



*Mutiny on the Amistad by Hale Woodruff. 1939.*

# AMISTAD

**Freedom is not given. It is our right at birth. But there are  
some moments  
when it must be taken.**



In the summer of 1839, on a stormy night off the coast of Cuba, 53 Africans held captive in the cramped cargo holds of the Spanish slave ship *La Amistad* break free of their shackles. Led by Cinque (DJIMON HOUNSOU), they arm themselves, take control of the ship and reclaim their freedom. They have one goal: to return to Africa. Without the navigational skills to guide them home, the Africans are forced to rely on the two surviving members of the crew. But they are tricked. After two months on a ragged course up the East-

ern seaboard, the *Amistad* is captured by an American naval ship off the coast of Connecticut, and the Africans are charged with murder.



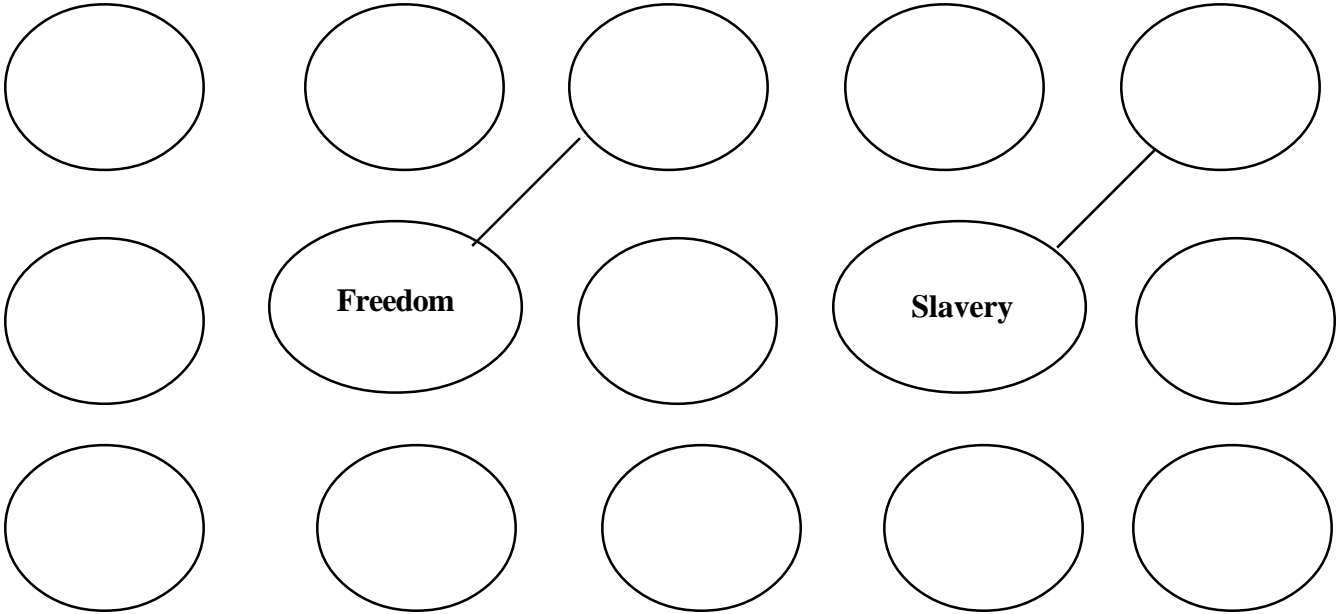
In the beginning, the Africans are championed by abolitionists Theodore Joadson (MORGAN FREEMAN) and Lewis Tappan (STELLAN SKARSGÅRD), and a young real estate attorney named Roger Baldwin (MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY). However, as the case becomes the symbol of a nation divided, two great Americans lock horns in the debate. Pro-slavery President Martin Van Buren (NIGEL HAWTHORNE), seeking re-election, is willing to sacrifice the Africans to appease the South, as well as Queen Isabella of Spain (ANNA PAQUIN). But his will is challenged by former President John Quincy Adams (ANTHONY HOPKINS), who comes out of retirement to fight the Africans' cause in the United State Supreme Court.

It is a case that challenges the very foundation of our legal system, but for the African captives on trial, this is not a clash of politics or ideologies. This is a fight for the basic right of all mankind...freedom.

# Amistad



# Clustering



1. What words and phrases come to mind when you think of the ideas of freedom and slavery? Complete the two cluster diagrams above in which you brainstorm words and phrases that you associate with each concept.

2. Using what you have associated from the exercise above, put the words and phrases into a pattern that becomes a poem. Write the poem on the lines below.

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# KWL

What I know about slavery and how it came to the U.S.

What I want to know about slavery in the U.S.

What I have learned about slavery.

