

# **UNLOCKING PERCEPTIONS**

**Understanding Slavery's approach  
to the history and legacies of the  
transatlantic slave trade.**

 **UNDERSTANDING  
SLAVERY**

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## Teaching approaches

Engaging with the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade may be more challenging than other subjects. Helpful hints and tips are highlighted throughout this document.

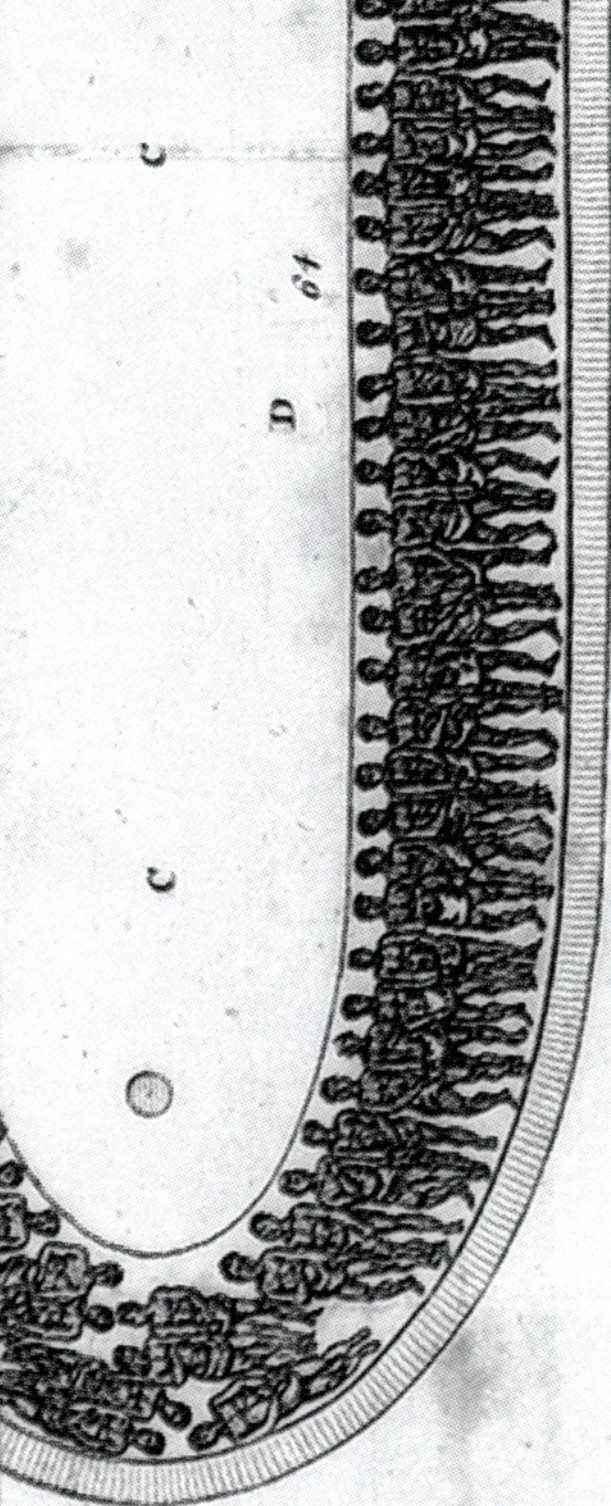
## Insights

You will find both personal and professional reflections on developing learning resources, exhibitions and events about the transatlantic slave trade. Responses have been collected from Museum Professionals, Media and Marketing Professionals, Project Managers and Consultants.

WWW.

Please note that more detailed learning resources, schemes of work and lesson plans, as well as audio-visuals of the USI partner museums' collections relating to transatlantic slavery can be downloaded from: [www.understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com)



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# About this book

***Unlocking Perceptions* offers insight to anyone planning to develop programmes of study and exhibitions about the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade, based on the issues, challenges and dilemmas addressed in the process of developing the Understanding Slavery Initiative (USI).**

The Codes of Practice bring together a list of USI teaching approaches as well as some recommendations for good practice based on piloting and evaluation. These approaches are interspersed with quotes from various individuals, describing their personal and professional experiences of working with this history and its related collections.

From our research, website and the 'The Big Conversation 2007' national competition and debate, we know that students want to know about the history of transatlantic slavery and its subsequent legacies.

To date USI has received a tremendous response to both its online and print resources.

While educators feel it is an important topic, there are fears over causing offence when dealing with sensitive and controversial issues, and worry about a lack of personal subject knowledge. Most people confess low confidence in dealing with the issues and challenges related to teaching about the subject using traditional methods, but show a desire to want to teach about it well.





Museums offer a route, with other partners, to reach out to the teacher-education network and History-Citizenship communities, and to meet the needs that have been identified.

This book is by no means a comprehensive 'how to' guide for teaching about this chapter in history. It is designed to share USI's approaches, research and findings in developing its materials and learning resources. It also aims to help develop an understanding of how the subject can be used to support other aspects of learning, such as development of knowledge, skills and understanding.

We recognize that we are not the 'experts' on transatlantic slavery or how to teach it. None the less, we would like to share some of our findings and experiences in developing the Understanding Slavery Initiative, and hope these will shed further light on the impact of new approaches to engaging young people with the subject.

A SHORT  
INTRODUCTION

**Blink**



**"The Big  
Conversation  
2007"**

**The Understanding Slavery Initiative (USI) required that the museums involved re-examine the ways they had previously interpreted collections and used those collections to devise learning programmes.**

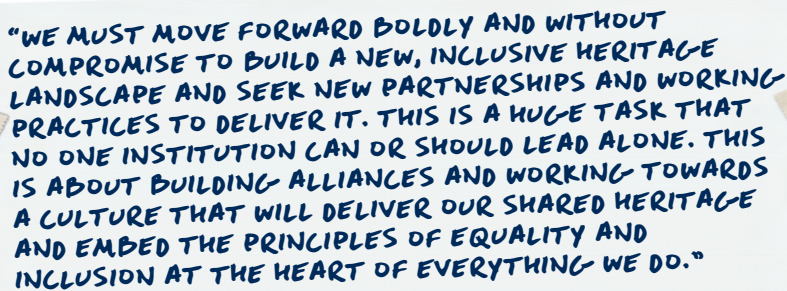
This required an approach that insisted we scrutinise ourselves – who we are, our politics, our attitudes to difference, our knowledge or lack of it, our culture and our experiences – in order to produce learning materials that truthfully re-examined British telling of the history and legacies of transatlantic slavery. Previously tried and tested methodologies were not automatically going to work in this instance.

