For my research paper, I chose to learn about Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin because I wanted to explore an influential Industrial Revolution invention. I figured out that my research question would be: “How did the cotton gin affect the United States’ economy?”

After deciding on my research question, I needed to get more information on the pros and cons of the invention and found many online sources. I also found two letters, one from Eli Whitney to his father and the other from Thomas Jefferson to Whitney. I also wanted to learn about the cotton gin’s later effects. In an article by William Philips, I learned about many effects of the cotton gin, including facts about slavery. I also found a book, “They Made America,” which gave me a good overview of Eli Whitney and the gin.

Next, I found an article called “King Cotton” which provided some helpful insight on the northern economy and its textile industry. I also found a copy of the speech by James H. Hammond called “Cotton is King.” He argued that the invention of the cotton gin was good and didn’t affect slaves as much as people said.

I also wanted to learn about the cotton trade after the gin. This led me to a New York Times article called “Cotton and the Cotton Trade” and a book by Angela Lakwete called “Inventing the Cotton Gin” that showed me the effect of cotton at global levels. I then found two scholarly journals. The first, by Thomas Gray Jr, told of lasting effects of the gin. The other, by Anna Wynveen, showed differences in beliefs about slavery between northern and southern states.

I also found two more sources. One was about New England mills and gave me more information about the North after the gin, and the other, a broad context source, showed me some long term causes and effects of the gin.

I then realized that I needed more information about the Civil War. My last resources, a letter by Abraham Lincoln and a website, both gave me valuable information about how the cotton gin led to the start of the Civil War.

After doing all this research, I wrote my thesis, which is this: “In the late 18th century, cash crops and plantations were becoming less profitable. As a solution, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin and plantation owners looked to cotton farming as a quick way to get rich. The cotton gin did its job and led the way towards an economic boom in America, with the emergence of cotton farming and textile industries. Unfortunately, these enormous plantations required more slaves than ever, leading to conflict between the north and south. Ultimately, the cotton gin led to tension between the North and South and played a role in the Civil War.” In my thesis, I highlight my major arguments, including how the cotton gin was both positive and negative. In the end, these things led to the Civil War.