

THE GROUNDBREAKING SERIES REIMAGINED

ROOTS

ROOTS: A FAMILY VIEWING GUIDE

"My ancestor would be a symbol for millions of slaves. All of them seeds of American families...Millions of men and women who struggle to be free every day." – Alex Haley

Airing on four consecutive nights on HISTORY® beginning on Memorial Day, **ROOTS** is a historical portrait of American slavery recounting the journey of one family's will to survive, endure and ultimately carry on their legacy. Spanning multiple generations, the lineage begins with young Mandinka warrior Kunta Kinte, who is captured in his homeland of The Gambia and transported in brutal conditions to colonial America, where he's sold into slavery.

Throughout the series, Kunta and his family descendants witness notable events in U.S. history, including the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, slave uprisings and eventual emancipation. The story of Kunta Kinte and the women and men who came after him echoes through the history of millions of Americans of African descent, and reveals powerful truths about the universal resilience of the human spirit.

VIEWING GUIDELINES: Key themes in **ROOTS** include the importance of identity, family, naming and heritage. Families may want to watch together and discuss episodes after they watch. This guide provides tips and resources for family discussions and explorations of **ROOTS**.

PLEASE NOTE: **ROOTS** is rated TV-14, L, V, S. It contains intense language of the time period, violence and sexual violence and therefore we do not recommend it for children under the age of 14. **ROOTS** includes scenes that may be very difficult for some viewers to watch. Visit us at roots.History.com for additional resources and discussion guidelines for talking about slavery and its legacy in American society.

MEMORIAL DAY

BACKGROUND

WHEN ROOTS AIRED IN 1977, it took the country by storm, telling the story of Kunta Kinte, an African who is abducted from The Gambia, sold into slavery, and taken to America. Through several generations of American history, the series followed Kunta Kinte and his family's struggle for freedom.

Over 130 million viewers watched over the course of 8 consecutive nights, nearly half of the U.S. population at the time. It was a seminal moment in American history. It was the first time that a television series started a conversation about slavery, race, identity, family, and freedom.

From May 30 to June 2, 2016 on History, **ROOTS** will take the world by storm again. An amazing cast and creative team have come together to produce a reimagined **ROOTS** for a new generation of viewers. The new **ROOTS** has benefited from rich new scholarship about life in The Gambia and on American plantations during the 18th and 19th centuries. The 2016 **ROOTS** miniseries breathes vibrant life into Kunta Kinte, Kizzy, Chicken George and the rest of their family's breathtaking journeys.



PRE-VIEWING SUGGESTION

VISIT roots.history.com to view a **ROOTS** family tree, short videos, and to find background articles about the series and related topics.

TWEET AND POST along with us while watching **ROOTS** – a virtual watch party! Tune in to HISTORY® May 30th–June 2nd. Join us each night and share your thoughts on the show.



EPISODE 1



IN 1750 IN THE PORT CITY OF JUFFURE, in the river region of The Gambia in West Africa, Omoro Kinte and his wife, Binta, have their first child, a son named Kunta. Kunta is trained in Mandinka customs and traditions. He is a dedicated student who dreams of traveling to the university in Timbuktu to become a scholar. Kunta passes his warrior training, an important Mandinka rite of passage, but soon after he is betrayed by the Koros, a rival family. After being kidnapped and captured by the Koros, Kunta is sold to British slave traders in 1767 and is shipped through the brutal Middle Passage to America on the Lord Ligonier along with 140 other slaves.

Conditions are horrific on the slave ship and Kunta fears he will never see his family again. He unites his fellow slaves and unsuccessfully leads an uprising on board. In Annapolis, Maryland, he is sold to a Virginia planter named John Waller and is given the slave name Toby. Kunta strongly resists his new name and enslavement. He relies on the wise counsel of Fiddler, an assimilated slave and sophisticated musician who has been assigned to train him. With Fiddler's help, Kunta fights to survive and maintain his dignity despite the unrelenting violence of the slave system.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Omoro tells his son Kunta “you must always honor your ancestors” during his naming ceremony, showing the importance of family in the Mandinka tradition. What are some of your family traditions, and why are they important?

