

Cotton Spinning

Cotton bolls can be bought at flower shops or through the U.S. Cotton Council located in Washington DC. Cotton bolls with husks and seeds in tack offer students an excellent hands on activity.

Supplies needed:

- cotton bolls
- chopsticks (or skewers)
- radishes or small potatoes



A) Ginning: *removing the seeds from the cotton.*

Supplies needed: 1 cotton boll per 6-10 students

Pass one entire cotton boll with husk and seeds in tack around table seating 6-10 students/ discuss feel, weight, geographical origin, climatic conditions, growth, etc.

Gently pull all cotton lint with seeds from the husk; pull apart into as many parts as there are students sharing it; giving each student a portion with 2-4 seeds in it, touch, guess number of seeds hiding inside the cotton lint/ etc. Ask each student to remove/pluck out the seeds. Explain to spread apart the cotton lint from seeds to make them as clean (bald) as possible. Discuss what weighs more, the seeds or the cotton? What are the seeds used for? What is the cotton used for?



B) Finger and Spindle Spinning the Ginned Cotton

African spindles are made from the rib of a dried palm leaf and the whorl, a weight, is made out of a piece of round clay. You can make your own with the following supplies: one chop-stick per student and one round radish or small round potato.

Preparation for spinning with spindle: pierce the radish as close to the center as possible with the pointed end of the chop stick; slide the radish up, allowing approx. 1/2-3/4" of the point to show

through.

To spin the cotton lint into a piece of thread, first gently spread apart the cotton into a thin cloud like structure, very gently spreading but not pulling apart, allow it to remain one piece; hold this in your left hand.

To finger spin now, with the index and thumb of your right hand pinch a very small amount of the cotton and while pinching give it a twist (in either direction), but continue twisting in the same direction. Twist and twist and then pull this twist away from the cotton cloud in your left hand. You will be making a piece of thread. Keep twisting in the same direction, gently pulling on the twisted end away from the left hand which is still holding the cotton lint. Do not release the twist but keep it pinched as you pull and twist. The gentle tension between the left supply hand and the right twisting hand will keep the thread from unwinding.



Take the piece of newly spun thread and tie it around the chopstick directly above the radish (serving as a weight or whorl). Roll the entire piece of newly finger-spun thread onto the chop-stick. Now try SPINDLE SPINNING holding the spindle up right with your right hand and giving it a sharp twist to the right (clockwise) allowing it to spin upon itself. Hold the beginning thread coming from the piece of cotton lint with your left hand as the spindle spins, pull the cotton lint up and away from it to allow it to make a continuous thread. Practice by repeating the same movement again and again. When your arm is not long enough to hold the continuous newly spun thread, wrap it around the spindle directly above the radish (whorl), and continue spinning by joining a new piece of cotton lint to the thread.



From cotton boll to thread!

