

Should 1807 really be celebrated as the end of the slave trade?

Learning Objectives:

- To investigate the role of the West Africa Squadron in combating the illicit slave trade after 1807.
- To evaluate the success of attempts to suppress the slave trade after 1807.
- To decide whether 1807 actually marked the end of the transatlantic slave trade.
- To use historical evidence to test hypotheses and reach conclusions.

Rationale:

In my own teaching of the transatlantic slave trade, I have usually ended with a study of abolition movements, and the abolition of the British trade in 1807. However, this traditional approach can present students with a very simplistic view of events, and fails to engage them with the difficulties which faced British attempts to prevent the trading of slaves. Moreover, it leaves students with the impression that only the British were involved in the slave trade and that once banned by the British Parliament, the problem was solved. My rationale for teaching students about the continuation of the transatlantic slave trade is, therefore, that it can enable them to engage with the difficulties of ending such a profitable trade on a global scale; to investigate change and continuity in the situation after 1807; to consider different factors which hindered Britain's ability to end the trade and to challenge the traditional interpretation of the 1807 Abolition Act as ending the trade.

I have chosen to focus on one ship (the *Henriqueta*) within the original documents as this will allow students to engage with one story before they then move on to consider the scale of the illicit trade by using the data from www.slavevoyages.org. Without an initially narrow focus, students may become overwhelmed by the data. Moreover, the use of an exciting story such as that of the capture of the *Henriqueta* can help to motivate students and support the learning of SEN students who may struggle to grasp the bigger picture.

Activities:

All of the activities are designed to allow students to carry out their own research into an interesting and valid historical question using original documents and data, thus meeting several of the requirements of the National Curriculum including the key processes of *Historical Enquiry* (2.1) and *Using Evidence* (2.2).

Students begin by writing their own hypothesis as to why Commodore Collier would be taking slaves *back* to Africa. This allows them to then test their theory using the evidence and provides a clear focus for their investigation. They can then begin to piece together the story of the *Henriqueta* and her capture by the HMS *Sybille* in 1827 using original documents. By handing out the documents chronologically and giving students time to read them and complete their research table, they should be able to unravel the story with limited teacher input. In doing so, they will begin to realise that the slave trade did not simply stop in 1807, and will begin to identify British attempts to suppress illegal traders. By the end of the lesson, students will be able to assess the validity of their hypothesis and reformulate it in the light of the evidence; they will, therefore, have to really think about what the evidence is telling them. Additionally, the documents should also begin to

encourage them to engage with those writing them, such as Commodore Collier, and help them to relate to people in the past more closely, thus building skills of empathy.

In the second lesson, students again begin by focussing on the *Henriqueta* and her success as part of the West Africa squadron (as the HMS *Black Joke*). This can lead into a class discussion about the difficulties Britain faced in stopping the slave trade before students use the data from www.slavevoyages.org.

The aim of dividing students into groups to study the data is to enable them to assess the scale of the slave trade after 1807 without becoming overwhelmed by the volume of data. In addition, by feeding back as a class, students will be able to identify change and continuity across the period and reach conclusions as to when the slave trade can really be said to have ended. They will also be able to identify how many slave ships were successfully captured by British squadrons, and approximately how many enslaved Africans were released. More able students could access the website themselves and decide which data was most relevant for their investigation. This would also give them the opportunity to create graphs and examine the data in more detail. The extension activity (replying to the news article) will allow more able students (or the whole class if time allows) to use the data to support their arguments about the slave trade in a piece of writing, in effect creating their own interpretations about abolition.

Further Learning:

To follow on from these lessons, students could investigate the establishment of Sierra Leone and what happened to enslaved Africans who were freed and sent there. They could also look at the abolition of the institution of slavery in the British Empire. Links could also be made to Citizenship and the problems of modern day slavery.