NEW JERSEY AMISTAD COMMISSION

A Resource Developed by GTC World Changers

# Amistad

*The Fight for Freedom*

## A Page-by-Page Teacher's Companion

Understand the book, page by page — with the history behind each scene and ready-to-use discussion prompts for the K–5 classroom.

**Courage · Freedom · Justice · History**

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START HERE

# How to Use This Companion

This companion walks you through Amistad: The Fight for Freedom one page at a time, so you can read the book with confidence and answer the questions your students will ask. It is a reading companion — a quick, page-by-page reference — and works alongside the full K–5 Curriculum Teaching Guide, which holds the lesson plans, handouts, and rubrics.

The book is a 26-page comic that tells the true story of the Mende people of Sierra Leone: their capture, the revolt aboard La Amistad, the court case that freed them, and New Jersey's leadership in teaching this history. It is built for K–5 readers and presents difficult history in a developmentally appropriate way.

**EVERY PAGE ENTRY GIVES YOU THREE THINGS**

On the page — a plain-language summary of what your students will see.

Background for you — the real Amistad history behind the scene, in your back pocket so you can answer questions and note where the comic simplifies for young readers.

In your classroom — a quick teaching move plus ready-to-ask discussion questions, with key vocabulary highlighted.

Read the entries before you teach, then keep the guide open beside the book. You do not need to use every question — choose the ones that fit your grade and your class.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

# About the Book at a Glance

**Your four student guides:** Eliz, Nia, Zuri, and Malik are four New Jersey students who frame the story and model inquiry on every focus topic. When they ask a question or share a feeling, that is your cue — it is the same question or feeling your students are likely having. Use the guides to scaffold class discussion.

**The four theme words:** Courage, Freedom, Justice, and History appear from the cover onward. Post them in your room and return to them on every page — they are the throughline vocabulary for the whole unit.

### STANDARDS THIS BOOK SUPPORTS

NJSLS 6.1 Social Studies — U.S. History

The New Jersey Amistad Mandate

NJSLS–ELA — Reading, Speaking & Listening

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies

### TEACHING SENSITIVE HISTORY WITH CARE

This story includes capture, the Middle Passage, and enslavement. The book handles these moments gently — without graphic violence — and keeps the focus on the Mende people's dignity, courage, and community.

Pages 8–9 show a thriving Mende society first, on purpose. Spend time there so students meet the Mende as a full community before any hardship.

Pages 10–12 are the hardest. Read them slowly, name the feelings (fear, then strength), and honor student responses without dwelling on cruelty.

Let the courtroom and homecoming pages (17–21) carry the hope. Justice is the destination this book is built to reach.

THE HEART OF THE GUIDE

# Page-by-Page Teaching Companion

Each entry below matches one page of the comic. Read with the book open beside you.

## Page 1 · Cover

*A True Story of Courage, Freedom & Justice*

**On the page:** The four student guides — Eliz, Malik, Nia, and Zuri — reach toward the reader, framed by the Amistad ship on one side and a Sierra Leone village on the other. Banner taglines set the tone: "Honor the past. Inspire the present. Build the future." The New Jersey Amistad Commission seal anchors the page, and four theme words — Courage, Freedom, Justice, History — appear in the margin.

**Background for you:** The cover deliberately shows the book's two worlds: the Mende homeland in West Africa and the ship La Amistad. The whole story is the bridge between them. Naming both up front helps students hold the journey in mind before it begins.

**In your classroom:** Do a "cover walk" before opening the book. Let students notice and predict, then introduce the four theme words you will return to on every page.

- What do you notice on this cover? What do you wonder?
- Who do you think these four children are, and what might they want to show us?
- What do the words courage, freedom, justice, and history mean to you right now? We will revisit them.

**Words to know:** *Courage, Freedom, Justice, History*

## Page 2 · Title Page

*Whose Story This Is*

**On the page:** A formal title page: "New Jersey Amistad Commission presents." The subtitle frames the scope — "The Story of the Mende People and New Jersey's Legacy" — with a navy-and-gold Kente-style border, an Africa map, a compass, and ship motifs.

