



Quicklook at "Vanilla"

Text B

Collaborative Reading Materials with an information gap.

There are three different texts with a common question sheet. The principle of the materials lies in fact that readers will be unable to complete the questions by simply using the information in their version, but will have to collaborate with other readers, asking questions and eliciting information, possibly arguing and negotiating. There is also an opportunity to draw on their own previous knowledge and other relevant reading materials.

In 1848 the revolutionary government in Paris abolished slavery in all the French possessions. The name of the island of Bourbon was changed to Reunion and 62,000 slaves were freed. Most of these slaves worked on plantations of sugar and vanilla. These crops need a lot of labour. Among these slaves was Edmond Albius who had made many planters rich. This was because he had discovered in 1841 how to fertilise vanilla flowers, and had taught other slaves how to do it. He used a small stick to press the male and female parts of the flower together. Edmond never received any reward for his discovery. In fact many people believed it was impossible that a slave could have made such a discovery. They still say it was an accident.

After emancipation Edmond went to work as a kitchen servant in the capital. He was accused of stealing jewellery and sentenced to ten years hard labour. His former owner wrote to the governor. He pointed out that Edmond had brought a lot of money to the island. He suggested that if he had been given a small reward he might not have become tempted by crime. He was released after five years. He died in poverty in 1880.

In 1980 the mayor of St. Suzanne put a small monument to Edmond Albius at the bus stop near the plantation of Belle Vue where he fertilized the vanilla vine. There is also a school named after him.

Text A

Text C is not shown here

Ferreol Bellier Beaumont owned a plantation called Belle Vue on the island of Bourbon in the Indian Ocean. The island is volcanic and has a hot, humid tropical climate. He had managed to grow one vanilla vine which was twenty years old. Unfortunately it had never managed to bear fruit, and produce the seed pods which were so valuable in Europe. He complained: "Of one hundred vanilla vines on our island, we would be lucky to see ten flowers, and even fewer fruits, in the whole year."

One morning he was surprised to discover two fruits growing on his solitary vine. He was with one of his slaves, a young boy called Edmond. Edmond said it was he that had fertilised the vanilla flower.

Edmond was sent around the island in a coach to visit all the large plantations. He was able to show other slaves how to fertilise the flower. As a result vanilla production increased rapidly. By 1898 the island sent 200 tons of pods to France. Planters on the island also developed a more efficient way of preparing the pods by blanching them in hot water before drying them in the sun.

Vanilla - Question sheet with space for answers.		
1. What kind of plant is vanilla? How does it grow?	2. What kind of climate does vanilla prefer?	3. What did Edmond Albius discover?
		Only partly shown.
5. How did Edmond fertilise the vanilla vine?	6. How did Edmond spend his time after his discovery?	7. When were slaves freed in French colonies?
9. What is vanilla used for?	10. Why is vanilla so expensive?	11. What reward did Edmond receive for his discovery?