

# ROOTS

WATCH GUIDE









# INTRODUCTION

In 1977, *ROOTS* started a conversation about race and our common heritage and struggle as a nation. An unprecedented number of Americans not only watched this powerful series but afterwards, they came together to talk about what they saw, what they felt, and what it meant. Throughout the world, the series also struck a chord with viewers who felt connected to this universal story about the power of human resilience and identity. Nearly 40 years later, it is clear that the conversation *ROOTS* started should continue. So whether you are talking among your family, your friends, colleagues, faith or community groups, classmates or among neighbors, thank you for taking the time to make space to watch this epic story and for joining this important conversation.

Our hope is that *ROOTS* will inspire you to think about how all of our stories connect through universal themes of humanity, family and identity. In this guide, you will find materials that will help facilitate a conversation, but they are merely suggested starting points. Process and engage with what you have seen. That was the lasting legacy of the series in 1977, and it is our hope that it will be the lasting legacy today.



# ROOTS

## INTRODUCTION

The miniseries *ROOTS* first aired in 1977, and immediately shook the world. As we approach the 40th anniversary of the original series, an amazing cast and crew is joining with HISTORY® to reimagine *ROOTS* for a new generation – the new *ROOTS* will air on HISTORY for 4 nights beginning Monday, May 30th, 2016.

This *ROOTS* Watch Guide will help you organize and lead a watch party for each of the four episodes of *ROOTS*. In addition, you can download a discussion guide specifically for educators and students, a guide for facilitating conversations about race and slavery, and a family viewing guide.

Visit <http://roots.history.com> to find more resources.

### In this toolkit you will find:

- Background on the 1977 *ROOTS* and the 2016 *ROOTS*
- Suggestions for hosting a *ROOTS* watch party
- Night-by-night summaries and questions for discussion
- Photos, links and additional resources about *ROOTS*.





# ROOTS

## BACKGROUND

### ROOTS (1977)

When *ROOTS* aired in 1977, it took the world by storm, telling the story of Kunta Kinte, an African who is abducted from The Gambia, sold into slavery, and taken to America. Based on the 1976 novel *Roots: The Saga of An American Family* by Alex Haley, the miniseries powerfully depicted the story of Kunta Kinte and his family's struggle for freedom over several generations.

Over 130 million viewers watched *ROOTS* 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.

### ROOTS (2016)

In 2016, an amazing cast and creative team have come together to produce a reimagined *ROOTS* for a new generation of viewers. The new *ROOTS* from A+E Studios has benefited from rich new scholarship about life in The Gambia, the transatlantic slave trade and the lives of enslaved people 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.



# ROOTS WATCH PARTIES

## WHAT YOU CAN DO



### STEP ONE

Organize your watch party.

*ROOTS* airs on HISTORY on May 30 - June 2 at 9PM ET

### STEP TWO

Partner with a friend, neighbor, organization, or group to help you host an event and watch the series together.

Assign folks to help you bring food and drinks and help you set up.

### STEP THREE

Think of who you'd like to invite and extend invitations. (Remember that *ROOTS* is TV-14 and not recommended for younger viewers.)

### STEP FOUR

Watch each episode together over four consecutive nights, Monday May 30 through Thursday, June 2 at 9PM ET on HISTORY.

### STEP FIVE

Facilitate a conversation.

# ROOTS : CONVERSATIONS

After the episode, it's important to provide an opportunity for everyone who saw the film to engage with what they have seen. These are just starting points. You know your guests best, and you will know what will work best!

Here are some general tips for hosting a discussion:

1. **Keep it short.**

If your discussion will take place immediately after the episode, keep it short. Each episode runs for two hours, so we suggest you aim for a 30-minute discussion.

2. **Prepare**

Read through the materials for each episode. Think about themes and questions you want to ask in advance.

3. **Give an introduction**

Set guidelines and expectations for the conversation. Set a time limit, so everyone can know when the conversation will end. Remind everyone present that this is a place to reflect and share. There aren't right or wrong answers. Encourage everyone to participate through both speaking and listening.

4. **Facilitate, rather than speak.**

As the leader, you want to make sure everyone who wants to speak has a chance. Ask questions, rather than simply give your own thoughts.

5. **End.**

Bring the conversation to a close. As the leader, it is up to you to respect everyone's time. If there are still people who wish to talk, say that people are welcome to continue talking, but thank everyone for coming and give those that need to the opportunity to leave.

# NIGHT ONE

## SUMMARY:

*ROOTS* is a powerful exploration of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in North America, based on the 1976 novel by Alex Haley.

The series begins 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. As a member of the highly esteemed Kinte family, 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, 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.