**Read the information about slavery in the article below, then complete the KWL graphic on the previous page, stating what you have learned about slavery. After you view the film, you may add to the section of the KWL that deals with what you have learned.**

The AFRICAN SLAVE trade was already over a hundred years old when the Dutch landed twenty Africans at the Jamestown colony in 1619. Portugal had introduced Africans to Europe in the early sixteenth century. The slave trade soon extended into England and Spain and their colonies in the New World of the Americas when it was discovered. Africans accompanied Spanish explorers on their journeys to the New World. There were thirty blacks with Balboa when he discovered the Pacific ocean; Blacks accompanied Pizarro to Peru, Coronado to New Mexico, Narvaez and Cabeza de Vaca in their explorations of what is now Arizona and New Mexico. Blacks also accompanied the French explorers to Canada and the Mississippi River valley. Thus Blacks were a part of the New World long before the Mayflower, even before the settling of Jamestown in 1609.

Yet even with the existence of the slave trade and the early presence of blacks in what was to become the United States, slavery was not introduced immediately. The English colonists were in great need of labor to help settle their colonies. At first they tried to use the Indians. This proved impossible. The Indians came from a society and a way of life that was relatively uncomplicated. This background did not prepare them for the disciplined and complex way of life and work necessary for the plantation system. They also proved to be very susceptible to the diseases of the colonists. Everywhere Indian labor was used, it proved to be highly unsuccessful.

England then tried sending poor white prisoners and debtors from England and Ireland to the American colonies. Men, women, and children were often kidnapped and sent to America to work. These whites were held as indentured servants for seven years and then released. This soon created the need for a continual supply of people to work. Another disadvantage was simply the fact that a white indentured servant could run away, and because he was white, he could go to another place, change his name, and have no fear of being caught. Gradually the English Colonist turned to Africans as the ideal solution. Because they were black, it would be difficult for them to run away and escape detection. Too, they could be bought outright and held for as long as they lived. And, finally, the supply was inexhaustible.

Eighteen years after the first Africans came to the Jamestown colony, the first American-built slave ship sailed from Marblehead, Massachusetts. It's name was Desire. The slave ships sailed to the west coast of Africa, and there the captains of the slave vessels went about their job of loading the ship with blacks to bring to America. When the slave trade began, West Africa had a highly developed civilization, with complex economic and political institutions. It was because of their sophisticated civilization that West Africans could be used so easily in the rapidly growing economy of America.


Generally the slave trade was carried out in one of three ways. The first and easiest was simply to lie in wait until somebody came by, and then capture him or her. This method soon gave way to an alliance between white slave traders and black African tribal chiefs. The African chief would make war on another tribe for the purpose of capturing as many people as possible. He would turn them over to the white slave traders in exchange for various items the chief wanted.



# Amistad, Day 1

1. **Below is a double entry journal.** In the left column, you will describe scenes from the film that seem **intriguing, interesting, or relate to your life in some way.** In the right column, you will write your responses to the scenes you have selected. Your responses might indicate **what the scene means, what it reminds you of, what you don't understand, how you feel about it, or any other comments that seem appropriate.**

**Remember,** describe the scene on the top of the left column and write your comments directly opposite in the right column. Then, copy your next passage and write your response opposite, etc.

Scenes	Response
	<p><b>i-ro-ny</b> <i>noun</i> <i>plural i-ro-nies</i></p> <p><b>a.</b> The use of words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning. <b>b.</b> An expression or utterance marked by a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended meaning. <b>c.</b> Incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs: <i>"Hyde noted the irony of Ireland's copying the nation she most hated"</i> (Richard Kain). <b>b.</b> An occurrence, a result, or a circumstance notable for such incongruity.</p> 

# Amistad, Day 2

**2. Below is a double entry journal.** In the left column, you will describe scenes from the film that seem **intriguing, interesting, or relate to your life in some way.** In the right column, you will write your responses to the scenes you have selected. Your responses might indicate **what the scene means, what it reminds you of, what you don't understand, how you feel about it, or any other comments that seem appropriate.**

**Remember,** describe the scene on the top of the left column and write your comments directly opposite in the right column. Then, copy your next passage and write your response opposite, etc.

Scenes	Response



# Amistad, Day 3

**3. Below is a double entry journal.** In the left column, you will describe scenes from the film that seem **intriguing, interesting, or relate to your life in some way.** In the right column, you will write your responses to the scenes you have selected. Your responses might indicate **what the scene means, what it reminds you of, what you don't understand, how you feel about it, or any other comments that seem appropriate.**

**Remember,** describe the scene on the top of the left column and write your comments directly opposite in the right column. Then, copy your next passage and write your response opposite, etc.

Scenes	Response

**Comment and discuss the following quotations from the film.**

**John Quincy Adams:** We've come to understand that who we are is who we were.

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**John Quincy Adams:** He is a black man, you can see that, but if he were white, we wouldn't be here today. He would be someone to tell our children about in school, like Patrick Henry and other such heroes.