So we spun a hundred and eighty degrees and looked outwards to the public, as it was paramount that nothing was assumed or omitted: to this end, consultation became USI's central core. We started by asking our primary audience,



namely teachers and students, what they would like to see in museums to support their teaching and learning of this history. We then consulted with other academics, curators, independent researchers and museum educators, as well as community project leaders and parents. All of these dialogues were absolutely invaluable. We benefited from a cross-section of expertise, which blurred the boundaries between custodians and audiences and gave USI its unique look and feel.

Dame Jocelyn Barrow, in the report *Delivering a Shared Heritage*, stresses the importance of sharing ideas and processes with the broader museum and education sectors:



"WE MUST MOVE FORWARD BOLDLY AND WITHOUT COMPROMISE TO BUILD A NEW, INCLUSIVE HERITAGE LANDSCAPE AND SEEK NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND WORKING PRACTICES TO DELIVER IT. THIS IS A HUGE TASK THAT NO ONE INSTITUTION CAN OR SHOULD LEAD ALONE. THIS IS ABOUT BUILDING ALLIANCES AND WORKING TOWARDS A CULTURE THAT WILL DELIVER OUR SHARED HERITAGE AND EMBED THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO."

*Unlocking Perceptions* has been produced to remind us that sometimes it is necessary to stop, look and listen: however much knowledge we have there is always something new to learn.

**Maria Amidu** USI Project Development Manager (2003–07)



**MORE THAN  
A SUBJECT**

**As professionals we often undertake a wide-range of projects that are of a personal and/or practical interest, often being able to create a line of distinction between the personal and the practical. The subject of transatlantic slavery does not neatly fit into either one of these categories. To refer to it as 'history' is somewhat complicated, because while we can trace its origins to a particular time in the past, its impact can still be felt with us today.**

One thing that was evident throughout our research and experience was that this is not an easy subject matter to approach, to discuss, to teach or learn about. In essence this is the reason for this book. It is difficult to engage with this subject without it evoking personal thoughts and reactions about the world we live in today.

With this subject, in particular, the element of enslavement, give yourself time and space for reflection. This is not the sort of subject that can be approached as any other topics of interest. There are elements of this history that may affect you more than others as it is a very complex.

USI resources have been designed to examine the history of transatlantic slavery and its legacies in a comprehensive way. They include the voices of the enslaved African and those of the African Diaspora, the European, and all of those both black and white who fought to end the cruelty and injustice of this period. The history will continue to evolve as more research is being uncovered and changing perspectives of this history unfolds. We will endeavour to update our resources as new information becomes available.

**USI Team**



# **USI Codes of Practice: Effective learning approaches**

**This section presents an overview of approaches that USI has instituted across the partner museums. This information is based on tried and tested methodologies piloted and evaluated throughout the project. It is hoped that the learning approaches and commentary supplied in this section will provide those developing programmes of study and exhibitions on the transatlantic slave trade with some practical guidance and inspiration. The Codes of Practice are not intended to be rigid or comprehensive, but constitute an information exchange between professionals as part of an ongoing movement towards improving public understanding of this history.**

The 'un-teaching' of preconceived notions could sometimes prove to be as difficult as presenting new material... If we want people to start to engage with this history and put it on the mainstream agenda, then we cannot set up all sorts of barriers – intellectual and otherwise – to approaching it.

**Museum Curator**



Often people prefer to learn about this history through contemporary creative interpretation. The full facts, un-sanitised and un-polished need to be presented. Artistic recreations/re-enactment is useful in this context (as so much has gone unrecorded) but, for me, it doesn't work as a substitute... I would add the caveat: think long and hard about bringing children under ten years old to exhibitions that look at the full facts of the brutality of this history.

**Museum Director**

© Lee Garland/ International Slavery Museum, Liverpool



**"TO KIDNAP OUR FELLOW CREATURES...  
TO DEGRADE THEM...  
TO DENY THEM EVERY RIGHT...  
TO KEEP THEM IN PERPETUAL SERVITUDE,  
IS A CRIME AS UNJUSTIFIABLE AS IT IS CRUEL"**

**Olaudah Equiano** *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African (1768)*



# Use of language

Knowing how best to use the language associated with the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade can be complex. Many words are considered offensive because they served to objectify the people who were enslaved and disregard the African perspectives of the history.



'Run away... Jack'  
Advertisement

Female Negro Slave, with a  
weight chained to her ankle

© NMM E8909

# Use of language

## Teaching approaches

- The use of the term 'transatlantic slave trade' has been one of considerable ongoing debate. While the use of the term 'trade' in referring to the selling of African peoples is in no way ideal, it does speak to the racist attitudes and perspectives of those who participated in the system with the view that considered Africans to be property that could be bought and sold. For consistency the term transatlantic slave trade is used in this publication, but we feel that the term transatlantic slavery more accurately describes the system, under which African peoples were enslaved, suffered, were bought and sold, and fought to end.







Frontis-Piece of Olaudah Equiano



It is important to have serious and discerning consideration for the use of language, artefacts and visual material much of which is harrowing and pejorative. Using the words: people, women, men and children rather than 'Africans' and 'slaves' alone changes perceptions of this history happening 'over there, long ago'. These words instil empathy rather than notions of 'otherness'.