**Background for you:** This page signals that the book is an official New Jersey instructional resource, developed for the Commission. Authorship is attributed to GTC World Changers.

**In your classroom:** Use this page to set purpose: we are about to read a true story that New Jersey schools are asked to teach.

- Why do you think a whole state wants every student to know this story?
- What do the map, compass, and ship on the border make you think the journey will involve?

# Page 3 · Front Matter

*Copyright & Educational Purpose*

**On the page:** Copyright © 2026 New Jersey Amistad Commission, with project credit to GTC World Changers. An Educational Purpose Statement ties the content to K–5 understanding of the Mende people and the Amistad case. A Legal & Content Note explains that the history is presented in a developmentally appropriate format.

**Background for you:** This is a front-matter page young readers will mostly skip. For you, it confirms the book's alignment with the New Jersey Amistad Mandate and the NJ Student Learning Standards.

**In your classroom:** No student instruction needed here — this page is for your planning and for anyone reviewing the resource. You may simply turn past it during a read-aloud.

## Page 4 · Contents

*Table of Contents — The Whole Journey at a Glance*

**On the page:** Eleven focus topics are mapped to page ranges with thumbnail previews and the four guides. The sequence runs: Sierra Leone → capture → the Tecora → Havana and La Amistad → the revolt → recapture → the court case → legacy. Banner: "Know the past. Understand the present. Shape the future."

**Background for you:** The contents are ordered historically, from West Africa in 1839 through the 1841 ruling and its modern legacy. In effect, the book hands you a built-in scope-and-sequence.

**In your classroom:** Preview the table of contents as a roadmap. Tracing the journey first gives students a mental map and helps them follow cause and effect later.

- Looking at the journey from home to a ship to a courtroom — where do you think the hardest part will be?
- What does it mean to "know the past" so we can "shape the future"?

## Page 5 · Why It Matters

*Why This Story Matters*

**On the page:** A framing spread: the Amistad teaches courage, justice, and the fight for freedom. The four guides study a classroom mural — a ship, scales of justice, breaking chains, and a sunrise. Closing prompt: "Why is it important to learn true stories from history?"

**Background for you:** This page frames the book's purpose: to remember the Mende struggle truthfully rather than glossing over it. It is the unit's essential-question entry point.

**In your classroom:** Open your unit here. Pose the essential question and record student answers to revisit at the end.

- Why is it important to learn true stories from history, even hard ones?
- The mural shows scales of justice and breaking chains. What might those pictures stand for?

**Words to know:** *justice*

## Page 6 · Our Story Begins

*A New Jersey Classroom Opens the Story*

**On the page:** A teacher introduces "Our History Matters: Real people. Real events. Real impact," and previews a true story of courage and of people who never gave up. Eliz, Nia, Zuri, and Malik respond with questions: "Is this about our ancestors?" "Was it long ago?"

**Background for you:** The framing classroom shows the Amistad as history that is actively studied in New Jersey today — the Commission's mandate in action. The four guides model the kind of questions you want your own students asking.

**In your classroom:** Point out that the children in the book are asking questions, just like your class. Invite your students to add their own wonderings to a chart.

- The guides ask, "Was it long ago?" How could we find out when this really happened?
- What questions do you have before we begin? Let's start a "We Wonder" chart.

**Words to know:** *ancestors*

## Page 7 · Into History

*Opening the Book — A Journey Begins*

**On the page:** The students open the AMISTAD book and "flip" to a map of Sierra Leone, showing Freetown, Guinea, Liberia, and the Atlantic. They react with wonder and notice "rich traditions and cultures." Reflection: "People, land, and history — all connected."

**Background for you:** This locates the Mende homeland in Sierra Leone, West Africa, before the story moves outward. Establishing where the Mende lived — and that they had a full life there — matters for everything that follows.

**In your classroom:** Use the map for "Look Closely / Think About It" map-literacy practice. Find Sierra Leone together and trace the Atlantic Ocean the story will cross.

