The wealth of Africa
The Slave Trade
Teachers’ notes
THE WEALTH OF AFRICA: USING THESE RESOURCES

This educational resource consists of 16 sets of resources on African civilisations, countries and themes. Each set of resources includes:

• Teachers’ notes
• Students’ worksheets
• A presentation

Download the resources free at www.britishmuseum.org/schools

Teachers’ notes
These are intended to provide background material for teachers, but can also be referred to by students who want more contextual information.

Students’ worksheets
These are stand-alone worksheets which can be downloaded as classroom resources or viewed on the interactive whiteboard. They are self-contained, with tasks and questions and a limited number of sources in which the language has been slightly amended to make them more accessible to the likely reading ages of the students. They are also designed to be used independently of the teacher, e.g. for homework.

Presentation
This provides a simpler and more visual introduction to the topic. It contains some of the images and sources found in the other sections, and can be shown on the whiteboard or used at home to give an overview of the main topics covered.

Sensitivities and terminology
Teachers should be aware of the sensitivities of teaching this topic. Good up-to-date advice is given at www.understandingslavery.com

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.
THE SLAVE TRADE: TEACHERS’ NOTES

Introduction
Slavery is defined by the human rights organisation Anti-Slavery International (www.antislavery.org) as involving being forced to work, often under threat; being owned or controlled by someone else; being dehumanised or bought and sold as property; and being physically constrained or having restrictions placed on free movement. It has been practised in one form or another by nearly every civilisation. According to the Doomsday Book of 1086 one in 11 Englishmen was a slave, but comparisons between different times and cultures are difficult because the definition of a ‘slave’ varied, as did what enslaved people were expected to do, and the conditions in which they lived and worked.

The Transatlantic trade in captured African people that took place between the 16th and 19th centuries was the largest forced migration in history. It created an African Diaspora which has had an enormous effect on the history of black people, and made a lasting influence on the countries to which Africans were transported. This trade was of a different magnitude, both in terms of its scope and its brutality, than other forms of enslavement in Africa. While it is true that enslavement was practised by many African societies, this was of a different character than the chattel slavery of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

These resources bring out a theme that is present in many of the other resources – that of enslavement and the impact on Africa of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. They are designed to link to other resources available to teachers, and it is not recommended that these resources are used in isolation to teach this complex topic. In particular, the Key Stage 3 resources produced by the Understanding Slavery Initiative, www.understandingslavery.com, and the online resources produced by Anti-Slavery International, online at www.recoveredhistories.org, are excellent. These cover the Transatlantic trade in some detail, including resistance and abolition, the Middle Passage, and the legacy of the trade, and they provide excellent resources and guidance for teachers and tutors.

Slavery in Africa
Historically, many civilisations in Africa practised enslavement, which took different forms in different places. Enslavement in African societies might have involved criminals, prisoners of war and debtors – and it did not necessarily involve ill-treatment, nor even hard labour, but the loss of freedom. People who were unable to feed themselves in times of famine might have voluntarily agreed to become enslaved in return for food. Their children would also have been enslaved, but both generations might be treated as part of the family. Owners had social obligations towards their slaves. Historians such as James Walvin describe how slaves in African society often had a number of rights such as the ability to marry, raise families, purchase property, or buy their freedom. Slaves could in some cases rise to high positions – Sakura, one of the kings of Mali, was an ex-slave.
Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Transatlantic Slave Trade began in the 16th century and ended in 19th century. While the process of obtaining people as captives for the Transatlantic Slave Trade connected with the systems for enslavement already in place across Africa, the nature of the Transatlantic Slave Trade differed significantly from the enslavement evidenced in African societies. The global scale and reach of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and its impact across the world is unprecedented in human history. Millions of Africans were forced to travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic to work on plantations and in mines in countries – mainly in the Americas – owned or controlled by the major European powers. Enslaved Africans were forced to work, often under threat of violence, and were treated as property (a form of enslavement known as chattel slavery). The only way most of these Africans could gain their freedom was by escaping, but this was risky as recaptured escapees were severely punished.

