The wealth of Africa
The Slave Trade

1502 – First captives shipped across Atlantic by Portuguese traders

1655 – First of several ‘Maroon’ (escaped slaves) revolts in Jamaica

1698 – Royal Africa Company monopoly on slave trading ended

1787 – Abolition Society founded in the UK
1789 – Equiano publishes autobiography
1795 – Slave rebellion in Grenada defeated
1807 – Britain abolishes slave trade in its territories
1833 – Britain abolishes slavery

1888 – Brazil abolishes slavery
1897 – Zanzibar abolishes slavery

1891 – Toussaint L’Ouverture leads rebellion in Haiti
1794 – France abolishes slavery
1804 – Haiti declares independence

1897 – Zanzibar abolishes slavery

Front cover image: Romuald Hazoumé, La Bouche du Roi (detail).
These sources show that enslavement occurred in Africa before the arrival of European traders. See what these sources tell you about the reasons that people were enslaved, and what their lives might have been like.

**Source 1**

Children and even sometimes adults were bartered for grain in times of famine to save the rest of the group. Strangers would also voluntarily place themselves in positions of dependence when forced to leave their own people because of quarrels, threats, hunger, hope of a better life, or because they had committed some crime... Compensation for murder and other crimes was commonly paid in people – usually children from the offending kin group and not the actual criminal... The acquisition of persons through capture in war was widespread.

Miers & Kopytoff 1977: 12–13

**Source 2**

In Arab North Africa, slaves were employed in domestic service, agriculture, artisan industries and mineral extraction. In the following centuries the use of slaves as soldiers and in agriculture among the nomadic pastoralists of the Sahara were important new developments.

Alexander 2001: 46

**Source 3**

Slaves in village-based societies often lived and worked with their masters’ families, and were more likely to enjoy some protection and status within the community. Slaves who worked in large groups – in the salt mines of the Sahara and on the agricultural plantations that emerged in West Africa after 1500 – were more likely to be treated as chattels [goods].

Collins & Burns 2007: 204

**Source 4**

Following the example of the Qur’an, many sensitive and thoughtful Muslims held that slaves should be treated kindly, indeed that they should be protected in the same way that Muslim men were expected to treat women and children.

Description of enslavement in Nigeria, in Lovejoy 1981: 208

**Source 5**

Slaves were prominent among the hangers on at court [in Bornu, Nigeria, 1870s], and they filled a substantial number of the most prominent positions in administration, government and the military. Slaves in such cases were not only owned by the ruling class: they themselves were part of it.

Fisher 1991: 125

**Source 6**

The numbers of African slaves integrated into any community, however, were relatively few compared to those who were abused like the slaves in the Americas. While African slavery was in many cases of a different quality to that found in America and the Caribbean, it was still slavery.

Collins & Burns 2007: 204

---

**Questions**

1. In what ways could people become enslaved according to source 1?
2. What different things did these individuals do, according to sources 2–5?
3. What point is source 8 making? Does this fit with what the other sources say?
SHEET 2: HOW DID THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE WORK?

Enslavement in Africa became part of an international trade system called the ‘triangular trade’. As part of this trade, African captives were taken thousands of miles across the Atlantic and forced to work in plantations and mines.

Source 1
Trade between Europe, Africa and the America’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>Sugar, Raw, Cotton, Tobacco</td>
<td>Manpower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Manpower</td>
<td>Cloth, guns, beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Cloth, guns, beads</td>
<td>Sugar, Raw, Cotton, Tobacco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task

In source 1 you will find what each area needs, and what each area produces. Work out a system of exchange so that each area gets what it wants.

Questions

1. What is happening in the print in source 2?
2. What is the opinion of the artist towards enslavement?
3. What do sources 3, 4 and 5 tell you about the slave trade?
4. Study source 1 and the results of the task. Why was this system called the triangular trade?
5. Who does best and worst out of this system?
6. In what ways was the transatlantic trade different from other forms of enslavement in Africa?
Many European countries became involved in African enslavement, including Portugal, France, Spain and Holland. Britain’s economy in the 18th century became closely linked with the trade in products connected with the slave trade.

**Source 1**
Christopher Columbus introduced the sugar cane plant to the Americas in 1494. Sugar cane was described by the writer Dr Eric Williams as ‘The greatest gift of the Old World to the New’. It became known as King Sugar. During Transatlantic slavery almost every country in the Caribbean cultivated sugar using slave labour.

**Questions**

1. What is written on the bowl?
2. Why was it written on the bowl (source 2)?
3. Why might a sugar press be shown on the official seal (source 3)?
4. What have the bowl and the seal got to do with Africa?