## FIND OUT MORE:

Visit [ROOTS.History.com](https://roots.history.com) to view an in-depth interactive mapping the transatlantic slave trade.

## THEME: YOUR NAME IS YOUR SHIELD

"Don't worry what Massa call you. Keep your true name inside. Kunta Kinte. I promise I'm gonna keep it, too. This ain't your home. But this is where you got to be."

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In this episode, we watch Kunta's rapid and tragic journey from warrior to enslaved person. What is it about Kunta's character and personality that is so compelling?
2. What part of Kunta's journey affects you the most? Why?
3. What is so significant about Kunta's name? What does it mean to him?
4. What does your name mean? Do you like your name? Why is it significant to you? Why are names so important?



# NIGHT TWO

## SUMMARY:

In this episode, 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 by the ministrations 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.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 1793, Congress passed what became known as the first Fugitive Slave Act. Visit <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fugitive-slave-acts> to learn more.

## THEME: REVOLUTIONARY STORIES

"I don't know if this is the right kind of place. And I don't even know all of the story -- there wasn't enough time. But I've got to tell you about our people."

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In this episode, we see the struggle for freedom. America is struggling for freedom from British rule. Kunta is struggling for freedom from slavery. Kizzy is struggling for the freedom to learn - to understand her story and her family's story. What does this episode say about freedom? How did enslaved people imagine freedom?
2. What is the importance of understanding our past and where we came from?
3. What is the connection between struggle and freedom?
4. Whose struggle do you most identify with? Why?



# NIGHT THREE

## SUMMARY:

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 sobriquet of "Chicken George." George marries a preacher's daughter, Matilda, and fathers many children.

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 offers to send his son to work off his debts. Chicken George is dragged off to England.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In this episode, the character Marcellus gives viewers insights into the realities of life for free blacks in the American south before emancipation. Visit <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/exhibit/aopart2.html> for background about free blacks during this time period.

### THEME: GROWING UP

"You here to keep this family goin'. That's what my father say we do to survive. Fight if we need-- but first we have to survive."

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In this episode, we see a country and a family growing up. As things become more complicated for both the nation and the Kinte family, each make decisions about what it means to be free. What decisions do members of the family make? What decisions is the country making?
2. There is a difference between aging and maturity. Is there anyone who is making mature and wise decisions? Who? What decisions did they make?
3. What is the difference between survival and fighting?
4. What are areas where you feel like you are just trying to survive and what are areas where you are still fighting?



# NIGHT FOUR

## SUMMARY:

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*.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Learn more about the role of African American soldiers during the Civil War:

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/black-civil-war-soldiers>

<http://histv.co/24Q1ywW>

## THEME: MEMORIES OF FREEDOM

"You're my first baby not born a slave. First baby nobody can own...I know I can't keep this family together if I don't teach you where you come from, who you are...If I don't remember who I am." - Tom

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is at stake in this episode for George and his family? What has it cost them?
2. Even though the family is finally free, is that freedom complete? What is lacking?
3. What is lacking today?
4. What themes from this series resonate most deeply today?



THE GROUNDBREAKING SERIES REIMAGINED

# ROOTS

## GET INVOLVED

*"Do not allow yourself to be defeated. They can put the chains on your body, never let them put the chains on your mind." – Kunta Kinte to Kizzy*

**ROOTS™** is an epic story reimagined for a new generation of viewers. There are many ways to engage with the series and the topics and themes it explores.

**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 about **ROOTS**.

**PREPARE** by viewing video clips, interactives, discussion guides, background information and more at [roots.History.com](http://roots.History.com).

**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. Visit [roots.History.com](http://roots.History.com) for discussion guidelines and resources.

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

**SEARCH** for your own family story. What are your roots? Talk to members of your family to learn their stories, and start your own research online. Visit [roots.History.com](http://roots.History.com) to enter to win a 23andMe DNA kit!

**EXPLORE** the history of **ROOTS** by reading a background article about the topic: [www.History.com/news/remembering-roots](http://www.History.com/news/remembering-roots)

**REMEMBER** that everyone can define their roots in more than one way. If you do not know about aspects of your family history, or do not have access, you can research the history of your town or city, or interview an elder you admire.


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


**YOUR NAME IS YOUR SHIELD.** The power of one's name is a key theme in **ROOTS**. Explore the story or meaning of your own name or the name of one of your ancestors.


**CONTINUE** to learn about the history explored in **ROOTS** and discuss these topics with others. Share what you have learned using **#roots**.

## MEMORIAL DAY





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Please Note: **ROOTS** is rated TV-14, L, V, S.  
Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

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# ROOTS

