

Slave Trade Memorial

Duration: This lesson culminates in a project which can take substantial time. Teachers may assign it as an in-class or homework, group or individual assignment. The core themes of the lesson are contained in the reading on the conditions of the Middle Passage, which is supplemented by images in PowerPoint and written Primary Sources.

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO LESSON:

This lesson asks students to demonstrate their mastery of their knowledge about the Middle Passage by designing a memorial. Slavery memorials are not common in the United States, despite the fact that roughly two million people perished because of inhumane conditions during their forced migration to the New World between 1519 and 1867. There have, however, been recent movements to have memorials built. In July 2007, a ten-person committee was formed at Brown University to discuss memorializing slavery in Providence, Rhode Island, in acknowledgement of the university founders' connection with the slave trade.

(Debbie Lehman, "U. Launches Commission to Consider Slavery Memorial," Brown Daily Herald, 16 July 2007).

<https://www.browndailyherald.com/2007/07/16/u-launches-commission-to-consider-slavery-memorial/>

The lesson contains several steps which teachers can use at their discretion to build an appreciation for what enslaved Africans were subjected to as they were forced to the New World, why this part of history should get a public memorial, and how that memorial should be expressed in words and image. The lesson uses mortality statistics from the database to help students get an understanding of how many people died on a voyage, reading comprehension questions, and a PowerPoint Presentation of various monuments.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will design (draw or build) a memorial for the Africans forced to undergo the trauma of the Middle Passage.
- Students will write a 150-200 word plaque or inscription for the memorial. This writing sample will define the Middle Passage, explain the economic factors that created a market for African slaves, and describe the fatal conditions Africans faced on slave ships.

SUGGESTED GRADE AND COURSE:

High School United States or World History

STANDARDS:

NCHS Standards: World History, Era 6; United States History, Era 2

NCSS Theme(s): Global Connections, Civic Ideals and Practices

RESOURCES/MATERIALS:

- Background Readings 1 & 2
- Mortality Rate Chart
- Vignettes
- Slave Trade Images
- Memorial Images

ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES:

Lesson Outline:

1. **Opening discussion questions:** Ask students what they know about memorials: Have you ever seen one? What is its purpose? What kinds of events do we build memorials for? Do you think there should be a national memorial for slavery?
2. **Background Reading 1:** An introduction to the slave trade. What stimulated the slave trade? How did Africans get to the ships?
3. **Mortality Rate chart:** Students should be able to calculate a mortality rate. They will discuss reasons why large portions of slaves on a ship would die during a voyage of one to five months.
4. **Background Reading 2:** What hardships threatened slave lives aboard the ships?
5. **Vignettes:** Primary Sources documenting sources of death and hardship on the Middle Passage.
6. **Images:** PowerPoint Presentation with images from the slave trade to reinforce factual learning.
7. **Images of Memorials:** Discuss what images memorials use. In this section, ask students what they see. This should be a discussion to stimulate ideas for a slave trade memorial.
8. Definition of Inscription

WRAP-UP/ASSIGNMENT:

Design a memorial to commemorate those who died on the Middle Passage. Your memorial must include:

- a) An appropriate image, such as a statue or building, to commemorate those who died on the Middle Passage.
- b) An inscription which tells:
 - 1- The event that the memorial commemorates
 - 2- The relevant dates of the event
 - 3- The people that it commemorates:
 - i. How many died
 - ii. How and why they died
 - iii. Where they died

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION:

1. Intermediate Questions: Each reading / image is accompanied by questions that check core understandings
2. Final Evaluation: Teacher may grade the memorial for:
 - a. Creativity
 - b. Appropriateness of images
 - c. Neatness of design

Teacher may grade the inscription requirement by determining how well it:

- a) Meets content requirements
- b) Meets length requirements
- c) Demonstrates appropriate development of writing style

VOCABULARY

Memorial

Middle Passage

Dysentery / Flux

Mortality Rate

FURTHER READINGS & DISCUSSION:

- Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)
- Falconbridge, Alexander. *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*, (London: J. Phillips, 1788)
- Farrow, Anne, Joel Lang, and Jennifer Frank. *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery*, (New York: Random House, 2005)
- The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*. 2 Vols. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997.
- Kolchin, Peter. *American Slavery 1619-1877*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993)
- Mountfield, Anne. *The Slave Trade*, (East Sussex: Wayland, 1973)
- Postma, Johannes. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003)
- Walvin, James, *Atlas of Slavery* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2006)
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BACKGROUND READING 1:

The Slave Trade

Triangular Trade is a term used to describe the pattern of trade that emerged in the 1500s between the three lands bordering the Atlantic Ocean: Europe, Africa, and the Americas (Findlay 2). When Europeans began colonizing the Americas in the 1500s, they started plantations that grew cash crops like sugar, tobacco, and rice, which were then shipped back to Europe. Millions of human hands were needed to grow and harvest these cash crops. For that labor, Europeans turned to Africa (Postma 8-13). One leg of the triangular trade bears a particularly grim history. That leg was the transport of African slaves from Africa to the Americas, a journey called the Middle Passage.

Africa had its own tradition of slavery when European sailors first began to explore its coast in the late 1400s. Africans traditionally enslaved war captives, some of whom were traded with Arabs (Walvin 52-53). As the need for labor in the European colonies of the Americas grew, Europeans encouraged the growth of African slave-catching by offering manufactured goods in exchange for slaves. African slave-catchers would kidnap villagers and bring them to slave trading fortresses along the coast. Here an African captive would be kept in a jail cell for days, weeks, or even months, until a slave purchaser arrived in his ship (Postma 21-22).

Question

1. What drove the European interest in slaves from Africa?

MORTALITY CHART: The mortality chart included contains a random selection of 23 voyages which flew the flags of different nations during the four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By looking at this chart and doing the included exercise, students will get some appreciation of the aggregate cost in human lives of the Middle Passage. Have students discuss the following questions after looking at the chart.

1. How did the chart's author determine the mortality rate of each voyage?
2. What factors do you think might make a mortality rate higher or lower on a voyage?
3. Why might the ship Nancy have had a mortality rate of 100%?
4. What is the estimated overall mortality rate of the Middle Passage?

BACKGROUND READING – PART 2

Once put into the hands of European slave traders, anywhere from 50 to almost 700 slaves were boarded onto wooden boats in shackles. They were taken under the main deck and chained together below the main deck on dismal shelves for storing the human cargo.

The spaces where the slaves were kept were pits of death. There was no light, no proper ventilation, and little or no sanitation. The smell of perspiration quickly blended with vomit,

blood, urine, excrement, and dead bodies. The voyage on the slave ship could last anywhere from one month to five months. Many died from suffocation, but disease was responsible for about 70% of deaths (Postma 45). Outbreaks of dysentery, a disease caused by contaminated drinking water, were the main killers. Scurvy, a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C, also took many lives (Kolchin 21). Infectious diseases like smallpox and measles were also common (Postma 45).

When weather was good, slaves were taken above to the main deck and “danced” during the morning. Someone played a drum or another instrument, and the slaves were ordered to move about the ship for exercise (Kolchin 21). Here, they were also given their meals, which usually consisted of rations of beans, corn, rice, or yams. Sometimes, small amounts of meat would be added (Postma 24). If the weather was not good, however, slaves were kept in the slimy under-decks all day and all night (Postma 27).

Depression and desperation caused many slaves to lose the will to live. Some committed suicide by finding opportunities to throw themselves overboard or refusing food (Postma 45). Crew members tried to prevent self-starving through torturous force-feeding (Kolchin 21). The goal of the slavers after all, was to get as many slaves as possible to ports in the New World (Walvin 65).