**Source 4**
Birmingham manufacturers began exporting guns in 1698, which were sent as a means of trade and a method of enforcing the slave trade. By 1788, Birmingham was employing between 4,000 and 5,000 people who were directly involved in the trade with Africa. On average 150,000 guns were shipped to Africa every year and it is estimated that some 20 million guns were shipped to the continent by 1907.

Gun sales to West Africa, described in Fryer 1984: 417

**Questions**

5. Study sources 4 and 5. Where might the gun have been made?
6. How is the gun linked to West Africa?
7. What does the gun tell you about the relationship between Britain and West Africa?
SHEET 4: WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE ON THE SLAVE SHIPS CROSSING THE ATLANTIC?

Millions of African captives were forced to travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic, in horrible conditions. See what these sources tell you about the conditions in the slave ships.

**Source 1**
The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for fresh air, but now that the whole ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us.
Equiano 1789: 63
SHEET 4: WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE ON THE SLAVE SHIPS CROSSING THE ATLANTIC?

Millions of African captives were forced to travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic, in horrible conditions. See what these sources tell you about the conditions in the slave ships.

Source 1
The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for fresh air, but now that the whole ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us.
Equiano 1789: 63

Source 2: A print of slave ship, the Brookes, 1789
British Museum

Source 3: Jug, 1793
British Museum

Source 4: La Bouche du Roi, a sculpture by Romuald Hazoumé
British Museum
SHEET 5: HOW MUCH DID AFRICA SUFFER FROM THE SLAVE TRADE?

Enslaved Africans who were sent to work in the Americas often suffered terribly. At the same time, there was an impact on African people and places. See what effects you can identify from these sources.

Source 1
a. World population (millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1850</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>1262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source 1: World population (millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1850</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

United Nations, Population Division, 1999: 6

Source 2
The influence of Europe during the era of the slave trade left a permanent mark on every [African] community it touched: some flourished, others disintegrated.

Reader 1997: 411

Source 3
Trading was profitable at the level of the individual, group, or class doing the trading. But what about the social costs of the trade? The slave raids against farmers and the abandonment of good crop lands, the stress on defence or military activity, the draining of young adults from the labour force, all had their long-term economic costs.

Klein 1999: 161

Source 4
Throughout West Africa, evidence of wholesale flight and destruction caused by the slave trade can still be seen. People fleeing slave raiders left massive stretches of empty land in fertile areas behind them. There is still a great ‘empty belt’ of land running through the sub-Saharan zones of Ghana, Togo, Dahomey and Nigeria, in other words through the main slave-raiding areas.

Beckles 2002: 153

Questions
1. What happens to Africa’s population in source 1, table a?
2. What happens to Africa’s population in source 1, table b?
3. How do you explain these figures?
4. What do the other sources tell you about the impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade on Africa?
Source 1: Slave Trade, print by John Raphael Smith, 1791, from a painting by George Morland. British Museum

Source 2: African hospitality, print by John Raphael Smith, 1791, from a painting by George Morland. British Museum

Source 3: Print showing Britannia freeing enslaved African people. Anonymous, 1833, circulated by the Female Society of Birmingham... for the relief of British Negro Slaves British Museum

Source 4: The Negro Revenged, print after a painting by Henry Fuseli, 1807. Africans rejoice at a slave ship sunk in a storm. British Museum

Questions

1. Look at all the pictures. What point is each picture making?
2. How do sources 1 and 2 work as a pair?
3. What do all the pictures show about attitudes towards the slave trade in Britain at the time?
4. How reliable are they as evidence for Africa and the slave trade?
Your feedback

Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.

Find out more

The British Museum’s collection spans over two million years of human history and culture, all under one roof and includes world-famous objects such as the Rosetta Stone, the Parthenon sculptures, and Egyptian mummies.

The Museum’s collection of over 200,000 African objects includes material from ancient to contemporary cultures. Highlights on display throughout the Museum include a magnificent brass head of a Yoruba ruler from Ife in Nigeria, vibrant textiles from across the continent, and the Throne of Weapons – a sculpture made out of guns.

For students

Students can experience and engage with the collection in many ways, from taking part in activity sessions at the Museum to using free online resources or playing interactive games in the classroom and at home.

For teachers

Search the Museum’s collection online at www.britishmuseum.org for information about objects, including pictures to download or print.

Schools and teachers enewsletter

Sign up to the schools and teachers enewsletter to receive regular updates on free special exhibitions previews, teacher events and new free resources at www.britishmuseum.org/schools

Ancient Civilizations websites

These award-winning British Museum websites have been specially designed for students in Years 5 and 6. Each site is supported by information and guidance for teachers. www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk

The CarAf Centre

These resources have been produced by the British Museum in collaboration with The CarAf Centre, a community educational support centre and registered charity based in the London Borough of Camden. For more information, visit www.thecarafcentre.org.uk