- Where in the world is Sierra Leone? What ocean borders it?
- What does it mean that "people, land, and history are all connected"?

**Words to know:** *Sierra Leone, Mende*

## Page 8 · The Mende People

*Home, Culture & Community*

**On the page:** A Sierra Leone village sits by rivers and forest; families grow food and care for one another. Music, dance, stories, and traditions pass from one generation to the next. "Hope and community were at the heart of everything they did."

**Background for you:** This page portrays a full, dignified Mende society before captivity — not a blank "before." Spending time here builds empathy and counters the deficit narrative that begins African history at enslavement.

**In your classroom:** Slow down on this page. Use Look / Think / Feel prompts so students see the Mende as a thriving community first. This investment pays off emotionally later.

- What do you see the Mende people doing to care for one another?
- How is the Mende community like and unlike your own community?
- How do families pass traditions from grandparents to children — in the book and in your family?

**Words to know:** *community, traditions, generation*

## Page 9 · Daily Life

*Values Passed Down*

**On the page:** Daily work, learning, and celebration. Elders teach "Respect others. Be kind. Speak the truth." Children help care for the land; the community prays, sings, and gives thanks. The guides reflect on elders, traditions, and staying close to family.

**Background for you:** This reinforces an intergenerational, values-based society and quietly foreshadows the resilience the Mende will need. The values named here — respect, kindness, truth — echo through the rest of the story.

**In your classroom:** Connect the Mende values to your classroom community agreements. The phrase "speak the truth" will matter again in the courtroom pages.

- The elders teach "Respect others. Be kind. Speak the truth." Which of these is hardest, and why?
- What values do the elders in your life pass down to you?

**Words to know:** *elders, values*

## Page 10 · Strangers Arrive

*Fear in the Village*

**On the page:** Unfamiliar men enter the peaceful village, and questions and fear spread quickly. Parents gather their children: "Our ancestors gave us strength. We must be strong too." The village does not know what will happen next.

**Background for you:** This depicts the disruption of the 1839 slave raids without graphic violence. The book handles a traumatic moment at an age-appropriate level, focusing on the family's courage rather than on harm.

**In your classroom:** This is a turning point. Name the feeling — fear — and notice how the parents respond with strength. Keep the focus on emotion identification and the family's love.

- How do you think the families felt when strangers arrived? How can you tell?
- The parents say, "We must be strong too." When have you had to be brave for someone else?

**Words to know:** *fear, strength*

## Page 11 · Captured

*Taken from Home — Onto the Tecora*

**On the page:** The Mende are marched to the shore ("Hurry up. Get on the ship.") and forced onto a ship called the Tecora. "The journey was long and very hard," and they do not know where they are going. Prompt: "How would you feel if you were taken away from your home without a choice?"

**Background for you:** The Tecora (Teçora) was the Portuguese slave ship that carried captives across the Atlantic to Cuba — part of a slave trade that international treaties had already banned. This page introduces the Middle Passage to young readers through perspective-taking rather than through graphic detail.

**In your classroom:** This is the most difficult page so far. Read it gently. Let students sit with the prompt about being taken from home; honor their feelings without dwelling on cruelty.

- How would you feel if you were taken from your home without a choice?
- Why do you think the book tells us the journey was "long and very hard" without showing every detail?

**Words to know:** *Tecora, captured, Middle Passage*

## Page 12 · Across the Ocean

*A Journey Across the Ocean*

**On the page:** A night storm rocks the ship; the Mende hold on to one another as it groans. Parents comfort crying children: "You are strong, my child. We are together." They pray and never give up, and after many days the Tecora reaches Havana, Cuba.

**Background for you:** The book compresses weeks of the Middle Passage into a single hope-centered scene. Notice the deliberate choice to emphasize togetherness and faith rather than despair — a developmentally appropriate way to carry students through this part.

**In your classroom:** Highlight resilience and cause-and-effect: the ship crossed the ocean, so the story now moves to Cuba. Affirm how the families held on to each other.

