

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Differentiated Reading Comprehension

The resources in this pack are designed to support teaching on or around the transatlantic slave trade and slavery or as part of UKS2 learning during Black History Month. This pack is specifically aimed at an UKS2 audience due to the distressing nature of the content.

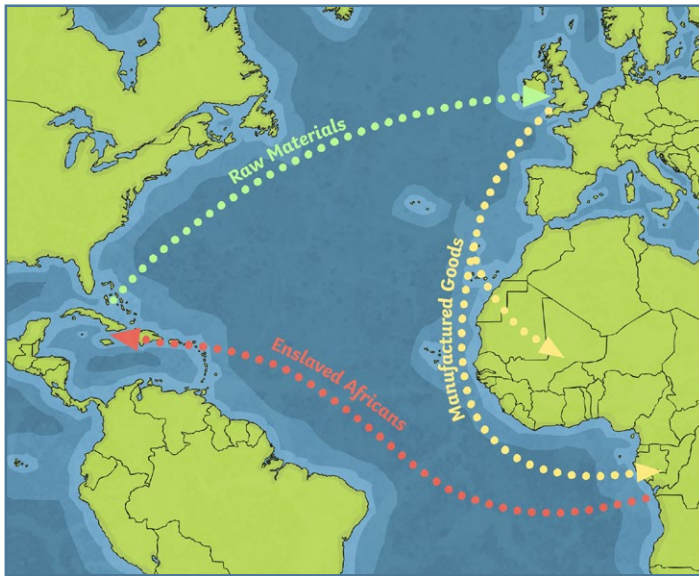
Please be aware that it will not be appropriate for the children in your class to research further into the slave trade due to the harrowing information and images freely available on the Internet.

Know your class: some content may be too upsetting for some children.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

From the late 16th until the early 19th century, Europeans were responsible for the enslavement of millions of people from parts of West Africa, transporting them across the Atlantic Ocean in the most awful of conditions to be inhumanely sold into a life of hard, unpaid labour and brutality in the Americas. This was known as the transatlantic slave trade: a bleak and shameful period in history to which the deaths of millions of Africans can be attributed.

The Triangular Trade



The Triangular Trade is the name used to describe the three stages of the transatlantic slave trade. Its most prolific period was between 1740 and 1810, with estimates of around 60 000 people being enslaved each year.

Initially, vast ships travelled to West Africa carrying goods, such as cloth, guns and ironware. Upon arrival, these goods would be bartered for

men, women and children who had been forcibly removed from their villages.

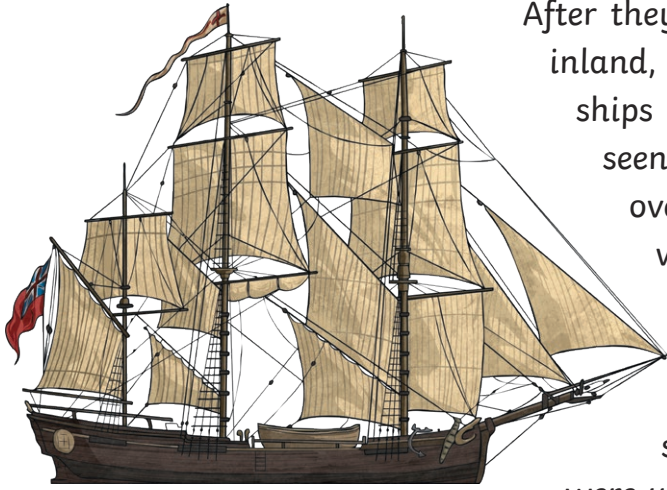
For the notorious middle passage across the ocean, these people endured unsanitary conditions below deck; overcrowded and filthy ships spent months at sea and many people died as a result. When the ships arrived in the West Indies, their weakened passengers were sold at auction to the highest bidder.

Thus, African people were bought and sold as possessions and became enslaved people, forced to work mercilessly on plantations, with little chance of payment or freedom.

The third stage of trade involved the ships returning to Europe with goods grown by the enslaved African villagers. These goods, including sugar, coffee, cotton and tobacco, were then sold to the people of Britain and beyond, completing the triangle which was built on the exploitation of many people. The process would then begin again.



What Happened to the African Villagers on the Middle Passage?



After they had been taken from their homes inland, the villagers were forced onto huge ships at the coast, many having never seen the sea before. Ships often carried over 700 people at a time. They were chained together in cramped conditions because they were considered cargo by the ships' captains. Below deck, the air was stifling and pungent and conditions were unsanitary: many people grew ill.

