to class that have people speaking languages unfamiliar to any of the students in the classroom. The tapes should be of stories or tales that all the children know. Do not tell the students the languages or the stories. Ask them what would help them to understand the stories (pictures, speaking more slowly, etc.). Replay the tapes using their suggestions — preferably one at a time. Discuss with the students which aid is most effective. Let them utilize what they have learned from this lesson with students who speak a language other than English.

Research Projects

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- ➔ Have students research which countries were involved in the slave trade between Africa and the Caribbean and the United States. Which country was the first to ban slavery, and when? In what years did other countries ban slavery? (Suggestion: Draw an outline of the world and mark the countries involved, the routes, and then below the name of each country involved, the date when slavery was banned.)
- ➔ Divide the class into four groups. Have each group research one of West Africa’s ancient kingdoms: Kanem-Bornu, Benin, Yoruba, Ashanti. Let each group present its findings to the class.

Follow These Footsteps

Sengbe
José Ruiz
Pedro Montes
Steven Spielberg

Djimon Hounsou
Debbie Allen
Grabeau
Margru

Thomas Gedney
Dwight P. James
John Quincy Adams