**Project Development Manager**

- Terms used when entering dialogue or discussions about enslavement are very important: for example, the terms 'enslaved' rather than slave; 'history' rather than story; and referring to 'transatlantic slavery' rather than the slave trade.
- Many try to describe the atrocities of transatlantic slavery by referring to it as the 'African holocaust'. The use of the term 'holocaust', however, is erroneous in this case. The term 'Maafa' a Kiswahili word meaning 'disaster' or 'terrible occurrence', best describes the suffering of people of African descent which includes Eastern, transatlantic, colonial and neo-colonial enslavement and their legacies.



For more information please see our glossary:  
[http://www.understandingslavery.com/teachingslavetrade/introduction/glossary/#GlossaryId\\_3274](http://www.understandingslavery.com/teachingslavetrade/introduction/glossary/#GlossaryId_3274)



# Use of language



## Teaching approaches

- When used with careful consideration, historical and contemporary words within the subject, such as including derogatory terms, can be discussed and analysed as part of the learning experience.
- It is important to note that materials which contain such language and-or imagery should be accompanied by a disclaimer to underline that their use is strictly linked to the historical context, is not deemed appropriate for use today, and does not reflect the views of the institution.



*Be aware of the subtleties and emotive connotations of language used – what meaning is being conveyed? Attempt not to reinforce stereotypes but confound them....Treat the material with due respect – it's not in the past as we are still living through the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade.*

### Media Production Manager

*I think that, for us, the key challenge was in developing the original visual language and logo – to ensure the appropriate mix of gravitas and respect for the subject, whilst ensuring it would appeal to a young, contemporary audience.*

### Media Account Director

# Addressing the misconceptions

Many of the challenges encountered when developing resources come from individual attitudes to this history. It became evident that many facts were unknown or contested. USI has integrated the following aspects into its approach.

Mask of  
Sande Society



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© Hull Museums

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

*There are five areas of misunderstanding or lack of knowledge:*

- 1. Africa before this period of enslavement and its impact.*
- 2. The duration of the transatlantic slave trade and the numbers of people involved.*
- 3. The nature of chattel slavery, (people as property) and the day-to-day abuse suffered.*
- 4. The fact that acts of resistance were prevalent throughout the period.*
- 5. The impact the 400 hundred-year system has had on our world. A system that went on for about as long as Rome dominated the world – it's not surprising it has had such a great impact.*

**Museum Learning Officer**



## Addressing the misconceptions

### Teaching approaches



- Transatlantic slavery is shared, world history not 'black' history.
- When teaching the history of Africa the focus is on traditions, some of which are still relevant today. This is an important distinction as it helps to dissolve stereotypical views of the continent as devoid of a 21st-century culture.
- This particular part of history deals with chattel slavery: African people were treated as property, with no possessions and no rights. This differentiates transatlantic slavery from other forms of enslavement and serfdom, both historical and contemporary.

© Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives



*I think the fact that so much that has been written and researched about transatlantic slavery comes from a European perspective, that one has to work very hard to attempt to include the perspective of the enslaved that doesn't consistently portray them as merely victims.*

**Museum Gallery Project Consultant**



- There are a number of perspectives on this history which remains a subject of debate by academics, as more archival material is unearthed. It is imperative to be aware of what has been established by this process, over what remains assertion or speculation, and communicate this to audiences.
- The brutality meted out during the era of transatlantic slavery is harrowing and rarely fully acknowledged or presented from a human perspective, not least since much of the archival evidence can only support an impression of it. Awareness of this limitation is important when discussing the Middle Passage and life on plantations.



*The single most important thing to emphasize, I think, is about the significance of enslavement to the world at that time and to the history of the 18th and 19th centuries in general. Otherwise it can be seen as something that happened a long way away and a long time ago.*

**Museum Exhibitions Manager**

© NMM E9974



**TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE**



**FRANCIS DRAKE**

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# Addressing the misconceptions

## Teaching approaches



- It is important to illustrate the developments of transatlantic slavery through time: how it became an accepted system in the 1500s that had evolved as an institution by the time it was finally abolished in the 1800s.
- Collapsing all contemporary cultural diversity issues into the legacies of transatlantic slavery only encourages further misunderstanding. The impact of this history is complex and needs to be presented in all its complexity.

"...COFFEE, CHOCOLATE AND TEA - ALL HAD A NATURALLY BITTER TASTE. WHAT MADE THEM PALATABLE TO EUROPEANS WAS THE ADDITION OF SUGAR. WITHOUT [SLAVERY] THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO SUGAR..."

James Walvin



© NMM F0908

One of the most challenging areas for planning workshops and programmes within a museum has been finding an approach which conveys the sensitivity and enriched learning experience offered uniquely by working with museum objects – whilst also covering within a one hour session a sufficient overview of the history to allow students to contextualize the objects. Students arriving at the museum may be at the beginning, middle or end of their coverage of the topic, so a judgment must be made as to how much time be spent covering historical narrative before embarking on the more sophisticated exploration of the objects themselves. This is a problem common to all museum learning sessions for schools, but particularly crucial when discussing transatlantic slavery as lack of historical context can lead to misconceptions and inappropriate responses to very sensitive historical objects.

**Museum Head of Formal Learning**



The consultation panel was such a crucial moment... It felt that what we were doing was entirely common sense and necessary and what surprised me was to have such important voices opposing it... A reactionary approach almost, who had no innate interest in hearing new ways of interpreting and looking at collections.

**Museum Director**

# Addressing the sensitive issues

Studying and engaging in discussions about the transatlantic slave trade can provoke strong responses because of the atrocities, cruelty and dehumanising experiences within its history. Teaching this subject raises questions about how to convey its magnitude and inhumanity in a thoughtful and sensitive way. The following are guidelines on how to encourage debate and constructive criticism in order to address these aspects effectively.