- What helped the Mende keep going during the hard journey?
- Where does the ship arrive? How is Cuba different from their home in Sierra Leone?

**Words to know:** *resilience, Havana*

## Page 13 · Havana & La Amistad

*Sold onto La Amistad*

**On the page:** In Havana the Mende are taken off the ship and treated as property, with a "FOR SALE" sign. "False papers were used to pretend they were legally enslaved." Some are placed on a smaller ship — La Amistad — where "the fight for freedom was about to begin."

**Background for you:** Two buyers, José Ruiz and Pedro Montes, used fraudulent documents to disguise the illegal importation, then loaded the captives onto the schooner La Amistad. Ironically, "amistad" means "friendship" in Spanish. The forged papers are the heart of why the later court case turned out as it did.

**In your classroom:** Introduce the idea of unjust laws and forged documents. This is groundwork for the fairness-and-justice questions coming in the courtroom.

- What does it mean that "false papers" were used? Why would someone lie on purpose?
- Is something fair just because a paper says it is? How can we tell what is truly right?

**Words to know:** *property, false papers, La Amistad*

## Page 14 · Sengbe Pieh

*Sengbe Pieh and the Plan for Freedom*

**On the page:** We meet the leader: Sengbe Pieh, called Joseph Cinqué by the Spanish — a husband, father, and farmer. Tired but unbroken, he says, "We did not survive the Tecora to die in chains." He finds a loose iron nail, unlocks his shackles ("Freedom starts here"), and shares a plan: "Tonight, we take our freedom back. Together."

**Background for you:** Historically, Sengbe Pieh freed himself with a nail or file and led the uprising. "Joseph Cinqué" was the Spanish rendering of his name. He was a real person — a Mende rice farmer with a family — not a symbol. Naming him as a leader, husband, and father restores his full humanity.

**In your classroom:** Profile Sengbe Pieh as a real historical leader. Center courage and leadership, and make sure students learn his true name.

- Sengbe Pieh says, "Freedom starts here." What do you think he means?
- What makes someone a good leader? Which of those qualities do you see in him?
- Why does he say "together" instead of "alone"?

**Words to know:** *Sengbe Pieh, Joseph Cinqué, leader*

## Page 15 · The Revolt

*The Revolt Aboard La Amistad*

**On the page:** At night the Mende rise up and take control of the ship: "Stand together!" They need the Spanish sailors to steer toward home. By day the sailors fake an eastward course toward Africa; by night they secretly turn the ship north toward America.

**Background for you:** After seizing the ship, the Mende ordered the surviving Spaniard, Montes, to sail to Africa. He deceptively steered the ship north, drifting it toward the U.S. coast instead. This deception is exactly why the Amistad ended up in American waters and American courts.

**In your classroom:** This is a strong cause-and-effect moment. Use the guides' commentary to discuss unintended consequences — the Mende wanted to go home but were tricked toward America.

- Why did the Mende need the sailors to steer the ship?
- The sailors tricked them. How did one act of deception change where the ship ended up?

**Words to know:** *revolt, deception*

## Page 16 · Recaptured

*Recaptured and Brought to America*

**On the page:** Near Long Island, La Amistad is stopped ("You are our prisoners now!"), and the Mende are taken ashore and jailed. A map traces their path from West Africa to Long Island. Their case heads to court: "We will make sure they are heard in court."

**Background for you:** In August 1839 a U.S. naval vessel seized the schooner off Long Island, New York, and the Africans were held while the legal case began. This is the moment the story shifts from the ocean to the American courtroom — and to the question of due process.

**In your classroom:** Introduce the idea of the U.S. court system and the right to be "heard in court." Trace the journey on the map to consolidate the geography.

- What does it mean to be "heard in court"? Why might that be important?
- Trace the map: from Sierra Leone to Cuba to Long Island. How far did they travel?