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**Joseph Cinque:** What kind of a land is this where you almost mean what you say? Where laws almost work?

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**John Quincy Adams:** Do you understand what the Supreme Court is?

**Joseph Cinque:** The place where they finally kill us.

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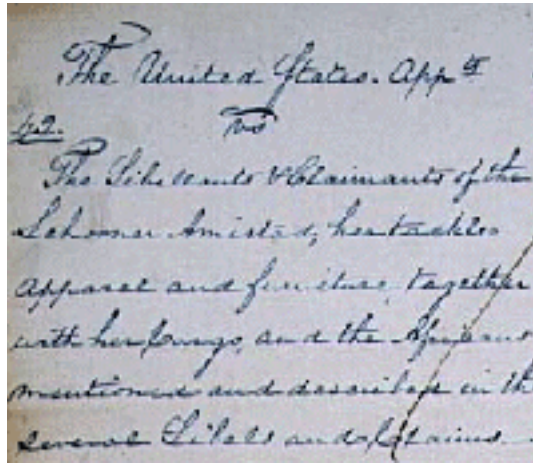
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# The *Amistad* Case



*“ . . . each of them are natives of Africa and were born free, and ever since have been and still of right are and ought to be free and not slaves . . . ”*

— The argument by S. Staples, R. Baldwin, and T. Sedgewick, Proctors for the *Amistad* Africans, January 7, 1840

**If this statement is true, explain its consequences in terms of the slaves on the plantations in the South. What does this mean for the institution of slavery in the United States?**

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### Comparison Chart

	Spanish Planters	Africans	Gedney	Van Buren	The Spanish Government	Abolitionists
<b>Who?</b>						
<b>What role did they play in the trial?</b>		(defendants)				(financial & moral support for Africans)
<b>What was their motivation?</b>			(economic gain)	(political gain)		
<b>What were their arguments?</b>						
<b>What was the basis for their arguments?</b>	(property rights)				(Pinckney's Treaty)	

Define the following terms:

schooner

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brig

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writ of habeas corpus

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proctor

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libel.

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Explain how these terms are used in the case of the Amistad Africans.

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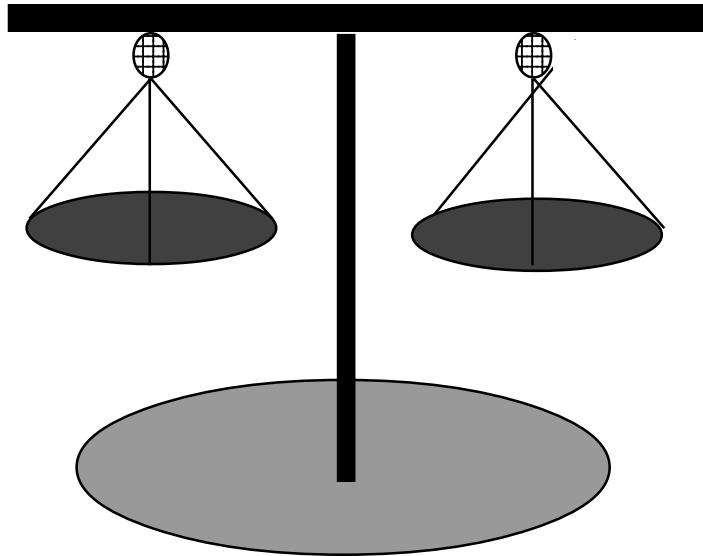


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# State the arguments in the Amistad case.



**For**

**Against**

A series of horizontal lines for writing, separated by a central vertical line that aligns with the vertical post of the scale above.

# Film Review

Title  
of the  
Film

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Introduce  
the most  
Important  
Characters

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Write a  
brief  
summary  
of the plot

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What  
problems  
does one or  
more of the  
characters  
face?

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What is  
done to  
solve the  
problem?

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How is the  
problem  
solved at  
the end?

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Comment on  
the camera  
work.

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Comment on  
music and  
other sounds

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Is the use of  
lighting  
effective?

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Are the actors  
convincing?

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Personal  
reactions:  
Liked the  
most? Liked  
the least?  
Why?

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Advise your  
readers  
whether to  
see the film  
or to stay  
away. Give  
convincing  
reasons.

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Read Magazine

Where the Amistad was going and where it arrived.



The map above is the direction the Amistad sailed in arriving at the United States. Explain how this happened, when the goal of the slaves was to return to Africa.

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**Steven Spielberg, director**

Theodore Joadson: **Morgan Freeman**  
 Cinque: **Djimon Hounsou**  
 John Quincy Adams: **Anthony Hopkins**  
 Roger Baldwin: **Matthew McConaughey**  
 Martin Van Buren: **Nigel Hawthorne**  
 Directed by **Steven Spielberg.**  
 Written by **David Franzoni.**  
 Running time: 145 minutes. Rated R (scenes of slavery and brutality).