Economic concerns sometimes led to throwing live slaves overboard. If any slaves showed signs of smallpox, a disease which could wipe out large portions of the slaves and the crew, they would be thrown overboard. Signs of ophthalmia, a disease which caused temporary blindness, threatened the value of the slaves, and any slave showing signs of this disease was also thrown overboard. Sometimes, if the voyage was taking too long and rations were running too thin, the sickest slaves would be thrown overboard so that the healthier ones would have the rations to make it to port (Walvin 67).

Sometimes, slaves aboard a ship would revolt. Revolts would sometimes result in the death of slaves. Slaves who seemed rebellious would be flogged, or beaten.

Finally, some ships sank, taking down their entire crew and kidnapped cargo.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Describe the conditions on the decks where the slaves were kept.
2. What were the causes of slave deaths aboard the slave ships? List at least 6 causes of death.
3. Do you think the crews on slave ships wanted to hurt the slaves? Why or why not? List at least 3 things that would prompt the crew to kill a slave.

VINGETTES: Primary Sources on the Middle Passage

“Space on the slave decks” by Alexander Falconbridge. *Falconbridge was an English surgeon aboard a slave ship. He recorded some of what he witnessed.*

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h281t.html>- Alexander Falconbridge’s account of the slave trade.

“...they are frequently stowed so close, as to admit of no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks...permit the indulgence of an erect posture; especially where there are platforms, which is generally the case. These platforms are a kind of shelf, about eight or nine feet in breadth, extending from the side of the ship toward the centre. They are placed nearly midway between the decks, at the distance of two or three feet from each deck, Upon these the Negroes are stowed in the same manner as they are on the deck underneath....”

1. Why did the slaves have to lie only on their sides?
2. Why were European slavers packing the slaves so tightly together?

Food

“...The diet of the Negroes while on board, consists chiefly of horse beans boiled to the consistency of a pulp; of boiled yams and rice and sometimes a small quantity of beef or pork. The latter are frequently taken from the provisions laid in for the sailors. They sometimes make use of a sauce composed of palm-oil mixed with flour, water and pepper, which the sailors call slabber-sauce. Yams are the favorite food of the Eboe or Bight Negroes, and rice or corn of those from the Gold or Windward Coast; each preferring the produce of their native soil....Upon the Negroes refusing to take sustenance, I have seen coals of fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel and placed so near their lips as to scorch and burn them. And this has been accompanied with threats of forcing them to swallow the coals if they any longer persisted in refusing to eat. These means have generally had the desired effect. I have also been credibly informed that a certain captain in the slave-trade, poured melted lead on such of his Negroes as obstinately refused their food....”

1. What would happen to slaves who refused to eat?
2. Why do you think they tortured slaves who did not want to eat?

Ventilation of the ships

“...The hardships and inconveniences suffered by the Negroes during the passage are scarcely to be enumerated or conceived. They are far more violently affected by seasickness than Europeans. It frequently terminates in death, especially among the women. But the exclusion of fresh air is among the most intolerable. For the purpose of admitting this needful refreshment, most of the ships in the slave trade are provided, between the decks, with five or six air-ports on each side of the ship, of about five inches in length and four in breadth....But whenever the sea is rough and the rain heavy, it becomes necessary to shut these and every other conveyance by which the air is admitted. The fresh air being thus excluded, the Negroes' rooms soon grow intolerable hot. The confined air, rendered noxious by the effluvia [gases] exhaled from their bodies and being repeatedly breathed, soon produces fevers and fluxes [dysentery] which generally carries off great numbers of them. During the voyages I made, I was frequently witness to the fatal effects of this exclusion of fresh air. I will give one instance, as it serves to convey some idea, though a very faint one, of their terrible sufferings....Some wet and blowing weather having occasioned the port-holes to be shut and the grating to be covered, fluxes and fevers among the Negroes ensued. While they were in this situation, I frequently went down among them till at length their room became so extremely hot as to be only bearable for a very short time. But the excessive heat was not the only thing that rendered their situation intolerable. The deck, that is the floor of their rooms, was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful or disgusting. Numbers of the slaves having fainted, they were carried upon deck where several of them died and the rest with great difficulty were restored. It had nearly proved fatal to me also. The climate was too warm to admit the wearing of any clothing but a shirt and that I had pulled off before I went down.... In a quarter of an hour I was so overcome with the heat, stench and foul air that I nearly fainted, and it was only with assistance I could get back on deck. The consequence was that I soon after fell sick of the same disorder from which I did not recover for several months....”