© Hull Museums



Branding Iron

*Do not judge other's emotional responses when confronting this topic and be aware that emotional responses can arise based on lived experience. Some people will laugh because they are uncomfortable. Some cry. Some go silent.*

**Museum Education Officer**





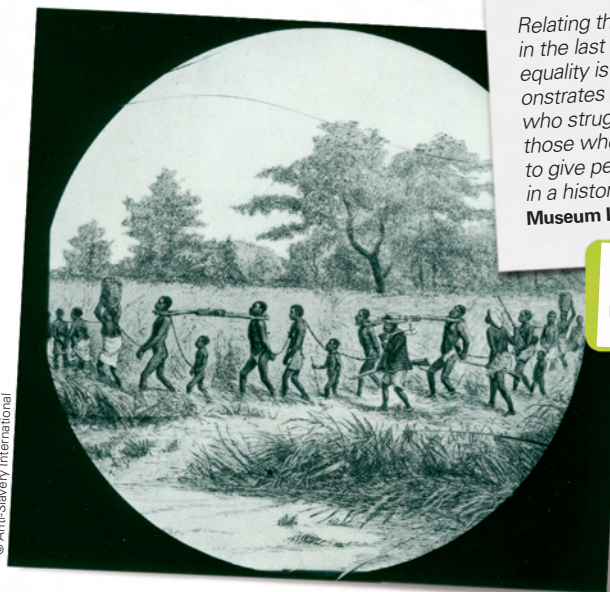
## Addressing the sensitive issues

### Teaching approaches



- Assessing the right approach to the sensitivities within the subject is important as teaching it raises questions about how to discuss related contemporary issues such as identity, racism, blame, guilt and ignorance, which will inevitably come up in sessions.
- Creating opportunities to discuss different viewpoints can help diffuse tensions and conflict. Referring to the museum, school or college anti-racist policy will give instruction and guidance on ways to tackle racism or prejudice.
- The violence and levels of oppression represented in the history and its related artefacts can be very difficult for both adults and young people to absorb. These aspects of the history will raise concerns with audiences and it is essential to create or suggest support structures to discuss their concerns.

*Relating the history to the struggle in the last century for freedom and equality is a bit more positive and demonstrates the dignity of those who struggled and the inhumanity of those who oppressed. It is important to give people some positive messages in a history that can be so shocking.*  
**Museum Learning Officer**





Many people see this history as something 'other' to them and worry [that] they are being accused or [that] their own understanding of their [own] heritage is being undermined. But there is something about speaking to the individual in this process: the moment that you capture somebody's interest because they see a personal connection is the moment you can begin extending the conversations.

**Project Development Manager**

- Audiences may respond inappropriately to images and objects because they are unaware of the content or context of what they are being shown. Starting with a discussion about respect and reverence, particularly the extent to which people were subjugated during enslavement, will aid better understanding and a deeper learning experience.
- The ways in which individuals interpret the history of transatlantic slavery can be based on their cultural perspectives or geographical location. Teaching the full facts of this history will enable audiences to understand its global impact as well as the moral and ethical issues involved.

© NMM F2506

Negroes purchased at Boney in the Molly Tross 1759											Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Blacks	Miscellaneous	Cappes	Boards	Alphabetic	Boys	Boards	Chattahoochee	Miscellaneous	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	Alphabetic	Boards	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Account book for the 'Molly' a slave ship

## Addressing the sensitive issues

### Teaching approaches

- Some audience members may have life experiences that trigger strong emotions when learning about this history, which may in turn impede their ability to discuss both the subject and their reactions to it. It is always useful to be aware of this possibility.
- For teachers working with a class over a period of time, it is advisable to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support within the classroom. Working with the students to set ground rules can help to open up class discussion and debate, and create a better understanding and a deeper learning experience.



SIR JOHN HAWKINS 1562

*There is often an assumption that representations of this period of history will focus on blame or attempt to discredit previous representations of British history – which can cause individuals to feel uncomfortable. Others may feel a very personal response to this history, which challenges their own sense of who they are... approach the subject with a willingness and openness to have your knowledge, views and interpretations of this piece of history challenged by your audience.*

**Museum Head of Formal Learning**



*There are basic facts that are really shocking about transatlantic slavery: 10 million displaced people; it was legal; it was a major contributor to the economy and underpinned much of the wealth creation in this country; that major institutions mercantile businesses and businesses in the City are also directly connected to this history. Until we are comfortable having this dialogue as a country it is going to make those subsequent dialogues around [who] we are and who is British, quite difficult. But they are integral, as is the confidence to understand them.*

**Museum Head of Education and Interpretation**



# Teaching and learning approaches for different audiences

As with any other subject USI has found that different audiences have different needs. Formal and informal learning audiences will have varying expectations: school sessions require a specified set of learning outcomes while family groups may simply come across a learning session during a museum visit. Devising the appropriate content of any session is dependent on the individual nature of collections and varied expertise of staff. However, some key recommendations are as follows:



*We have found that active learning is a very useful way for young people to understand the full extent of this history. Interspersing physical work to demonstrate the facts of the history can be very powerful. For example, we have worked with the archive of a local jazz dancer and had workshops leaders use his style to illustrate ways in which movement and dance were often used as a secret code by the enslaved for non-verbal communication. Allowing students to understand these aspects in active ways helps embed the learning.*  
**Museum Senior Education Officer**

*Before a learning session, clearly establish the ground rules for the session, including an explanation for why ground rules exist.*

**Museum Exhibitions Manager**

*Ask yourself why you and your organisation are tackling the subject. What can you and your resources (collections, expertise etc.) contribute that others can't? And understand your own audiences and how they might respond.*

**Museum Exhibitions Manager**



## Teaching and learning approaches for different audiences

### Teaching approaches



- Piloting sessions before making them a definite part of a museum learning programme will provide an opportunity for review and modification.
- Offering a range of sessions/modules with a specific focus and delivery style, to support various learning needs, will enable museums to meet audiences' expectations.
- Providing pre-visit material for schools can be vital in setting the tone for an on-site museum session. This will give teachers the time to introduce students to the main components of the history and discuss the sensitivities; particularly the brutality, subjugation and racism. Pre-visit preparation would ideally be obligatory.