2. Kunta dreams of studying in Timbuktu, revealing that education is extremely important to him. What role does education play in your life, and how has it been important in your family?

3. What emotions did you feel when Kunta was taken captive and forced onto the slave ship?

4. What are some of the ways Kunta survived and resisted enslavement?

5. Why do you think Kunta resisted the name Toby? Why are names so important to our identities and in our families?

6. Why do you think it is important to tell the **ROOTS** story?

AFTER WATCHING

DISCUSS. This episode of **ROOTS** includes scenes depicting extreme violence against Kunta and other enslaved people. You may want to discuss this together and talk about the emotions you experienced while watching. (Visit roots.History.com to find resources for these discussions.)

YOUR NAME IS YOUR SHIELD. The theme “your name is your shield” is explored in this episode. What does this phrase mean to you? Discuss your family names and their significance. You can also create a family shield—what items, ideas or quotes define your family

EPISODE 2

IN 1775, KUNTA IS WORKING ON THE WALLER FARM

when he meets English Redcoats encouraging slaves to run away and join the English governor's 'Ethiopian Regiment'. The slaves are promised freedom if they fight for King George. However, during the battle Kunta realizes the English are little better than the Americans and takes off. He is apprehended by slave catchers and they amputate half his foot to make sure he never runs off again. John Waller's younger brother William, a doctor, is outraged at the mutilation and buys Kunta. Kunta is healed with the help of William Waller's slave cook, Belle.

After a lengthy, awkward courtship, Kunta marries Belle. Soon after, a daughter is born to the couple. Kunta gives her the Mandinka name of "Kizzy," meaning "you stay put."

A clever child, Kizzy is entranced by William Waller's daughter, Missy, mistaking her attention for true friendship. Missy secretly teaches Kizzy how to read and write. Her hidden skills allow her to feel free and actively resist. As a teenager, Kizzy forges papers that help a young slave, Noah, to escape during a terrible hurricane. Her conspiracy is discovered; Kizzy is sold to a poor, white farmer, Tom Lea. Lea rapes Kizzy fathering a son, George. Kizzy vows to instill in her son both her pride in their African heritage and Kunta Kinte's dream of freedom.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What role does memory play in Kunta's life? Why do you think memories are so important to families?
2. What role did Belle play in Kunta's recovery? In general, what are some of the important roles enslaved women play in **ROOTS**?
3. In what ways did enslaved people imagine the possibilities of freedom, and why was this important? How did they attempt to resist enslavement even amidst violence? What were the risks enslaved people faced when they tried to resist, escape, or control their own lives?
4. During her training, Kunta tells Kizzy, "They can put the chains on your body, never let them put chains on your mind." What do you think he means by this?
5. Kizzy says that reading is her way of being a warrior, and she is willing to risk anything for the freedom to read. Why was reading so important to her? What role does reading and learning play in your life?

AFTER WATCHING

REFLECT AND SHARE. This episode includes intense scenes that may be difficult to watch. After watching, reflect on what you learned and share your thoughts with each other or on social media. Why is **ROOTS** an important story to tell? Social handles include: Facebook.com/History, Facebook.com/RootsSeries and #roots on Twitter.

EXPLORE. As a family or individually, explore or write about your own family or community story. Create a family tree, interview an elder or relative, or create a photo album. Think about how you will record and save these memories for future generations.

EPISODE 3



AS GEORGE GROWS TO MANHOOD, he exhibits traits of both his parents. Like Tom Lea, he falls in love with cockfighting and carousing. The old slave bird-handler, Mingo, resents George who eventually usurps his position as pit master. The rakish George becomes such an accomplished trainer of gamecocks that he earns the nickname "Chicken George." George marries a preacher's daughter, Matilda, and fathers many children. But George struggles to keep Tom Lea, his father, from his self-destructive ways. From Kizzy, George has inherited the strong traditions of family and a desire to be free. He rationalizes his bond with Tom Lea by convincing himself that one day he can buy freedom for himself and his family. When Tom Lea loses a reckless wager with an Englishman, he sells Chicken George to save his farm. Chicken George is dragged off to England.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Beads are passed down through the generations in **ROOTS**, connecting the family over time. What kinds of items, if any, are important in your family? What items remind you of your family or community?
2. Chicken George says to Tom Lea, "I'm a better man than you." Why do you think it was important to George to say this to Tom? How would you describe their relationship?