Figures for the number of Africans enslaved and transported to the Americas are very difficult to estimate accurately, and the numbers quoted by sources vary significantly. Few scholars would put the total number at less than 8 million, and Professor Joseph Inikori writes ‘It seems probable that the ultimate figure is unlikely to be less than 12 million or more than 20 million captives exported from Africa in the Transatlantic Slave Trade’.

These numbers do not convey the scale and brutality of the trade, or its impact, however. To draw attention to this, some scholars refer to the Transatlantic trade as *maafa*, using a Swahili-language word that means great disaster or tragedy. Others prefer to call the trade the African Holocaust, to point out the global character of the trade, and the complicity of governments, businesses, and individuals in it.

The Middle Passage

Almost every seafaring European nation was involved in the trade, and it formed part of the Triangular Trade between Africa, the New World and Europe. The outbound journey from Europe to Africa carried manufactured goods which were exchanged for enslaved Africans. The so-called ‘Middle Passage’ carried people and raw materials from Africa to the Americas, while the return journey to Europe usually transported items such as sugar, rum, cotton, tobacco and molasses.

The Middle Passage was difficult and dangerous, and it has been estimated that as many as one in five Africans died during the passage across the Atlantic, on a voyage which could last between six weeks and three months. Slave ships were built to get to their destination in the quickest time possible, and the conditions on board were cramped and unhygienic, causing Thomas Clarkson, a leading abolitionist, to describe the individual people on board as being stacked like books on a bookshelf. Disease was rife, and this, combined with the fear of the captured Africans, who did not know where they were being taken, made for appalling conditions on board the slave ships. Enslaved Africans were obtained from many different areas and they would have spoken a multitude of languages, making communication on board ship difficult. This would have added to the fear and hardships that they would have been experienced. The Understanding Slavery Initiative website has some excellent resources, quotations, and ideas for teaching students about the horrors of the Middle Passage at www.understandingslavery.com
Resistance and abolition

From the beginning of the trade enslavement in all forms was resisted. This resistance by Africans to the Transatlantic Trade took many forms. Captives took part in mutinies on board slave ships, rebellions on the plantations, and many more were involved in everyday acts of defiance or refusal to comply with orders on the plantations. Some made the decision to commit suicide. There are several accounts of slave ships being attacked by Africans while they were loading their cargo, and the captives being freed. Nearly 400 cases are recorded of revolts aboard the ships engaged in the Transatlantic trade. In Jamaica, communities of escaped enslaved Africans formed, and became known as Maroons. One of the leaders, Nanny of the Maroons, led the fight against the British from 1720 to 1729. In 1831 the Baptist preacher Samuel Sharpe encouraged fellow enslaved Africans to stop working after Christmas Day until they received better conditions. This led to a full scale rebellion, and Sharpe was hanged for his part in the plot. One of the greatest rebellions took place on what is now Haiti, where in 1791 Toussaint L’Ouverture and his fellow Africans fought against their French masters for 13 years until they managed to establish the second independent country in the New World after the United States. As well as overt acts of resistance enslaved people also resisted their owners demands by continually working at a slower pace and by practicing forms of music, dance and religion based on their cultural heritage.

At around the same time, there was increasing awareness in Europe of the horrors of the Transatlantic trade. By the second half of the 18th century people in Britain had begun to question the morality of the enslavement of Africans, and religious groups including the Quakers and Methodists led campaigns against the trade. Petitions were organised, letters were sent to parliament, and mass sugar boycotts were organised. Figures such as the politician William Wilberforce, the campaigner Thomas Clarkson, the writer Hannah More and the former enslaved African Olaudah Equiano spread the abolitionists’ message. Eventually, in 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed, banning the trade in the British Empire, but it took another 27 years before enslavement was banned. The story told of the ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade has in the past been dominated by the histories of these abolition campaigns, but the resistance and rebellions against enslavement by Africans had a huge impact, and both should be discussed together. There are more detailed resources on resistance, rebellion and abolition available online at www.recoveredhistories.org/storiesresist.php

The impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade on Africa

The Transatlantic Slave Trade had a huge impact on Europe and the Americas, bringing great wealth to the traders and their countries. It had an enormous impact on Africa, and the available population figures show that there was a slowdown in the rate of population growth in Africa, and Africa’s share of world population declined during the period of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is, however, even more difficult to get accurate figures for the population of different parts of Africa in this period than it is to get accurate figures for the numbers of Africans who were enslaved.