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*For teachers: Do your research – there's plenty of material to help you and just do it – talk to colleagues and seek advice from professionals. It's too important to avoid and it may open up whole new ways of working and enable a more open and honest dialogue in the classroom.*

**Museum Learning Manager**



*A key recommendation is to always consult your audience. From our perspective in education, working closely with teachers has ensured that our learning programmes are relevant and meet the needs of staff and students who will be using them.*

**Museum Education Officer**

- Suggesting post-visit approaches for schools can enhance and extend the learning experience and support further discussion and debate. Such opportunities can also provide students with space to express their emotions.
- Offering suggestions for cross-curricular schemes of work for KS1, 2 and 3 sessions will enable teachers to develop projects with students beyond a museum visit.
- Devising a set of ground rules and a safe space for discussion and debate is imperative. Audiences should be clear about the dignity of the history and understand that respect is a necessity, particularly as many of the issues involved are relevant today. For example, it is important to make the distinction between recounting/reciting an historical viewpoint about race and expressing a modern opinion: in short, what was acceptable then is not acceptable now.





## Teaching and learning approaches for different audiences



### Teaching approaches

- Teaching this subject to children under ten years of age needs to be carefully considered. USI partner museums have been developing modules which introduce a younger age group to the themes, history and legacies which surround the transatlantic slave trade. These include justice; what is fair and unfair; African traditions such as masquerade and storytelling; and living in multicultural Britain. This approach provides a context without exposing them to the disturbing parts of the history. It can also work with families.
- Peopling the history – presenting biographical data and including information on historical landmarks that are linked to the transatlantic slave trade – prevents the history being perceived as something abstract. Making specific references to any connections in an audience's local area can also broaden the scope of what a museum offers.
- As well as developing empathy as a response to learning about this subject, other key learning outcomes should include building critical thinking, research and analytical skills. Engagement, discussion and debate need to be anchored in a thorough and sound understanding of the subject, as with any historical or contemporary issue.

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*I have seen genuine inter-cultural debate and dialogue, and have personally come to see this as all our history rather than differentiating or polarising it into black history. I have begun to see signs of the subject becoming mainstreamed. It has made me personally realise there are so many legacies and so many perspectives that bring to bear that you cannot be all things to all people; but by bringing these together it starts to become inclusive rather than divisive.*

**Museum Education Officer**



# Working with collections

Audiences say that access to primary sources – particularly objects – is the unique contribution museums can make to the teaching of history. However, there are distinct challenges when using them to illustrate aspects of transatlantic slavery.



*Set up a physical environment conducive to looking at objects that have a violent history. Beyond verbal explanation associated with instructions, are the cues that get sent from, for example; having learners sit down; keeping key objects or images removed from circulation and handled only by the facilitator; or asking the students to wear gloves or open a case in order to handle and question an object. These are actions that promote an awareness of the gravitas of the history. (Always think about why the object is required as an integral part of the learning outcome. Do you really need to show a whip? What does this object seek to convey to the learner?)*

**Museum Education Officer**

Sugar-cane cutters  
Jamaica, Caribbean

# Working with collections

## Teaching approaches



- It has been imperative for the USI team to set ground rules when using the slavery-related handling objects particularly when working with the instruments of torture and 'correction'. Using them separately from the other historical artefacts has been essential in conveying the seriousness of this history.



*There was a moment that struck me during an event here at the museum: during a handling session, an adult visitor picked up a leg-iron and in that moment something resonated for him. The object seemed to trigger something immense for him. You could show image after image of the torture associated with the transatlantic slave trade and the gravitas may not sink in, but for that one individual, it was that object that made its mark.*

**Museum Head of Formal Learning**

*I remember the sheer power of our collections. We could have an argument, we could have a debate and we could stimulate passion around inert objects because they told such a history.*

**Museum Director**



*If you want to use collections to engage audiences, if you want effective exhibitions, if you want to have real learning taking place around collections you have to have respect for what's coming back at you. And I don't mean in a kind of woolly-focus group way: I mean from people who ask hard questions and who want intellectual answers. If you approach your practice in that sense you will get to something that is challenging and enjoyable. And very dynamic.*

**Museum Head of Learning and Interpretation**



© Hull Museums Education

- Using one or two handling objects in a session, rather than everything available, has proved very effective in promoting deductive, analytical, curatorial and discursive learning.
- Handling-session participants should be invited to touch the objects but some participants may decline as the impact of handling the object can often evoke strong reactions.



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# Working with collections

## Teaching approaches



- Much of the visual material (paintings and prints) depicting African people is derogatory. In some cases that may have been the original intention, but in others it may not: in the latter case any offence caused today is because views have changed. It is essential to point this out and also to remind audiences that the works are artistic impressions and inevitably reflect artistic or societal views at the time of creation.
- Some collections have relatively little to offer in illustrating the impact of transatlantic slavery on Britain, the Caribbean and Africa. Images can be gathered from other sources but it has proved essential to broaden the range used to avoid reinforcing stereotypes about Africa, the Caribbean and multicultural Britain.



*My ideal model for schools would be:*

1. Preparation at school based on museum collections, creating a format to discuss the sensitivities of the subject and the right language to use, ensuring that pupils feel safe in the group to be honest and emotional if need be and that respect is instilled.
2. A museum session which offers an overview through the museum's collection and discussions with breaks for reflection.
3. A forum at school to process what has been learnt.

**Museum Head of Formal Learning**



Racist Advert for Pear's Soap. c. 1800  
© National Museums Liverpool



# Artistic interpretation

Working with artists, performers and writers can be useful when teaching this subject, to compensate for the lack of primary evidence in various areas, particularly of first-hand accounts by those who were enslaved.