If they survived the middle passage, once sold into slavery, life did not improve. Slave owners sought to crush the enslaved people's spirits and control them: they were given a new name, made to learn a new language and forced to adopt new customs. Daily life on a plantation involved working 14 hours, or more, a day with harsh beatings for any **transgressions**. However, despite the brutal consequences, many of the enslaved people did bravely resist and some were even able to earn their freedom and join the fight for the abolition of slavery.

Olaudah Equiano's Story

Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) was enslaved in West Africa (in modern-day Nigeria) as a child but was fortunate enough to survive and pay for his freedom. He became an **abolitionist** and travelled to Europe to share his life story and promote his autobiography.

'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano' was published in 1789. Due to the fact it recounted his own traumatic experiences of slavery, it became a powerful, persuasive argument for its abolition.

Did You Know...?

Olaudah Equiano raised awareness of slavery by lecturing in Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Cambridge.

Abolition at Long Last

Eventually, British citizens began to recognise that slavery was unethical. In 1807, the House of Parliament outlawed the slave trade itself; however, it was not until 1833 that enslaved people began their freedom across the British Empire.

In the USA, there was great resistance to abolition and slavery continued, partly due to the fact that wealthy plantation owners continued to prosper from slave labour. Disagreements about slavery between Americans led to the American Civil War (1861-1865). Furthermore, the civil rights movement of the 1960s arose due to the continued **segregation** of Black and White Americans over 100 years following abolition.



Glossary

abolitionist	Someone who campaigns for abolition (the action of abolishing a system – in this case, slavery).
segregation	The enforced separation of different ethnic groups in a country.
transgression	An act that goes against a law, rule or code of conduct; an offence.

Questions

1. Which statements about the transatlantic slave trade are true? Tick **two**.

- People were shipped across an ocean under atrocious conditions.
- Enslaved people were paid to work hard.
- Millions of Africans died as a result of its brutality.
- Only men were bought and sold.

2. **Upon arrival, these goods would be bartered for men, women and children who had been forcibly removed from their villages.**

What does the word bartered mean? Tick **one**.

- given away
- captured
- exchanged, without using money
- grown on plantations

3. Look at the section entitled The Triangular Trade. Give two examples of goods which were sold during the last stage of trade.

4. Find a word which describes how the villagers had little room to themselves below deck.

5. Look at the section entitled **What Happened to the African Villagers on the Middle Passage?** The author describes the air as **stifling and pungent**. What does this tell us about conditions below deck on the ships on the middle passage?

6. Summarise what happened to the passengers if they survived the middle passage and arrived at their destination.

7. Why do you think some enslaved people tried to resist slavery, despite the consequences?

8. Explain what people such as Olaudah Equiano hoped to achieve by visiting so many cities in Britain.

9. In your own words, explain why you think there was **great resistance to abolition** and it took so long for enslaved people to be freed.

10. Life improved for some people during the 1800s. Do you agree or disagree? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Agree / Disagree (circle one)

Questions

1. Which statements about the transatlantic slave trade are true? Tick **two**.

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A choice of two from: sugar, coffee, cotton or tobacco.

4. Find a word which describes how the villagers had little room to themselves below deck.

overcrowded

5. Look at the section entitled **What Happened to the African Villagers on the Middle Passage?** The author describes the air as **stifling and pungent**. What does this tell us about conditions below deck on the ships on the middle passage?

It tells us that it was hard to breathe, hot and very smelly. As a result, many people became ill because conditions were unsanitary.

6. Summarise what happened to the passengers if they survived the middle passage and arrived at their destination.

Pupils' own responses, such as: If they survived, their lives did not improve. They were told given a new name and forced to adopt new customs. If they made any mistakes they were given harsh beatings.

7. Why do you think some enslaved people tried to resist slavery, despite the consequences?

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think they tried to resist because they could not stand their harsh treatment and want to stand up to the slave owners. They refused to be controlled and were willing to take the risk of being beaten.

8. Explain what people such as Olaudah Equiano hoped to achieve by visiting so many cities in Britain.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think he hoped to let everyone know about the harsh treatment of enslaved people during the slave trade. He wanted people to know how their sugar and coffee were grown. He wanted more support for an end to slavery.

9. In your own words, explain why you think there was **great resistance to abolition** and it took so long for enslaved people to be freed.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think many people made a lot of money from slavery and they would not have wanted it to end. Also, many people, did not fully understand what was really happening so it took a long time for them to realise.

10. Life improved for some people during the 1800s. Do you agree or disagree? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Agree / Disagree (circle one)

Pupils' own responses either agreeing or disagreeing with the statement, such as: Life was a little better for some people in some ways. Enslaved people were freed across the British Empire from 1833. However, slavery continued in the USA after abolition. It also led to a war.