3. How would you describe the relationship between Kizzy and Chicken George? Why is Kizzy disappointed in George at times?

4. In this episode, Kizzy says to George, "We fight when we need- but first we've got to survive." What were some of the ways Kizzy helped the family survive? What did she have to endure in order to do this?

5. What shocked or surprised you most about this episode? Why do you think it is important to learn about what enslaved people experienced?

6. How did you feel at the end of this episode?

AFTER WATCHING

LOOKING BACK. By the end of this episode, generations of Kunta's family have survived. Discuss the journey of his family. How have they survived? What values have helped them survive enslavement? How have they continued to imagine and fight for freedom?

HONORING ELDER. Honoring ancestors and remembering the importance of family and community are key themes in **ROOTS**. Think about ways you can honor the elders in your family or community by sending letters, planning a visit or recording their stories.



EPISODE 4



AFTER MORE THAN 20 YEARS IN ENGLAND, Chicken George is finally given his freedom. George returns to the Lea farm to discover that his family was sold off to another family in North Carolina in his absence. He tracks them down working for Benjamin Murray, a respected engineer at the North Carolina Federal armory. George is reunited with Matilda but finds his youngest boy, Tom, a master blacksmith, is now the leader of the family. Tom is a quiet, hard-working young man but he nurses a cold rage against his father, blaming him for abandoning the family. George is forced to leave the Murray farm and meets up with a young, hot-headed slave, Cyrus. Together they join the Memphis Colored Battery. As the Civil War comes to a close, Chicken George and Cyrus barely escape with their lives.

After the war, southern soldiers launch a terror campaign against freed slaves. Tom goes on a journey to find his father and, inspired by a vision of Kunta Kinte, rescues George. Once home, Tom leads his family off the Murray farm, embarking on a new life. True to Kunte's hope, the family finally finds freedom and has kept the family and their traditions intact. In 1976, Alex Haley, a seventh-generation descendant of Kunta Kinte, authors and publishes the Pulitzer Prize winning *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When George returns from England the first thing he does is try to find his family. When he encounters Tom Lea he calls him a man with no honor. Why do you think it was important to George to say this to Tom?
2. While George was in England, Matilda helped the family survive. What characteristics do you think it took for her to survive those years without George?
3. Why do you think George and Cyrus decided to join the Union Army during the Civil War? Why do you think service was important to many African Americans during the Civil War?
4. At the end of the Civil War, what challenges did freed slaves face?
5. What surprised you the most about this episode? What do you think you will remember about it?
6. What spaces, if any, are there to heal from the history of slavery in our society?

AFTER WATCHING

YOUR ROOTS. Locate a photo of your oldest living ancestor or community member and share it using #roots.

LEARN MORE. You can learn more about many of the topics explored in **ROOTS** online at roots.History.com.



ROOTS: FURTHER EXPLORATIONS



EXPLORE the history of **ROOTS** by reading a background article about the topic: <http://www.history.com/news/remembering-roots>

DISCUSS ROOTS and the role of slavery in American history. This can be a difficult topic to talk about, but an important one. As you learn from watching **ROOTS**, the history of slavery affects all of us.

REMEMBER that everyone can define their roots in their own way. If you do not know about or have aspects of your family history you can't access, you can research the history of your city or community, or interview an elder you admire.

SEARCH for your own family story. What are your roots? Talk to members of your family to learn their stories.

SHARE your own family history. Search for a photo of the oldest relative in your family and share it through social media using #roots

KNOW HIS NAME Kunta Kinte is mentioned in dozens of songs and movies. Learn more about this important **ROOTS** character: <http://www.history.com/shows/roots/videos/roots-know-his-name>

SOCIAL MEDIA

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