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*You have to have lay interpretation alongside academic interpretation or you're lost.*  
**Museum Director**



## Artistic interpretation

### Teaching approaches



© John Player/Rex Features

THE NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL 1975

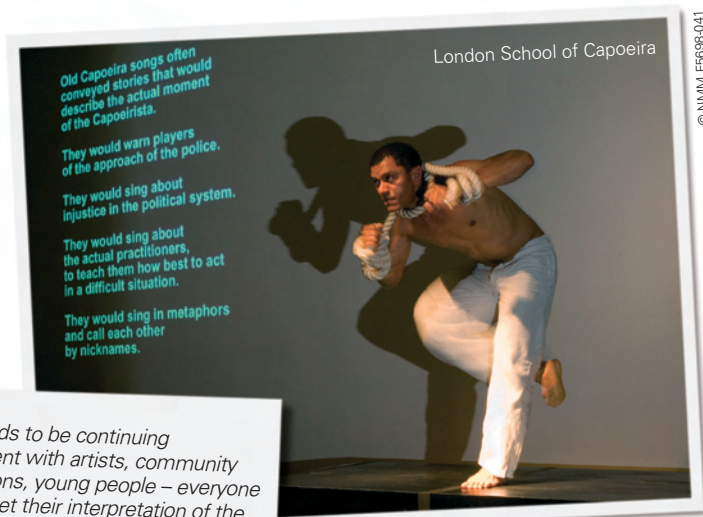
- Re-creation is best used in conjunction with museum collections and archival material to support the learning experience.
- Some well-designed drama techniques, particularly status activities, improvisation and scripting, can be used very effectively to develop a sense of perspective and points of view. For example, re-enacting a debate in parliament. Some dramatization is inappropriate, however, when teaching this history (e.g. role-playing an enslaved person interacting with their 'owner'; or separation of a mother and child).



*People from the African and Caribbean communities should play a collaborative role in the interpretation of artefacts relating to Africa and the Caribbean, and should be involved in a consultative role if an exhibition is going to be created. Ensure the history is presented from different perspectives, moving away from a Eurocentric interpretation; be creative where there are gaps in the historical narrative – engaging a poet or a visual artist for this purpose.*

**Museum Gallery Project Consultant**

- Using active, dynamic drama approaches reinforces learning through developing emotional understanding and empathy. It also encourages active participation.
- Improvisation or working with short scripted pieces of dialogue, or real-life accounts, helps audiences to develop abilities to look at different interpretations of history, and exercises the concept of alternative points of view.
- Engaging audio-visual extracts appeal to some audiences' preferred learning styles and act as an effective, vivid way of illustrating and visualizing aspects of the history.



© NMM F5658-041

*There needs to be continuing engagement with artists, community organisations, young people – everyone in fact to get their interpretation of the objects which should form part of the gallery on a rotating basis so that perspectives are constantly evolving – the people should provide a 'living' extension to the permanent gallery.*

**Museum Gallery Project Consultant**



*Don't be afraid of multitudinous narratives. Acknowledge that there will never be 'consensus' but this should not prevent you from moving forward.*

**Museum Director Display**

## Artistic interpretation



**SHE AIN'T HOLDING THEM  
UP, SHE'S HOLDING ON (SOME  
ENGLISH ROSE) 1986**



*I think we need to have more emphasis on the government's support and sanctioning of the slave trade from the 16th century onwards, to make people aware that it was a 'business' that touched all aspects of British society, and give plenty of examples to illustrate this i.e. the use of primary sources from places such as the National Archives and NMM archives. We also need to get people to acknowledge the millions of people who were transported to the Americas, and the fact that the Atlantic is a tomb. If people can get to grips with governmental, religious and royal complicity, it may go some way in making those 21st-century links as to why there is so much poverty today, why slavery still exists today.*

**Museum Gallery Project Consultant**



# Connections with contemporary social and global issues

USI has found that making links between the history of transatlantic slavery and modern forms of slavery and child labour have helped younger audiences engage with the subject more fully, and make the history relevant to today.



*I think the key learning experience for me has been that many of the issues in the 18th century are still being addressed today. We think that our 21st-century society is much more civilized and informed than we were two hundred years ago, when in fact we are still fighting slavery in all its forms and aiming at a fairer system for international trade. Showing young people this history may just make them question how far we have really come.*

**Museum Education Officer**

# Connections with contemporary social and global issues

## Teaching approaches



- The transatlantic slave trade has had an impact on so many aspects of British and world history, either directly or indirectly, and its legacy can still be seen today.
- While people-trafficking, child and bonded labour are relevant issues, it is important, not to view them as inextricable from the wider legacies of transatlantic slavery, such as racial discrimination, inequality, and poverty in African and Caribbean countries, but rather to look at them in parallel.

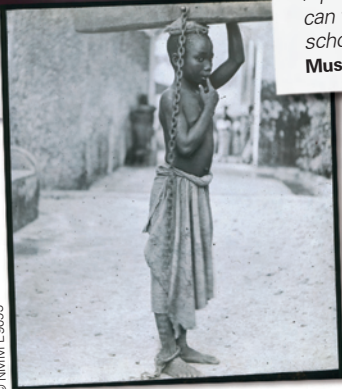
© Rex Features



*This topic will introduce people to the familiar and the less familiar. Inheritances in the form of dance, music, and histories bring joy and enjoyment and remind us of commonly held cultural referents instigated and maintained within the African Diaspora. The topic makes a person critically assess their beliefs and values as an individual and a member of this society... I would hope that the museum as well would be seen as a safe and appropriate space to engage in this conversation, a public institution supported by and for the nation's citizenry and for the purpose of representing a shared history, of which many narratives can find voice through public participation and rigorous scholarship.*

**Museum Education Officer**

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'Slavery in Zanzibar' (about 1890)

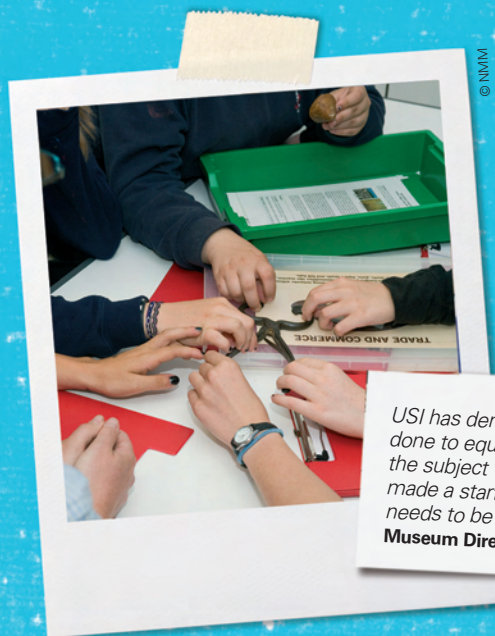


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# Expertise and training

USI has enlisted the expertise and skills of on-site curators and independent researchers and educators in order to offer a learning experience that is rigorous and effective. Like any other subject the knowledge base needs to be sufficient in order to provide meaningful, informed sessions.



