

Georgia Studies Tour, Grades 2-12, 45 minutes

Tour Objectives

Students will...

- Discuss moral issues related to race during the Antebellum era and the years following the Civil War
- Understand the significance of the Savannah river in developing this region
- Explore the overall importance of cotton in Georgia’s history—how it created wealth and helped to define class structure in Georgia
- Define their present-day relationship to cotton and cotton products

Vocabulary

Itinerant

Sharecropping

Agriculture

Economy

Tour Props

Ben Shahn photo reproduction

Cotton drag sack

Branch of a cotton plant

Map of Savannah River

Tour Overview

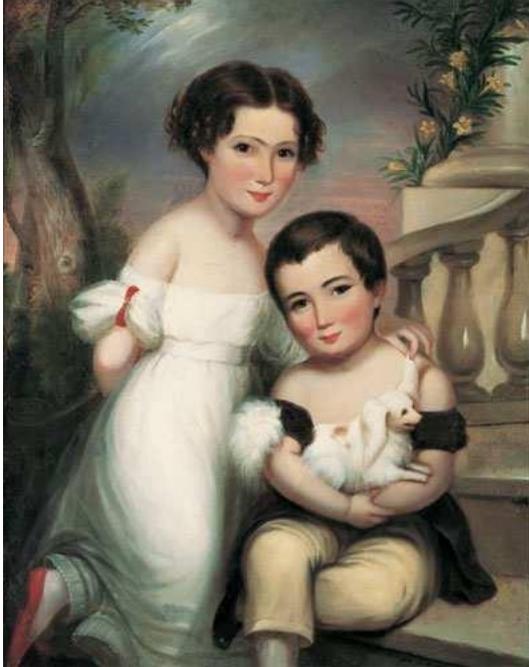
This tour is designed to allow students to view and interpret objects as they relate to Georgia history. This tour has an optional second component with either the Augusta History Museum or the Augusta Canal National Heritage Area; in the latter, students will experience a two-part field trip that begins at the Morris Museum and ends with a boat ride and tour at the other site.

This tour will use different paintings from the museum to tell them about Georgia’s history.

The questions in this tour plan are simply suggestions to help you develop conversations with your students. You do not need to use every suggestion at every stop; assess the interests and ability of your group and choose the questions you think are appropriate.

Introduction

Welcome students to the museum. Explain the mission of the museum and a brief history of the institution. Tell them that we will be using different paintings from the museum to tell them about Georgia history. You can let them know cotton had a huge impact on that history. Ask them: Have you ever picked cotton? Have you ever seen cotton, either in the fields or up close? Hold up a branch of cotton and tell them that because of this one little plant Georgia was known as the “Empire of the South,” and from the early nineteenth through the early twentieth century, cotton would be one of the defining characteristics of our state, contributing to scientific progress, industrial manufacturing, transportation, and even the arts.



George Cooke (1793–1849)

Portrait of Western Berkeley Thomas and Emily Howard Thomas of Augusta, Georgia
1840

Oil on canvas

This portrait by George Cook depicts the niece and nephew of a prominent Augusta family. Some of Augusta's wealthiest citizens made money exporting goods such as tobacco and cotton for resale all over the world. Having one's portrait painted could be seen as a status symbol, or a reflection of one's material wealth. These pictures were primarily by artists who traveled from town to town, frequently painting the sitter in their homes. This practice allowed painters to develop relationships with patrons in a variety of small and emerging towns.

1. How might the popularity of cotton and developing industry play a role in the importance of art locally? How might money be a necessary component to developing artists and communities that value art? Do you think that's a good or a bad thing? Why?
2. What about this picture might suggest that these children are well-off? Why isn't this picture of poorer children?
3. Some itinerant portrait painters had their own distinct way of painting. There is another painting by this artist in this gallery. Can you identify the other painting?
In what ways are they similar? Do the children in either picture look realistic? Why or why not?

4. How is this portrait different from a portrait that might be done today? Would it be made with the same materials? Would your present-day portrait be created by an artist? Do any of you have portraits of family members in your house? What are some of the purposes portraits serve? Are they useful? If so, how?



