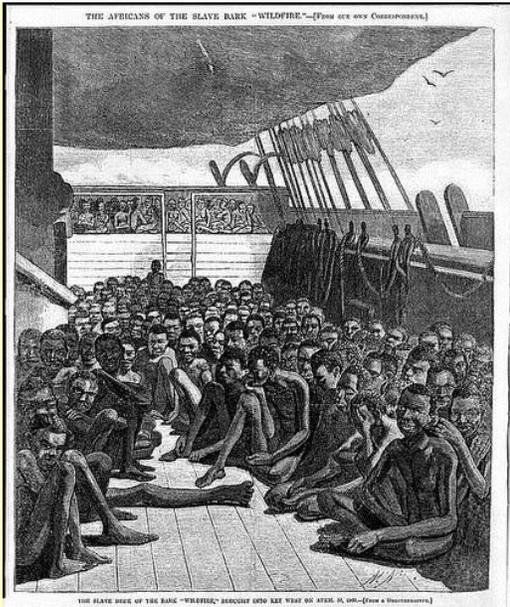


Slave Trade: The Middle Passage

Procedure 1:

- Introduce students to the concept of the “Middle Passage” for the slave trade.
- Display the following pictures to prime students for reading.
 - Ask students what they see in each picture.
 - Allow them to do some basic interpretation about the conditions aboard slave ships
 - Afterwards, give them the context for each picture.



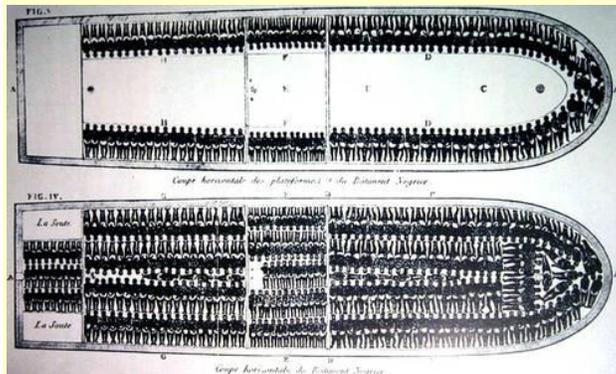
Context: Decks of illegal slave ships (1850s-1860s). The sick and the young were kept on deck.



Context: A live slave is thrown overboard for rebelling. Another is beaten for interfering.



Context: Personal space below deck was 3ft. by 3ft.



Context: A layout for a “flat-packed” slave ship designed to maximize the number of slaves transported.

Procedure 2:

- Briefly introduce Equiano to the class:

Olaudah Equiano lived in Africa during the 1700s. He was captured and sold into slavery at a young age. He later wrote about the **Middle Passage**, the difficult journey across the ocean in a slave ship. He tells about the loneliness he felt, and his fear that the European slavers would eat him.

Procedure 3: Word Mastery

- Handout reading to class. Give each student a copy. Handout highlighters so students hand underline key words and phrases.
- Hand out vocabulary list for students to use during reading:

Vocabulary List

1. **Multitude:** a great number
2. **Anguish:** pain or suffering
3. **Flogged:** beaten or whipped
4. **Eatables:** food
5. **Windlass:** A rope attached to a crank which is used to stretch people out
6. **Savage:** rough or uncivilized
7. **Brute:** someone who is “rough” or “uncivilized”
8. **Vessel:** ship
9. **Cargo:** items being transported by a ship
10. **Hold:** place below deck where cargo is held
11. **Loathsome:** hated
12. **Suffocated:** choked
13. **Aggravated:** made worse
14. **Inconceivable:** unbelievable
15. **Moderate:** light or medium-sized

- Make sure to pronounce each of these words for the students and explain that these words are bolded within the reading.
- Have partners go through the list together before they read.

Procedure 3: Partner Reading

- Divide students into reading partners. Students read the selected passage allowed with their partner, alternating every other paragraph.

Equiano Describes the Middle Passage (*abridged*):

When I looked around the ship and saw and a **multitude** of black people of every description chained together, I no longer doubted my fate. Quite overpowered with horror and **anguish**, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted

Soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me **eatables** and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and laid me across the **windlass** and tied my feet while the other **flogged** me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before. If I could have gotten over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not. The crew used to watch very closely those of us who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water. I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself.

[I was told] that we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate. But still I feared that I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted in so **savage** a manner. I have never seen among my people such instances of brutal cruelty, and this not only shown towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves.

One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast that he died in consequence of it, and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a **brute**. This made me fear these people the more, and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner.

I asked if these people had no country, but lived in this hollow place? [Others] told me they did not but came from a distant land. "Then," said I, "how come in all our country we never heard of them?"

They told me because they lived so far off. I then asked where were their women? Had they any like themselves? I was told they had.

"And why do we not see them" I asked. They answered, "Because they were left behind."

I asked how the **vessel** would go? They told me they could not tell, but there was cloth put upon the masts by the help of the ropes I saw, and then vessels went on, and the white men had some spell or magic they put in the water when they liked in order to stop the vessel when they liked.

At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her **cargo**, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel.

The stench of the **hold** while we were on the coast was so **loathsome**, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time...some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air. The ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost **suffocated** us.

This brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. This wretched situation was **aggravated** by the chains, and the filth of the [toilets] into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying [made] the whole a scene of horror almost **inconceivable**.

One day, when we had a smooth sea and **moderate** wind, two 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 fellow followed their example. 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.

Source: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African (London, 1789).

Procedure 4: Treasure Hunt

- Partners will answer these comprehension questions as they read through the passage.
1. In your own words, what is the Middle Passage?
 2. When Equiano first got on the ship, why did he think about dying?
 3. What clues in the reading tell you that Equiano has never seen Europeans before? Give specific examples.
 4. When Equiano says that the ship had taken on all of its “cargo,” what did he mean?
 5. Why do you think the ship smelled so badly? Come up with at least two reasons. Explain your answers.

Procedure 5: Story Retelling/Extension

- Have the students write a brief account of the Middle Passage from the perspective of two friends who were captured and transported together.
 - It should be at least four paragraphs.
 - It should use at least 6 of the vocabulary words.
 - It should pay attention to the conditions aboard the vessel and the treatment of the slaves.
 - It should convey the emotions and thoughts experienced by the slaves.
 - Students should use information from Equiano’s account and the pictures shown to accurately portray the Middle Passage.

Procedure 6: Assessment

- Assessment is comprised of the Treasure Hunt and the Story Retelling. Students will be assessed based on these two activities for comprehension and word meaning.