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*USI has demonstrated how much needs to be done to equip the teaching profession to address the subject with knowledge and confidence. It has made a start in terms of resources but much more needs to be done in terms of training.*

**Museum Director**

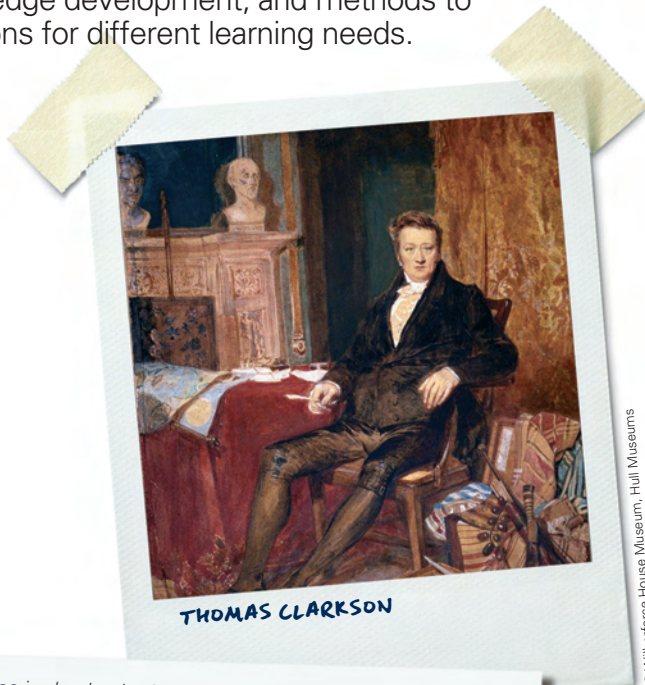


## Expertise and training



### Teaching approaches

- The USI partner museums offer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) days to assist teachers and other educators to develop their schemes of work. The sessions focus on various themes including: using handling collections to teach sensitive issues; workshops to discuss racism, stereotyping and racist terminology; subject knowledge development; and methods to develop sessions for different learning needs.



© Wilberforce House Museum, Hull Museums



*Expertise is absolutely vital: full knowledge of the history, understanding of related contemporary issues and experience of working with museum artefacts. It is a mistake to assume that a very basic knowledge will equip you to teach this subject. The educator needs to ensure learners have left a session with the facts and speculative [interpretation of them]. If this knowledge is not readily available then it makes sense to appoint the right expert or make time to offer/devise comprehensive training for staff.*

**Museum Director**

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- USI research has demonstrated that museums are ideally placed to work with other partners in the education sector to support the study of this subject at Initial Teacher Education level. It has also initiated discussions with academic institutions to work directly with schools, teachers and trainee teachers to pilot specific ITE programmes.
- Working with colleagues across departments, particularly curators, has been essential in the development of museum learning sessions.

## Expertise and training

## Teaching approaches

- Sharing learning approaches with colleagues internally and externally, and researching into best practice models, can support Continuing Professional Development needs and network development.
- Identifying and making provision for knowledge and skills development needs for educators teaching this subject will advance the learning programme around enslavement.



International Slavery Museum – Liverpool, 2007



# Evaluation

Periodic evaluations, consultation and discussion panels have been vital for ongoing development and modification of USI's programmes. Devising a long-term evaluation strategy to assess user need is essential. Demand from schools will no doubt increase, particularly in light of the National Curriculum history and citizenship revisions which now fully incorporate this subject into KS3.



*Do more testing, not only the website, but also within exhibitions. Participant observation or interviews are good rather than questionnaires because this gives you results of quality rather than quantity.*

**Media Information Architect**

*I would want to see more active evaluation occurring in museums and experiential learning environments, looking at approaches and impacts of this type of learning on student knowledge, skills and understanding and across borders. This work would seek to inform programme building and address gaps between teaching and learning in schools and at museum sites.*

**Museum Education Officer**

*We'll see what kind of feedback we get from our audiences and our stakeholders and take it from there. Over the lifespan of the gallery we will change objects, alter graphics, and we could change the AV programmes.*

**Museum Exhibition Manager**

# A short glossary of terms

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## A

### **Abolition**

Literally 'bringing to an end'; in this context the campaign to end the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

### **Abolitionist**

Person who supported the movement to end the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

### **African-Caribbean**

A person from the Caribbean of African descent.

## B

### **Black**

Often used in Britain to describe people of African and Caribbean origin.

### **Black British**

First used during the 1980s to stress the political unity between African, Caribbean, and South Asian people in Britain. Now mainly used to refer to British descendants of first generation Caribbean migrants, or more broadly to all people of African or Caribbean descent living in Britain.

### **British Empire**

A system of dependencies, mostly colonies, throughout the world that were under the sovereignty and administration of the British Crown and government over a period of about three hundred years.

## C

### **Chattel Slavery**

A form of slavery, introduced by Europeans, in which the enslaved person is treated as a piece of property belonging to his or her owner and has no rights; this status is for life and their children automatically have the same status; chattel derives from the word for cattle.

### **Coffle**

Used to describe a group of animals and prisoners or enslaved people chained together in a line commonly used by slavers in the 18th century.

### **Colonization**

A process of one country taking over another in order to exploit it.

## D

### **Diaspora**

The spreading out of any group of people, forcibly or voluntarily, away from their homeland across a large area or indeed the world (it was originally used to describe the Jewish dispersal); also refers to the expatriate population as a distinct group.

