



Year 5

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Lesson Series

1. The Origins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade
2. The Atlantic Passage
3. Enslaved Africans: Treatment and Resistance
4. The Abolishment of Slavery
5. An Abolitionist: Thomas Clarkson (from Wisbech)

Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - The Origins of The Transatlantic Slave Trade

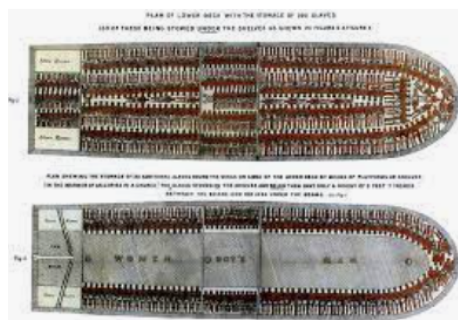
The slave trade took off due to European nations (particularly Portugal, Britain and Spain) wanting slave labour to work their plantations and mines in North and South America.

Slave labour meant that New World products such as sugar, tobacco and cotton could be sold to the rest of the world for a very cheap price. Slavery had always existed, but it was the scale of Atlantic Slave trade that has made it so infamous. An estimated 11 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic between 1500 and 1867, and their descendants make up much of the population of Brazil, the United States, Western Europe and the Caribbean today. This is called the African Diaspora.



Lesson 2 - The Atlantic Passage

The Atlantic passage was the most harrowing part of the slave trade. Some historians have estimated that of the 11 million slaves transported across the Atlantic, over 1 million died during the journey. Slave traders calculated the maximum amount of slaves they could fit onto their ships, whilst ensuring that enough survived for the journey to remain profitable. Slaves were chained onto wooden bunk beds below deck, and taken above board once a day to be washed and made to dance for exercise. Occasionally, slaves mutinied and took control of the ship. So foul were the conditions, sailors at sea could smell a slave ship before they could see one.



Lesson 3 - Enslaved Africans - Treatment and Resistance

Once they arrived in the Americas, enslaved Africans were sold to the highest bidder at slave auctions. Much of what owners did to enslaved Africans was intended to rob them of their individuality. They were separated from their families; separated from people who spoke the same language; given western names; and banned from practising African religions or speaking African languages. The best job to gain was as a 'house slave', but the great majority of enslaved Africans did backbreaking manual labour in farms and mines.

The average life of a slave was just eight years, and only a small minority escaped or bought their freedom. Enslaved Africans faced brutal treatment and lack of freedom. Slave owners were afraid of rebellion and any form of resistance was harshly punished. Between 1791-1804, there was a successful revolt in the French colony of St Domingue (known as Haiti today) and plantations were burned and French slave owners were killed.



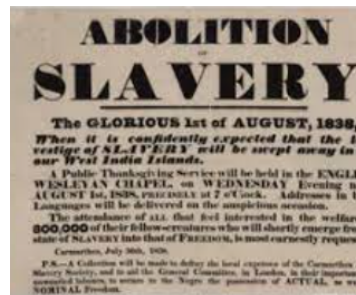
Lesson 4 - Abolition

Historians believe that the abolition of slavery and the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade was achieved by African resistance, economic factors as well as through humanitarian campaigns.

Traditionally, the inspiring story of how abolitionists ended slavery was the predominant view of many historians and the British public. However, some historians today argue that slavery was becoming less profitable and its decline was partly down to economic factors. Another factor was resistance from enslaved Africans and former slaves.

The humanitarian abolition movement in Britain began around 1780, but there was opposition from merchants who owed their fortunes to slave labour. The abolitionists used many of the features of a modern campaign, delivering speeches and petitions, publishing pamphlets, and organising boycotts of slave-made goods. Their tactics

involved 'awareness raising', such as circulating images of slave boats, or showing shackles and chains in public speeches. Finally, in 1807, the slave trade was made illegal, and in 1833 slavery became illegal throughout the British Empire. The enslavers who owned the plantations were given £20 million in compensation. The enslaved people were given nothing.



Lesson 5 - An Abolitionist: Thomas Clarkson

Thomas Clarkson (from Wisbech) was one of the most prominent eighteenth-century anti-slavery campaigners. He was described by poet Samuel Coleridge as a “moral steam engine”. His involvement with the movement to abolish the Slave Trade began in 1785 when he entered and won first prize for a Latin essay competition at Cambridge University entitled, ‘Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their wills?’ The research he conducted to write the essay opened his eyes to the atrocities of the Slave Trade and ending slavery became his driving passion for the rest of his life.

In 1787, Clarkson and another prominent abolitionist, Granville Sharp, were instrumental in forming the Committee for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade. The committee persuaded MP William Wilberforce to speak up for the abolitionist cause in Parliament. William Wilberforce’s brilliant speeches in the House of Commons led to a Parliamentary investigation into the Slave Trade. Wilberforce has been most associated with the campaign for the abolition of slavery, but it was Clarkson who provided him with the evidence for his speeches.

The Thomas Clarkson Memorial in Wisbech