**Words to know:** *recaptured, court, due process*

## Page 17 · The Fight in Court

*The Fight for Freedom in Court*

**On the page:** The court must answer two questions: are the Mende free people, or property? The Mende argue, "We are not things. We are people. We have the right to be free." The men claiming ownership insist they were bought legally, and the judge listens carefully.

**Background for you:** This is the legal heart of the case: were the Africans property and cargo, or free people who had been illegally kidnapped? Teaching note for accuracy: this scene correctly shows a judge — not a jury — deciding. Federal cases like this were decided by judges, and the book reflects that.

**In your classroom:** Distinguish this civil dispute about rights from a criminal trial, and introduce explicit civics vocabulary. If students ask about a jury, you can affirm that a judge decided this case.

- The case comes down to one question: were the Mende people, or property? How would you argue that they are people?
- What is the difference between a judge and a jury? Who decides here?

**Words to know:** *court, judge, property, rights*

## Page 18 · A Court Decision

*Evidence and Advocates*

**On the page:** Early criminal charges are dismissed, and the court turns to whether the Mende are free. Witnesses testify through a translator: "We were trying to be free." Lawyers Roger Sherman Baldwin and former President John Quincy Adams defend the Mende: "They are not property. They are human beings with the right to be free."

**Background for you:** The early criminal charges were dismissed, and the case continued as a federal battle over whether the Mende were property or free people who had been illegally kidnapped. Their defenders included Roger Sherman Baldwin and John Quincy Adams — a former U.S. president who argued on their behalf. A translator was essential, since the Mende spoke neither English nor Spanish.

**In your classroom:** Model the ideas of evidence, testimony, and advocacy, and point out that real historical figures stepped forward to help. The translator is a great hook for why language and being understood matter.

- Why did the Mende need a translator? What might happen if no one could understand you?
- What does it mean to be an advocate — someone who speaks up for others? Who advocates for you?

**Words to know:** *evidence, testimony, translator, advocate*

## Page 19 · The Decision

*Justice Found — "They Are Free"*

**On the page:** The court rules: "The Mende people are not property. They are free." They hear the words they waited for ("We are free… Thank you…") as crowds react outside. Families reunite — "Justice had been found."

**Background for you:** The courts found that the Africans had been illegally enslaved and were therefore free. The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed this in 1841 in United States v. The Amistad — the highest court in the country agreeing that the Mende were free people.

**In your classroom:** Define justice and connect the ruling to human rights. Let the emotional weight land; this is the payoff of the unit's essential question.

- How do you think the Mende felt hearing the words "You are free"?
- What does the word justice mean now that we have seen it happen in this story?

**Words to know:** *justice, Supreme Court, free*

## Page 20 · Free & Home

*Free — and Home Again*

**On the page:** "We are free! This is our victory!" — chains fall on the courthouse steps. With help from supporters, the Mende sail back to Sierra Leone and are welcomed home. They rebuild their lives and pass their traditions to the next generation.

**Background for you:** In 1842 the surviving Mende returned to Sierra Leone, accompanied by missionaries and abolitionist supporters who had helped fund the journey home. Connecting the ending back to the village from the opening pages closes the circle for students.

**In your classroom:** Resolve the arc and define freedom as dignity and human rights. Circle back to pages 8 and 9: the traditions they protected are the ones they carried home.

- The Mende return to the same village we saw at the beginning. Why does that ending feel right?
- What does freedom mean to the Mende — and what does it mean to you?

**Words to know:** *abolitionist, freedom*

## Page 21 · History Changed

*The Court's Decision Changed History*

**On the page:** A full-page scene of release: the ruling is announced — "The Mende people are free." Sengbe Pieh and the families weep and cheer together. "After a long and painful journey, freedom had finally been won."

**Background for you:** This page marks the Amistad ruling as a landmark in the long struggle against slavery and for human rights. It is the emotional high point and a chance to underscore why one case can matter for everyone.

**In your classroom:** Let students respond emotionally, then connect the single ruling to a bigger idea: one decision about a few people can shape what a whole country believes is right.

- Why might this one decision matter for many more people than just the Mende?
- What feelings do you see in this picture? What words would you give them?

