

Understanding Slavery Initiative

What techniques should teachers use with objects to enhance students' knowledge, understanding and skills relating to this history? (Video transcript)

Speaker: Jean Campbell

Time-code	Speech
00:00:08	Teachers need to establish their learning outcomes before the sessions starts. By that I mean they need to decide what they want their students to learn, and that helps them to understand which are the best objects to enable that learning to happen. Now, I'm going to demonstrate this by looking at, say, one of the themes within the history of transatlantic slavery, which is to do with the campaign for abolition of the slave trade.
00:00:39	And my learning outcomes are: I want the students to understand something about the form and the scale of the campaign. I want them to have some thinking about how image was used, the role of image, within this campaign. I want them to have some notions about some of the key people that were involved.
00:01:08	I also want to enable the students to be a little bit critical of the sources of information. And finally, I want, as a part of my learning outcome, for them to acquire some skills of research. For... so they might seem like a lot of outcomes to have, but actually less is more. And even with a few objects, you can enable that to happen.
00:01:30	So let's start with this. I'm going to start with these two objects here. What are they? Well, they're clearly two bits of crockery. What are they made of? Well, we know they may have been made of porcelain, but also for cheaper ones, they'd have been made of standard ware. What's the most important thing about it?
00:01:54	Well, it's to do with the motif that's inside it. The image. The picture. And they both have the same one. And it's in fact of a supplicant enslaved person. An enslaved person on their knees. This was a key image used within the campaign for the abolition of the trade. You'd have seen this everywhere. Ladies embroidered them on their purses. They would have been on banners, in all kinds of forms.
00:02:23	But this is important that it's on a piece of domestic ware, because women would have been able to declare where they stood. Women were... played a very key part in this campaign. so the students would be using questioning, first of all, to find out about this. Questions first about the object, and then questions about the context of the object.
00:02:44	Who would have used it? How'd they have used it? Where they'd have used it? And then we come, again, to some other objects that I would be linking with those. I, for example, would make sure that there was a picture of a ship involved, so they understood this is a slaving ship. Slaving ships had wonderful names, like snows and barkentines, which sound very grand.
00:03:10	But these are literally ships that carried sometimes up to 600 enslaved people, so it's very important that as part of the campaign, that people were able to hear more about what went on on those ships. Here is an image that was extremely powerful. Students would be looking at this image closely.

00:03:32	And if you come to a close-up of this, you will see that, in fact, what you have in this, is that you have people here. They're enslaved people on the ships. This became a key document in the campaign. These would have been put up on practically every street corner. It's the first use of mass campaign document that we take for granted now.
00:03:57	So very important that they have that in relation to these objects. On top of that, we have this. It's a ship's manifest. It says who... it tells them who they had, and the people are counted... enslaved people are recorded as though they were just a product. They're just an object for trade. They're not real. This is the nature of chattel enslavement, as though they are cattle.
00:04:28	There's nothing quite like it in the history of the world before. They are just simply a product to be traded. So these are very important that this information came across in the campaign. If you look at these two images, they are telling us something very, very different. This image here of the... Equiano frontispiece, from his book.
00:04:53	As you see, it shows a very well-to-do African gentleman, beautifully dressed; an equal of anyone. Whereas the image that became literally the representative logo for the campaign is of a supplicant enslaved person who is very much in an inferior position, begging for him... and sometimes it was a her, freedom.
00:05:19	You couldn't get more of a dramatic difference. So one of the questions we'd use in terms of grounding the students' understanding is for them to think about whether or not an image like this one would be used today. And why not? And also, why would it have been so effective then?
00:05:46	Learners touch and handle the objects. They look at them, and then they ask questions. For example, I might say, what are the questions I need to ask to find out about this object? What is it? What is it made from? How does it feel? How does it look? These are questions about the objects.
00:06:16	Then I might ask questions to do with the context of the object. Where was it made? Who made it? What was it made for? These are questions that we give the students that enable them to pull out deeper understanding for the object. Now, this, for example, is a copy... is a replica of Queen Oba's head.
00:06:42	And again, we use that to teach at the beginning of the history, looking at Africa before transatlantic enslavement. This is just one object that we use. So with a series of questioning that come from either the students themselves, or from the teacher, we enable them to think carefully about the object. Here's another object here. This is a piece of kente cloth.
00:07:08	Now, look closely at the kente cloth. You'll see that it's quite complex. So we'll ask the students, well, what is it? What stands out about this? And we'll guide them in the questioning to look at the complexity of the weave. That's the first stage of questioning. Then we'll ask them, what does these objects...
00:07:28	For example, this kente cloth and this very... This object is very difficult to make. It's a lost-wax process, and this has been used from something like the eleventh century in west Africa. They've been casting these amazing bronzes. What do these objects tell us about African culture, for example, pre-Atlantic slavery.
00:07:58	And the answers come, literally, from what is in front of them. You can tell this takes a lot of complex mathematical thinking to just work out the weave patterns. You can tell from the handling of this, that this requires highly

	skilled people to be able to do this, and to be able to cast these astonishing bronzes. So then, we have another layer of questioning.
00:08:25	Who benefited from thinking about African cultures and African peoples as being primitive, unskilled, yes? So these are different layers of questioning that we used in relation to the objects. So the students feel, touch the objects; inquire about the objects; inquire about the context of the objects. On top of that, we are able to use and link in text and images, so that the object is seen in relation to other text and images.