## E

### **Emancipation**

Being set free, or granted rights equal to others who already enjoy them (including allowing non-Anglicans to sit in Parliament and have other civic rights); the freeing of enslaved people from slavery.




 WWW.

For more information please see our glossary:  
[http://www.understandingslavery.com/teachingslavetrade/introduction/glossary/#GlossaryId\\_3274](http://www.understandingslavery.com/teachingslavetrade/introduction/glossary/#GlossaryId_3274)

## E continued

### Enslaved African/Enslaved Person

A servant devoid of freedom and personal rights; one who is the property of another whether by capture, purchase or birth.

### Enslavement

To make a slave of a person; being held in captivity; servitude.

## M

### Maafa

Derived from a Kiswahili word meaning 'disaster', or 'terrible occurrence'. It is used to refer to the enslavement of African people by Europeans. The definition also refers to the subsequent loss of indigenous African cultures, languages and religions.

### Middle Passage

The second stage in the transatlantic slave trade, on which ships carried enslaved Africans from Africa to either the Caribbean islands or the Americas.

## N

### Negro

A term used to describe a person of African descent throughout the 18th to the 20th centuries, the word is considered derogatory and unacceptable today.

## P

### Plantation

A large area of farmland, or estate, planted with particular crops.

## R

### Racism

A belief that one group of people is inferior, or superior to another because of their race.

## S

### Serfdom

A system in which the serf, or labourer, was not allowed to leave the land that he or she worked on.

## T

### Transatlantic

Across the Atlantic Ocean.

### Transatlantic slave trade

A Eurocentric term used to describe the selling of Africans as chattel across the Atlantic Ocean between Europe and the Americas.

### Transatlantic slavery

The institution that kept people as property, and submissive to work under the domination of others; the system of slavery that incorporates the 'trade' of enslaved Africans, the culture of enslavement, resistance of the enslaved and abolition.

### Triangular trade

The name often given to the transatlantic slave trade; describes the three sides to the route the slave ships took from Europe to West Africa, then to the Caribbean and the Americas and finally back to Europe; the routes are known as the Outward Passage, the Middle Passage, and the Return or Homeward Passage.



# About the Understanding Slavery Initiative (USI)

The Understanding Slavery Initiative is a national education project, which began in April 2003 and is funded by the Strategic Commissioning National/Regional Partnerships Programme.

Five museums: the National Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool, British Empire & Commonwealth Museum, Bristol City Museums, Galleries and Archives, and Hull Museums & Art Gallery are working in partnership to promote and support the effective teaching of the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade in schools and communities by producing resources that reflect the many historical and contemporary perspectives on this major part of world history.



## Project objectives

- To encourage teachers, educators and young people to fully examine the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade through the museums' collections and schemes of work in the National Curriculum.
- To develop resources for teachers and pupils which focus on the British, West African and Caribbean elements of the history.
- To offer training opportunities for teachers and museum educators to support their development of effective teaching methodologies for this subject.
- To develop best practice teaching models which effectively address the issues and sensitivities inherent in this history, particularly when working with the related museum collections.



De'ah, a maid, about 1900

# About the Understanding Slavery Initiative (USI)

## Programme 2003 – 08

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### Phase 1 (2003 – 04)

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**Consultation:**

Understanding the Transatlantic Slave Trade; initial consultations with teachers, LEA representatives and community educators.

**New museum and classroom resources:****National Maritime Museum**

*Freedom*: printed pack and website  
Handling collection  
Museum sessions for KS3 and 4

**British Empire & Commonwealth Museum**

*Voices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*: DVD and printed notes and loan boxes  
Handling collection  
Museum sessions for KS3 and 4

**National Museums Liverpool**

*Transatlantic Slavery – Facing Up*: CD ROM  
Handling collection  
Museum sessions for KS3 and 4

**Bristol's Museums, Galleries & Archives**

*Transatlantic Slavery at Bristol Industrial Museum*: pdf pack  
Museum sessions for KS3 and 4

### Phase 2 (2004 – 05)

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**Research and evaluation:**

*USI Evaluation Report*: how the USI resources are used by schools and how they could be modified.

*Engaging with Educators*: research to ascertain how much provision exists in Initial Teacher Education to address this history.

**Community project:**

*Landmarks DVD*: community visual arts and film workshops resulting in a short film documenting local residents' views and perceptions of the transatlantic slave trade.

### Phase 3 (2005 – 06)

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**Digital resource:**

**[www.understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com)**

The design and production of a new website for teachers and educators offering visual material, background information and activities to teach young people about the transatlantic slave trade, bringing together items from the partner museums' collections as well as new and revised lesson plans and activities for use in both formal and informal learning contexts.



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## Phase 4 (2006 – 07)

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### Digital resource:

**[www.understandingslavery.com/citizen](http://www.understandingslavery.com/citizen)**

A website for KS3 students organized under four themes – Activism, Heritage, Identity and Routes – offering schools a rich bank of museum artefacts and archival material for research and study, online and offline.

### Teachers' resource:

#### *The Citizen Resource*

A printed pack for teachers with corresponding content from the Citizen website, including lesson plans and activities for ongoing study programmes.

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## Phase 5 (2007 – 08)

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### Bicentenary programme:

#### *The Big Conversation 2007*

A national competition to mark the bicentenary of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the British Empire, to encourage KS3 students to explore many of the complex issues surrounding the legacies of this history through museum collections.

Evaluation report available upon request.

### Dissemination programme:

#### *Unlocking Perceptions*

The production of a handbook which brings together in one printed, easy-to-use publication, guidelines for developing museum resources and programmes of study for this subject. This new publication will be produced for dissemination across the museums and learning sectors.

#### *Seminar programme*

Implementation of a sector-wide programme of seminars, CPD and INSET days in conjunction with a regional MLA programme designed to share expertise, and support the development of programmes about the transatlantic slave trade related beyond the bicentenary of abolition.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE UNDERSTANDING  
SLAVERY INITIATIVE OR TO RECEIVE A FREE  
RESOURCE PACK E-MAIL:

USlcitizenresource@nmm.ac.uk



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