Thomas Satterwhite Noble (1835–1907)

The Price of Blood

1868

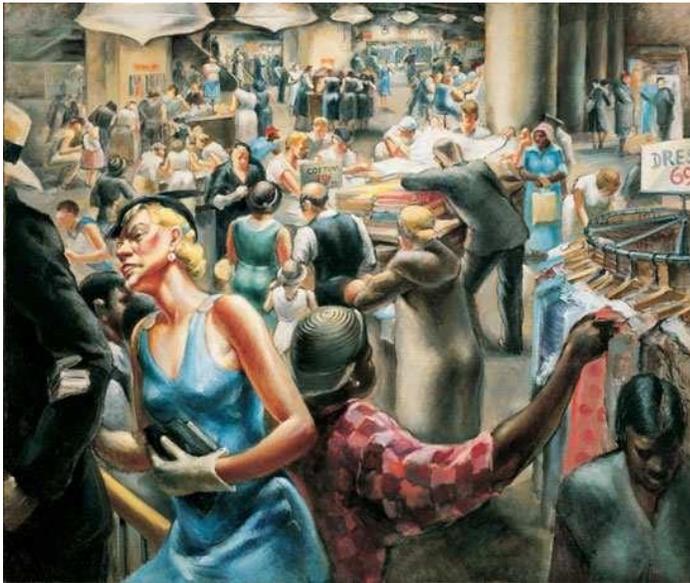
Oil on canvas

39¼ x 49½ inches

This is a scene in which the family patriarch is selling his own mulatto son into slavery. The image is often cited as a critical look at slavery and an effort to confront the racial tension in the years leading up to the Civil War. The artist was raised in a slave-owning household and claims to have fought for the Confederate army on the grounds of states' rights. After the Civil War he made a number of works that dealt with the injustices of slavery. In that period, civil rights for African Americans were slowly improving, but equality would be slow coming. In the same year this painting was completed, the first African American congressmen from Georgia had been elected by the people, but they weren't permitted to serve because of their race. Explain to students what is happening in the painting, and identify each person's role.

1. How do you think the artist felt about slavery? Why makes you feel that way? Do you think that a work like this could make someone think differently about slavery? Why or why not?

2. Nowadays we can all agree that slavery is immoral and unfair. People haven't always felt this way, so what do you think has changed?
3. Even though it is difficult for us to imagine *any* justification for slavery, for what reasons do you think people supported such a horrible and unjust way of life?
4. Pretend you are each person in this picture, can you describe how you might feel?



Lamar Dodd (1909–1996)

Bargain Basement

1937

Oil on canvas

46 x 55 inches

Cotton is still a very important part of Georgia's economy. Historically, Georgia has been one of the leading producers of cotton in the United States. The cotton grown in the United States doesn't all get used here; some of it is shipped to other countries to be used. The U.S. currently provides about a quarter of the world's cotton which annually brings in \$2 billion. Jeans, bed sheets, and towels are just a few of the consumer goods made with cotton.

1. What is going on in this picture? Can you describe the scene? What do you think the title *Bargain Basement* means? What type of place is this?
2. One of the reasons cotton is so popular is that it is relatively cheap to produce and has a lot of different uses. Are you wearing anything made with

cotton today? More than one thing? What are some of the materials that people might use in place of cotton?

3. Part of this painting is made from cotton; can you guess what part? Most canvases today are made with cotton. There are two basic types of Canvas: either plain or duck (with a tighter weave, derived from the Dutch word *doek*, meaning cloth). Canvas is classified by its weight and grade. Cotton is also graded using characteristics that determine its value, like color (how white the cotton is), the strength, the length of its fibers, and other characteristics important to its resale. Why do you think it was important to develop a grading system for cotton? Why might the whiteness of the cotton be important in manufacturing goods?

