**Amazing Inventions**

History is often influenced by innovation. Imagine how different the world would be today if electricity, cell phones, cars, or computers hadn’t been invented. Even the Civil War, one of the most tragic chapters in American History, was greatly influenced by two inventions. These inventions – McCormick’s Reaper and Whitney’s Cotton Gin – were huge in aiding farmers both in the North and South. **₁**

One of the North’s major crops was grain. Wheat, barley, rye, and other grains were very difficult to grow in large amounts, due to the fact that they had to be harvested by hand with scythes. However, when Cyrus McCormick invented his Reaper in 1834, he changed everything. **₂₊₃₊₄**

In the South, cotton was a major crop. If a farmer wanted to make his fortune, his best chance was to grow large amounts of cotton. The demand was huge both in America and Europe. Unfortunately, cotton was an extremely labor intensive crop. Not only did the picking of cotton need to be done by hand, but the cotton itself had to be cleared of its seeds before it could be sold at market. All of this labor forced southern farmers to depend on slaves to harvest sizeable cotton crops. Suddenly, in 1793, Eli Whitney’s small invention, like McCormick’s Reaper, changed everything. **₅**

These machines saved farmers a ton in both time and labor. By hand, a slave could only separate the seeds from about a pound of cotton per day. However, with the cotton gin, a slave could de-seed about 50 pounds of cotton per day. Similarly, harvesting grains using scythes limited a single, experienced man to about an acre per day. Using McCormick’s Reaper, however, a single man could harvest about 28 acres in a day. **₆**

In the big picture, the cotton gin made farming cotton far more profitable and reinforced the South’s dependence on slave labor. Cotton became so important to the South’s economy, that people began calling it “King”. King cotton held the South together. In the decade before the Civil War, the worldwide demand for cotton increased to the point that southern farmers began producing over 2.1 million bales of cotton per year (up from 1.3 million bales only a few years earlier). Along with demand, prices for cotton increased too, making many cotton farmers wealthy. Instead of investing in factories and manufacturing, southerners put their money into more cotton-growing land and slaves to work it. The number of slaves in America grew from about 700,000 to over 3,000,000. The cotton gin, along with perfect timing, allowed for all of this.

Similarly, the Reaper greatly benefitted the North. Farmers could now tend to large crops without nearly as much hired help, leading to more profits. Hired hands who used to have jobs helping farmers now moved back to cities to work in factories. Because the factories produced goods that were sold in Europe, the economy of the North flourished. Most importantly, the Reaper helped the North win the Civil War by (1) helping to provide enough food for Union soldiers, and (2) allowing young, northern boys to leave their families’ farms and serve in the army. **₇**

**Questions**

1. Predict which invention was the most important, the Reaper or the Cotton Gin?

Why?

1. What do you think changed?

Why?

1. Use (or watch your classmates use) a scythe to cut grass. Describe the experience.
2. Watch a short video about how a reaper works. On a scale of 1-10, rank how much of a difference this machine must have made to farmers.

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Very little difference Some difference A HUGE difference**

Explain your ranking:

1. Watch a short video about how a cotton gin works. Then, try picking a seed out of cotton. On a scale of 1-10, rank how much of a difference this small machine made to farmers.

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Very little difference Some difference A HUGE difference**

Explain your ranking:

1. Which invention saved more work for farmers? Explain
2. So, which invention was the most important to America? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In *one paragraph*, explain your conclusion. Include **three (3)** pieces of textual evidence that support your opinion.