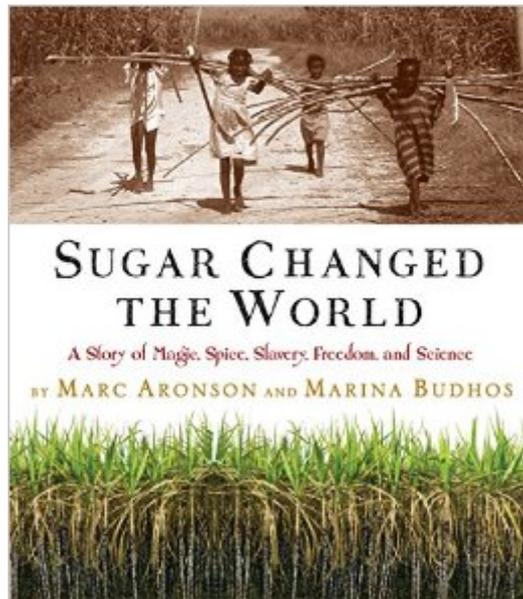


The book was found

Sugar Changed The World: A Story Of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, And Science



Synopsis

When this award-winning husband-and-wife team discovered that they each had sugar in their family history, they were inspired to trace the globe-spanning story of the sweet substance and to seek out the voices of those who led bitter sugar lives. The trail ran like a bright band from religious ceremonies in India to Europe's Middle Ages, then on to Columbus, who brought the first cane cuttings to the Americas. Sugar was the substance that drove the bloody slave trade and caused the loss of countless lives but it also planted the seeds of revolution that led to freedom in the American colonies, Haiti, and France. With songs, oral histories, maps, and over 80 archival illustrations, here is the story of how one product allows us to see the grand currents of world history in new ways. Time line, source notes, bibliography, index.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1130L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 176 pages

Publisher: Clarion Books; 1 edition (November 15, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0618574921

ISBN-13: 978-0618574926

Product Dimensions: 8.5 x 0.7 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (43 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #45,736 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Science & Technology > Technology > Agriculture #12 in Books > History > World > Slavery & Emancipation #49 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > History

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Although aimed at a younger audience, this title would be an excellent starting point for anyone who is interested in issues of food justice and social justice. It is a timely title as issues surrounding "factory farming" have come to the forefront of our social consciousness thanks to such works as Food, Inc., Supersize Me and, to some extent, An Inconvenient Truth. To hear people talk about it now, many would have us believe that it's a new corruption away from a "natural" system of farming and food production. However, as this title shows, people have been perfecting the farm as a

factory- and people as machines- for almost a thousand years. The uncomfortable truth is that many of the things that we purchase cheaply and in large quantities involves some level of human exploitation. This book traces the history of the sugar cane from it's wild origins in New Guinea through it's spread through India and then the Muslim world. The Muslims were the first ones to create a sugar plantation, where vast stretches of land were all about one crop. However, although they are the architects of the system, the problems of labor and the need for lumber aren't solved until the Europeans take over dominance of the trade. In the space of two centuries, sugar goes from being a luxury commodity that kings are willing to pay small ransoms for to a relatively common household item. In a story familiar to those who worry about the cost of strawberries shipped across the country versus those grown a few towns away, the authors note that it is now cheaper to buy sugar from overseas than it is to buy honey produced down the road. And it still is. The engine that drove sugar production was slavery (later indentured servitude).

The authors have a special section at the end of the book to discuss their methodology and how they see their book fitting into and even driving classroom instruction. Agreed, the topic--the history of sugar trade--would be an excellent thematic, interdisciplinary unit in the classroom. The way the authors present it is that the history of the sugar trade challenges the myths about our founding fathers that float through our history textbooks and the study of it opens wide the door to the big questions of human nature and history. The book itself falls short as a central text, which is how it was intended. I hope the authors will consider repackaging the material in an interactive CD or web format with teachers as the primary audience. Bottom line: the authors tried to do too much, which undermines the effort and the book. While filled with fascinating information and ideas, the book is scattered and frustrating to read. Read on for more details... The book opens with the personal stories of how the two authors became interested in this history and the project. But remember this book is for young people who likely know next to nothing about the topic, so the personal stories have no context and do not captivate as intended. The first chapter flies through some 19 centuries of history. Again, the intended audience has learned next to no history, so almost every sentence would need a footnote if not an entire unit of study. Much more focused, the second chapter is a detailed explanation of sugar production and plantation life. Not sure I needed to know quite so much about the production line to understand its brutality... The third chapter examines and re-examines the fight against slavery.

Gist: Except for the beginning, this middle-school book is not really about sugar, so it may or may

not be what you are looking for. It is mostly about how the enterprise of sugar (to the exclusion of other commodities) over the centuries caused enslavement and indentured servitude around the world, with all the brutality and oppression that accompanies these practices. Just as sugar is the historic excuse for these offensive practices, sugar is the excuse for writing a book that is really about how people have exploited people, and how the stirrings for abolition and freedom spread and grew over the centuries. The authors have done an excellent job pulling together lots of interesting details from multiple sources to build this story of human abuse and forced migrations around the world. I even found their back notes interesting, and plan on tracking down some of the references they included. I like that they have provided backup websites for more information and for color versions of the b&w historic images. Part I is about the discovery of "sweet cane" and how it spread around the old world, up to the time of Columbus. To me this was the most interesting part of the book. Our words for sugar and candy come from Sanskrit, reflecting how sugar spread to rest of the old world from India. I didn't know about the first university in Persia around 500AD, or the Champagne year-around trade fairs starting around 1150AD. It includes a bit of what is known about what meals consisted of then. I found this part very interesting and would like to read more along these lines, since this was only about 20 pages with large print and illustrations.

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