4. As cotton became more popular and cheaper to produce, goods made from cotton became less expensive. As a result more people were able to afford new clothes, and fewer people made their own clothes at home. If making clothes at home became less common, what new businesses could develop? How do you think clothes made today differ from clothes made before there was a common commercial garment industry?



Lamar Dodd (1909–1996)

From This Earth

1945

Oil on canvas

24 x 39½ inches

Props

Photocopy of a Ben Shahn print

Cotton drag sack

Harvesting cotton in the years after the Civil War was a challenge for the people of the South. Because landowners could no longer depend on slave labor to work their fields, new ways of establishing a workforce had to be developed. Many landowners, leased their land to worker-tenants, who would then repay them with a portion of the proceeds that came from the cotton harvest. Known as sharecropping, this arrangement had benefits for both the landowner and worker, but in many cases the workers were left with difficult labor, large amounts of debt, and an ever-decreasing return on their cotton. Just as in the days of slavery, fieldworkers (former slaves, struggling white yeomen, and Hispanics) would plant, tend, and harvest the raw materials that would later become industrial cotton products. This work of picking the cotton was difficult and timeconsuming. Each cotton flower needed to be pulled from a dry thorny boll and put in a long drag sack pulled behind the picker. When filled, the bags could be quite heavy. Sometimes there were different size bags for men, women, and children. Some accounts claim that children's bags could be as long as four feet.

Opening interpretive questions:

1. What is this a picture of?
2. How has the artist painted the picture? How does the field look? Does the picture look real? Why or why not? Are there any specific feelings you get from looking at the picture? Can you describe them?
3. How might the title *From this Earth* relate to the picture? How would you describe the posture of the pickers? Many museum visitors have expressed their appreciation for this picture. What do you think they are drawn to in this picture? Can you relate to the subject matter?
4. Let's assume the pickers in this painting are sharecroppers. Why do you think people continued to pick cotton after the Civil War was over?



Thomas Addison Richards (1820–1900)

River Plantation

1855–1860

Oil on canvas

20¼ x 30 inches

Props

Map of the Savannah River

This picture resulted from the time Richards spent in the South. An enthusiastic traveler, Richards spent many years exploring and documenting his travels. He illustrated magazine articles, penned essays, published books, and produced prints that documented his interest in the unique characteristics of the places he visited. Richards eventually became the editor of the first guidebook devoted to the United States and Canada. This scene on the Savannah River shows what the river may have looked like before the Civil War. An important part of the development in this area, the Savannah River provided a route for boat transporting goods from town to town, encouraging trade and travel. Some of the earliest boats used by Americans on the Savannah River, Petersburg boats, got their name from a nearby town no longer in existence, important for distributing tobacco, the most important crop in the South before cotton became extremely profitable. In those days, men, frequently slaves, would have the dangerous task of navigating the river in shallow flat bottom boats loaded with goods for various markets. They were also responsible for making the difficult trip upriver against the currents. This was achieved one of two ways: either through the use of long poles to slowly push their way upstream, or with the help of draft animals pulling the load from shore.

1. Rivers have often been crucial to development of communities like ours. Can you list some of the reasons why?

2. Hold up the map of the Savannah River and ask if one student can locate Augusta on the map. Point out the distance to other relevant landmarks including Savannah, the Atlantic Ocean, and England.
3. This picture shows us a small part of the Savannah River in a time before the Civil War. How might that same place look now? What might you see?
4. Do you know some of the contemporary uses for our river system? (In addition to shipping goods, we now use the river for hydroelectric power, drinking water, and recreation.)
5. This picture is called *River Plantation*; do you know what a plantation is? Can you find where the plantation might be in this picture? *Plantation* is a term frequently used to describe certain types of houses in the South. Why do you think the term is less popular in other parts of the United States?

**Definitions for the purpose of this
tour**

Itinerant

A person who travels from place to place with no fixed home.

Sharecropping

An agriculture practice in which landowners allow tenants to work on and harvest from their land in return for a share of the crop.

Agriculture

The type of work associated with growing and harvesting crops or raising livestock for sale.

Economy

A system that involves work, goods, and resources.