**Words to know:** *landmark, human rights*

## Page 22 · Still Teaches Today

*The Amistad Story Still Teaches Us Today*

**On the page:** Back in the New Jersey classroom, the theme words return: Courage, Freedom, Justice, Hope. New Jersey honors this history — the State House and the state flag appear. The guides close: "We learn. We remember. We honor. We build a better world."

**Background for you:** This page bridges the 1839–1841 events to present-day New Jersey civic memory, connecting the past to your students' own state and identity.

**In your classroom:** Return to your theme-word chart and your essential question. Ask students how this old story still speaks to their lives now.

- The guides say, "We learn. We remember. We honor." How can our class do each of those?
- Why does New Jersey want every student to remember the Amistad story?

**Words to know:** *honor, civic memory*

## Page 23 · Learning Across NJ

*Learning the Full, True Story Across New Jersey*

**On the page:** Students study primary sources — an Amistad narrative, a trial newspaper, 1839 imagery. Communities gather to share culture: "Our Stories, Our Roots, Our Future." The New Jersey Amistad Commission, created in 2002, ensures schools teach with truth, respect, and pride.

**Background for you:** The Commission was established by state law in 2002 — the Amistad Bill — sponsored by Assemblymen William D. Payne and Craig A. Stanley. A primary source is a record from the time itself, such as a newspaper from 1839; this page builds that skill explicitly.

**In your classroom:** Introduce primary sources: how do we know what really happened? Connect to the civics content about why the Commission exists.

- What is a primary source? Why is a newspaper from 1839 special?
- Why do you think New Jersey created a commission just to make sure this history is taught?

**Words to know:** *primary source, Amistad Commission*

## Page 24 · Our Voices

*Our History · Our Voices · Our Future*

**On the page:** Students reflect that history shapes today's choices and make signs: "Stand for Justice," "Every Voice Matters." They journal — "I can make a difference" — and share what they learned. "Sengbe Pieh's courage shows us one voice can change history… and every voice still matters today."

**Background for you:** This page frames the Amistad legacy as an ongoing civic responsibility carried by each new student. It is the book's clearest call to student agency.

**In your classroom:** Move from reading to doing. Use a journal or speaking-and-listening activity so students name how their own voice matters.

- "One voice can change history." Whose voice in this story changed it? Whose voice could change something today?
- Finish this sentence in your journal: "I can make a difference by…"

**Words to know:** *voice, difference*

## Page 25 · Historical Note

*Facts to Remember*

**On the page:** Nine fact boxes give the precise record: what the Amistad is, why it matters, and the Commission's role. The court-case box states that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1841 that the Mende are free — the highest court in the country. A journey map (Tecora → Havana → Amistad) and the Commission's sponsors (Payne and Stanley) close the page.

**Background for you:** This is the book's precision layer: exact dates (1839–1841), the Supreme Court level, and named sponsors complement the simplified narrative pages. Use it as your fact-check anchor and a reference for older or curious readers.

**In your classroom:** Use this page with grades 3–5 as a research-and-verify station. Younger students can revisit it briefly to reinforce that the story is true.

- Which fact on this page surprised you most?
- How do these exact dates and names help us know the story is true?

**Words to know:** *Supreme Court, 1839–1841*

## Page 26 · Back Matter

*A K–5 Educational Resource — Scope & Alignment*

**On the page:** A closing summary of the journey: Mende Sierra Leone → the revolt → the court decisions → New Jersey's leadership. "This Resource" is designed for K–5, supports the NJSLS, aligns with the Amistad Mandate, and supports guided discussion. Developed for the New Jersey Amistad Commission; written and developed by GTC World Changers.

**Background for you:** This page restates the resource's scope and standards alignment. For you, it is a one-page reminder of what the book is designed to do.

**In your classroom:** Use this page to close the unit. Return one final time to your essential question and theme-word chart to show students how far they have come.

- Look back at our "We Wonder" chart from the beginning. Which questions can we now answer?
- If you taught this story to a younger student, what is the one thing you would want them to remember?

