

Who fought for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and what were some of the tactics they used?

Suitable for students aged 11-16

The following enquiry can be undertaken as described or adapted to suit the teaching and learning needs of your students. Students can undertake their enquiry individually, in pairs or in small groups. Images can be projected onto the whiteboard, printed or viewed on computers or tablets.

Remind students that transatlantic slavery was a brutal system which forcibly shipped over twelve million Africans to the Americas and lasted over 300 years. It allowed African men, women and children to be stolen from their homeland, bought and sold as property and used to produce sugar, coffee, cotton and other goods for huge profit in the European and North American markets.

Tell the students about the famous 'Zong case':

in November 1781 the slave ship Zong, was sailing to Jamaica with hundreds of enslaved African men, women and children packed into its hold. When the ship began to run out of drinking water, the Master ordered around 130 slaves to be thrown overboard. The slaves were insured, as they were regarded in law as property or cargo, not human beings, so the owners of the ship could claim their money back. At a trial in 1783 the Master and crew were acquitted of murder. The furore surrounding the trial led to the setting up of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787.

Here are some examples of tactics used in the fight against transatlantic slavery. Students can study these to answer the enquiry question 'Who fought for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and what were some of the tactics they used?' Older students can formulate their own questions to interrogate each source.

Each student/group can investigate every object, or different objects can each be allocated for different students/groups to explore and then share their findings with the rest of the class.

1. Sugar boycott

Show students the image of the Wedgwood sugar bowl ageofrevolution.org/200-object/anti-slavery-sugar-bowl/, dating from the late 1700s/early 1800s.

- What does it say on the bowl?
- Why does the bowl make the point 'not made by slaves?'

Students can read the Wedgewood sugar bowl notes and research the sugar boycott to answer the questions:

- What was the sugar boycott?
- When did it begin?
- Who took part? How many?
- How successful do they think it was in the campaign for abolition?
- What is the significance of this bowl having been made by Josiah Wedgewood?
- How similar or different do you think it is to the Fair Trade movement today?

2. Personal testament

Ask students to listen to the extract from the Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-interesting-narrative-of-the-life-of-olaudah-equiano-or-gustavus-yassa-the-african/. They can then read the Olaudah Equiano notes and conduct further research to answer the questions:

- Who was Olaudah Equiano?
- What is the name of his book?
- What is the book about?
- Why do they think the author has two names?
- When was it published? Why do they think it was published at that time? What was the motive in publishing it?
- How popular was the book? Did many people know about it or read it?
- How successful do they think it was in the campaign for abolition?
- Some people argue that the book is not a true account of Olaudah's life. Why might they have said that – at the time, and now?

3. Uprising

In 1791, slaves in what is now known as Haiti rose up and demanded their freedom. Two of the leaders were Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines.

Show students the print of Toussaint Louverture ageofrevolution.org/200-object/toussaint-louverture-chief-french-rebels-st-domingo/ and the sculpture of Jean-Jacques Dessalines ageofrevolution.org/200-object/bust-of-jean-jacques-dessalines-1758-1806/ and get them to find out as much as they can simply from looking closely at the two portraits:

- Immediate impressions: do they think they are a man or woman, young or old, rich or poor? What do they think their ethnicity is? What are they wearing?
- Pose or stance – are they sitting, standing, crouching, relaxed, formal?
- Gaze or expression – where are they looking, what might they be thinking, feeling, doing?
- Colours and materials – what sort of mood or atmosphere does this create?

What do students think their answers say about Louverture and Dessaline?

Students can find out:

- Who commissioned the image/sculpture? What message did they hope to tell through the portrait?
- Who was the intended audience for these portraits? Were they widely circulated or could just a few people have access to them? What impact would they have had?

Students can read the Toussaint Louverture notes and Jean-Jacques Dessalines notes and conduct further research to find out more:

- What was the Haitian revolution?
- What role did Louverture and Dessaline play in the revolution?
- What happened as a result of the Haitian revolution?
- What happened to Louverture and Dessaline after the revolution?
- In their opinion, was the revolution successful?
- How useful are the portraits of Louverture and Dessaline as evidence for the Haitian revolution and/or its impact?

4. Images

Ask students to look carefully at the Description of a slave ship poster ageofrevolution.org/200-object/description-of-a-slave-ship/ and answer the questions (zoom in on the statistics in the bottom left hand corner for further information):

- What does this image tell us about conditions for enslaved Africans being taken by ship across the Atlantic to the Americas?

- Where and how did they travel in the ship?
- How much room did each person have?
- Can they see how many men, women and children were on the ship?
- What *doesn't* it tell us about conditions on the ship for these people?
- How useful is it as evidence of conditions on board a slave ship?

Students can use the Description of a slave ship notes and conduct further research to find out more:

- What was the name of this ship?
- Why was this diagram created?
- How was it used? Who is it aimed at?
- Did many people get to see this image? How?
- How successful do they think it was in the campaign for the abolition of transatlantic slavery?

Students could choose one tactic to focus on and present their findings as a poster – digitally or by hand, with the object in the middle surrounded by facts they have discovered about it in relation to abolition.

Students could research other tactics used in the fight for abolition – both by slaves who found ways to resist their enslavement and treatment or to escape, such as Harriet Tubman and Ignatious Sancho, and by others campaigning on their behalf such as Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce and the Quakers. These include cultural resistance, masquerade, running away, 'go slows', the 'underground railroad', songs, writings and political campaigns.

Older students could also research the impact of the different campaigns and decide how effective they were in the campaign for abolition.

By 1807 the slave trade was abolished in Britain and its colonies, and in 1833 slavery itself was abolished, although other countries continued with both the slave trade and slavery for many, many years.

How might the abolition campaign have been fought today?

Useful links:

International Slavery Museum - www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/

Understanding Slavery initiative - www.understandingslavery.com/

The Equiano society - www.equiano.net/



Revolutionary Enquiries
ageofrevolution.org/education

Further sources:

Roll Jordan Roll - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/roll-jordan-roll/

Waterloo teeth - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/waterloo-teeth-1815-2/