Questions

1. How did Alexander Falconbridge attribute poor weather to an increase in disease?
2. Why did the interior of the slave ship look like “a slaughter-house?”

“Jumping Overboard” – Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano was an African who was transported taken from Africa and enslaved in the New World.

“One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who on account of his illness was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed. Those of us that were the most active were in a moment put down under the deck, and there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her and get the boat out to go after the slaves. However two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other and afterwards flogged him unmercifully for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery.”

Questions

1. Why do you think some slaves wanted to jump overboard? What did the sailors do to the slave who they rescued from drowning? Why do you think they did that to him?

Suggested Images to illustrate the Middle Passage

SLAVE TRADE

1. **Triangular Trade Map**
A Google Image Search will locate this map.
2. Africans being taken to coastal slave fortresses
See PowerPoint slide #3
3. Cape Coast Castle (A Slave Fortress)
See PowerPoint slide #4
4. The Slave Ship Brookes (A diagram of slaves packed onto a ship)
<http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2553>
5. Africans Aboard the Slave Ship Wildfire
<http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2575>

SLAVE MEMORIALS

6. **The Door of No Return by Fortuné Bandeira (artist), Benin, Africa.**
A Memorial to the Slave Trade. It represents the actual “door of no return,” or the door to a slave fortress, the African’s last view of his homeland before being taken aboard a slave ship.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/The_Door_of_No_Return_in_Ouidah%2C_November_2007.jpg
7. The Actual “Door of No Return” at Goree Island, Senegal
<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/house-of-slaves>
8. Memorial to the Slave Market in Zanzibar, East Africa
<http://www.radioopensource.org/the-hidden-histories-of-slavery/>

OTHER MEMORIALS

9. Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
<https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/05/tomb-of-the-unknown-soldier-history/>
10. Vietnam War Memorial
<https://washington.org/dc-guide-to/vietnam-veterans-memorial>
11. Inscription at the Jefferson Memorial

MORTALITY IN THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

Historians estimate that 12.5 million Africans were taken from their homes in Africa during the four centuries of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Of those put on ships, about 10.7 million made it to land in the New World. Below are the slave mortality rates aboard 23 of the thousands of slave voyages. How did the author calculate the mortality rate? What do you calculate as the total mortality rate for all Africans placed upon slave ships?

Date	Ship Name	Slaves boarded in Africa	Deaths	Mortality rate
1527	Conception	65	19	29%
1532	S. Antonio	201	26	13%
1592	NS del Buen Viaje	236	68	29%
1600	NS del Roasario	318	82	26%
1621	S Buena Ventura	236	68	
1637	S Francisco Capuchino	211	61	29%
1646	Merchant of Barbados	211	23	11%
1660	New Westindisch Huis	478	67	14%
1674	Phenix	516	46	9%
1691	Armenian Merchant	527	92	17%
1694	Katherine	600	114	19%
1712	Comte de Lemoignan	465	69	15%
1722	Greyhound Sloop	120	13	11%
1735	St. Louis	400	14	
1749	Bom Jesus de Villanova e Almas	634	84	13%
1750	Prince de Conty	601	58	10%
1759	Upton	251	46	18%
1767	Nancy	300	300	100%
1783	Rusé	169	19	11%
1800	Margaret	289	29	
1819	Pastora de Lima	435	37	9%
1820	Boa Harmonia	476	39	8%