REFERENCE

# Key Vocabulary Glossary

Student-friendly definitions for the words that carry the most weight in this story. Introduce them in context as you reach each page.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mende** | The people of Sierra Leone, West Africa, whose true story this book tells. |
| **Sierra Leone** | A country in West Africa; the Mende people's homeland. |
| **Sengbe Pieh** | The Mende leader of the Amistad uprising; a rice farmer, husband, and father. Called "Joseph Cinqué" by the Spanish. |
| **Tecora** | The Portuguese slave ship that carried the captured Mende across the Atlantic to Cuba. |
| **Middle Passage** | The brutal ocean crossing that carried enslaved Africans from Africa to the Americas. |
| **La Amistad** | The smaller schooner the Mende were placed on in Cuba. "Amistad" means "friendship" in Spanish. |
| **false papers** | Forged documents used to pretend, falsely, that the Mende were legally enslaved. |
| **revolt** | When the Mende rose up and took control of La Amistad to win their freedom. |
| **recaptured** | Taken into custody again — here, when the U.S. seized the ship off Long Island. |
| **court** | The place where a judge decides what is fair and legal under the law. |
| **judge** | The person who decided the Amistad case (not a jury). |
| **evidence** | Facts and proof presented in court to show what is true. |
| **testimony** | What a witness says in court about what happened. |
| **translator** | A person who turns one language into another so people can understand each other. |
| **advocate** | Someone who speaks up and stands for another person. |
| **abolitionist** | A person who worked to end slavery. |
| **Supreme Court** | The highest court in the United States, which affirmed in 1841 that the Mende were free. |
| **justice** | Fairness; making sure people are treated rightly under the law. |
| **primary source** | A record made at the time of an event, such as an 1839 newspaper or letter. |
| **Amistad Commission** | The New Jersey body, created in 2002, that ensures this history is taught in schools. |

REFERENCE

# Historical Facts to Keep Handy

The book's precision layer, gathered for you. Use these to answer older students' questions and to reassure every reader that the story is true.

- The captured Mende were taken from Sierra Leone in 1839 and carried across the Atlantic on the Portuguese ship Tecora — part of a slave trade that treaties had already banned.
- In Cuba, buyers José Ruiz and Pedro Montes used forged papers to disguise the illegal importation, then placed the Mende on the schooner La Amistad.
- Sengbe Pieh (called Joseph Cinqué by the Spanish) led the uprising aboard La Amistad after freeing himself from his shackles.
- In August 1839, a U.S. naval vessel seized La Amistad off Long Island, New York, and the case entered the American court system.
- The Mende were defended by Roger Sherman Baldwin and former U.S. President John Quincy Adams; a translator was needed because the Mende spoke neither English nor Spanish.
- The case was decided by a judge, not a jury. In 1841, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed in United States v. The Amistad that the Mende had been illegally enslaved and were free.
- In 1842, the surviving Mende returned home to Sierra Leone, accompanied by missionaries and abolitionist supporters.
- The New Jersey Amistad Commission was established by state law in 2002 (the Amistad Bill), sponsored by Assemblymen William D. Payne and Craig A. Stanley.

**ONE ACCURACY NOTE WORTH KNOWING**

The courtroom pages correctly show a judge — not a jury — deciding the case. If a student asks about a jury, you can affirm that this federal case was decided by a judge, and the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the ruling in 1841.

TO CLOSE

# Carrying the Story Forward

When you reach the final pages, return to where you began: the "We Wonder" chart, the essential question ("Why is it important to learn true stories from history?"), and the four theme words. Showing students how much they can now answer is the most powerful close you can give this unit.

The guides leave students with a charge worth repeating: We learn. We remember. We honor. We build a better world. Sengbe Pieh's courage shows that one voice can change history — and that every voice still matters today.

**Amistad: The Fight for Freedom — A Page-by-Page Teacher's Companion**
Developed for the New Jersey Amistad Commission · Written and developed by GTC World Changers
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