It is clear that some Africans were made wealthy by the trade, for example the kingdom of Bambara in West Africa, formed in around 1712, derived much of its wealth in the later 18th century from raiding and trading in captives. Sometimes this demand for captives could cause problems, as for example when the kingdom of Benin began expanding its territory to gather more captives, which later led to its decline due to resistance by its own people and economic problems caused by the unequal balance of wealth.
The psychological impact on individual societies and family groups must have been very significant – people living in inland areas subject to slave raiding were afraid, distrustful, and worried about what would happen if they were captured. Olaudah Equiano refers to the custom of children in villages no longer being allowed out to play and roam, but instead having to be guarded while their parents were out at work in the fields. He also explains that captives on the slave ships, not knowing where they were being taken, were frightened by rumours that they were being taken away to be eaten by their captors.

The global nature of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

European companies involved in trade in West Africa built forts along the coastline which acted as their bases. Settlements grew up near to the forts. Gold, which had been one of the commodities that first motivated Europeans to trade with Africa, was important, but less so as the Transatlantic Slave Trade increased in size. Ports like Liverpool and Bristol became wealthy, and businesses in other parts of Britain were linked to the trade in Africa. For example, foundries in the West Midlands and other parts of the UK cast large quantities of brass trade goods, including manillas (bracelet currency), which were exported to Africa. There, the manillas were used as a form of currency, and used to purchase captives. Similarly, historian Richard Hart shows that iron from Shropshire was fashioned into bars that became a form of currency in what is today Sierra Leone and the Gambia. By the 1750s, both these countries had a fixed price in irons bars for male, female and young enslaved Africans. British factory owners and merchants became extremely wealthy as a result of this trade, linking many people into the Transatlantic Slave Trade even if they were not directly involved in it.

Effects on the economy of Britain

Some historians, such as Eric Williams, have linked Britain’s Industrial Revolution to the slave trade, and argue that economic, rather than moral, motivations lay behind the decision to abolish the trade in 1807. The so-called ‘Williams Thesis’ is still much debated by historians, but it is clear that the transatlantic trade brought great wealth to Britain, and provided both worldwide markets for its manufactures, and cheap imported raw materials from the plantations in the Americas.

Cotton

During the 18th century Lancashire became famous for its mills and textile factories which turned raw cotton into cloth. Much of this cotton was imported from the Americas, from plantations where it had been grown and picked by enslaved Africans. By the 1840s Manchester had become the world’s capital for cotton manufacturing. The cloth made there was then re-exported to British colonies including India and those in Africa. The growth of the textile industries in northern England created wealth, employment, and stimulated other improvements, like iron-making for the machines, and transport, such as railways, to move the cotton and the cloth to and from the port cities.
Sugar
Sugar cane was described by historian Eric Williams as ‘the greatest gift of the Old World to the New’ and was known as ‘King Sugar’ in the Caribbean, where it became the most widely-produced crop. The sugar plantations were among the most brutal, and the machinery used to extract sugar from cane was dangerous – in large sugar presses, driven by oxen, it was all too easy to trap fingers or limbs, leading to horrific injuries. The sugar trade was very profitable as the craze for sugar gripped Britain, and during the 18th century many British planters became so rich from the trade in sugar that the phrase ‘As rich as a West Indian planter’ could be used to describe someone of great wealth. Some of Britain’s wealthiest men were West Indian sugar planters, such as William Beckford, arguably Britain’s first millionaire.

Guns
Birmingham became the centre of the arms trade to Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Birmingham’s weapons’ manufacturers began exporting guns in 1698, as a means of buying slaves, and the main method of enforcing the slave trade. By 1788, they were employing between 4,000 and 5,000 people 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.

Other industries
Other industries in Britain were stimulated by the Transatlantic Slave Trade such as ship-building and the production of trade goods like copper, brass, pottery, pots, pans, beads, textiles and guns. Financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies supported the trade because money had to be borrowed for expensive voyages, ships and their cargos needed insuring, and profits had to be banked.
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For teachers

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