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| TEACHER GUIDE: Chapter 8 Meanwhile, sitting at a mahogany tea table | | | | | |
| Story summary | Hidden lives behind a transatlantic trade | | | | |
| Why teach this topic?  (Curriculum intent) | In this story summary, students will learn about the transatlantic slave trade through the lens of mahogany.  Students will be introduced to the rising popularity of mahogany in European countries and the connection between mahogany and the transatlantic slave trade. Students will explore the importance of the knowledge and language of West African people to European understanding of mahogany and its importance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Students will be able to connect this to their prior learning about European trading relations with the wider world and the West African country of Benin. The chapter provides context for broader study of the transatlantic slave trade and changing trade relations with countries such as India in the coming century. The chapter moves between different locations throughout, beginning in Britain before moving to Jamaica and ending in West Africa. | | | | |
| Linked resources | * Teaching slides * Planning podcast | | * Teaching podcast * Quiz | | |
| Key dates | **1655** Oliver Cromwell’s men took Jamaica from the Spanish and began to fell mahogany to be used in European houses and furnishing  **1670s** Two English authors mentioned the value of mahogany in books  **1694** A ship called the *Hannibal* travelled from Whydah, in West Africa, to the Caribbean with 700 enslaved people on board. Nearly one-third of the crew and half of the enslaved did not survive the journey  **18th century** Over a million enslaved people passed through Whydah, one of the largest trading ports in West Africa  **1729** Marble Hill was completed, including its mahogany staircase and floorboards  **1757** Maynard Clarke kept detailed journal records about how mahogany was felled on the Chancery Hall planation, Kingston, Jamaica  **1761** Almost 6,500 enslaved people were forcibly brought from West Africa to Kingston, Jamaica  **1788** Mahogany imports to Europe from the Caribbean peaked at 30,000 tons | | | | |
| Key words and terms | **chinoiserie**  **mahogany/ *m’oganwo***  **hogshead** | **genteel**  **merchants**  **plantations**  **archives** | | **colonist**  **Yoruba and Igbo**  **suicide** | **Middle Passage**  **triangular trade**  **cowrie shell** |
| Key people | **Henrietta Howard** The Countess of Suffolk. Henrietta had Marble Hill built in Twickenham, which incorporated a large amount of mahogany furnishing and design  **Katherine Naish** A female craftsperson commissioned to make two mahogany thrones with footstools for King George and Queen Charlotte’s coronation in Westminster Abbey in September 1761  **Jamaica National Archive** A collection of records of Jamaican history, including archival evidence of:   * **James, the carpenter** A skilled labourer who bought his freedom from enslavement * **Susannah Davidson** Owner of a house in Kingston full of mahogany furniture * **Humphrey** The enslaved coachmanof Susannah Davidson   **Maynard Clarke** Owner of Chancery Hall planation and over 200 enslaved people  **Royal African Company** An English trading company from 1660. The RAC traded in enslaved people from West African countries | | | | |
| Key takeaways from story summary as a whole | **Substantive**   * Oliver Cromwell’s men took Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655 and books were immediately written by colonists about how to make Jamaica profitable. * By the 1670s, English books documented the value of mahogany, resulting in many people attempting to exploit its profitability. * Mahogany was incredibly fashionable in European countries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was used in housing design, such as staircases, and to create furniture. * The huge demand for mahogany furniture led to a boom in workshops across London, providing work for male and female craftspeople. * The majority of mahogany used in European countries came from Jamaica and Honduras. * Mahogany arrived in European ports from Jamaica alongside other goods such as sugar and rum. * Mahogany trees had grown in Jamaica for hundreds of years before colonists or enslaved people arrived. * Mahogany was mostly felled in Jamaica in order to clear new land to plant more sugar cane on plantations. * At times, people were indirectly involved in the slave trade. For example, Henrietta Howard’s use of mahogany without thinking explicitly about mahogany being sourced through transatlantic enslavement. * Women were involved in the transatlantic slave trade, as consumers in Britain and in plantation management. Women were also enslaved and had complex lives in West Africa prior to enslavement. * West African people had complex, varied and internal lives prior to their enslavement, which can be forgotten when people are viewed solely as enslaved. * Enslaved people were expected to fell mahogany trees and haul logs as part of their work on Jamaican plantations. Enslaved people were forced to produce commodities such as sugar, cotton, tobacco and mahogany, which were sold in Europe. * The Middle Passage involved enslaved people being transported from West African countries to the Caribbean, including Jamaica. * Many enslaved people died during the Middle Passage from a combination of disease, suicide and revolts. Disease was worsened by overcrowding, lack of food, water, sanitation and shackling enslaved people together. * 12.5 million Africans were trafficked across the Atlantic. * Enslaved people sought escape from enslavement on plantations. This included running away. * The triangular trade began in ports such as London, Bristol, Liverpool and Amsterdam before moving towards West Africa and Jamaica. * Most enslaved people came from what is now Nigeria and were mostly Yoruba and Igbo speakers. * West African communities held knowledge of the natural world and African mahogany. The word ‘mahogany’ likely comes from the Yoruba and Igbo languages, with the word *m’oganwo* used to describe a type of wood-bark which had medicinal uses. | | | | |
| Consider connections to previous and future study | **For example …**  **Previous**  How does this chapter build on students’ knowledge of West African civilisations (Chapter 2)?  How does this chapter build on students’ knowledge of European involvement in the transatlantic slave trade (Chapter 4)?  How does this chapter build on students’ knowledge of the Royal African Company (Chapter 7)?  **Future**  How might this chapter prepare students for understanding the colonisation of seventeenth-century Virginia (Chapter 9)?  How does this chapter prepare students for understanding British involvement in the enslavement of African people in the Caribbean and North America (Chapter 11)?  How does this chapter prepare students for understanding the abolition of enslavement (Chapters 11, 13, 15, 17 and 20)?  How does this chapter prepare students for understanding the interconnections between enslavement and the Industrial Revolution (Chapters 16 and 28)?  How does this chapter prepare students for understanding resistance and rebellion against enslavement (Chapters 19 and 20)? | | | | |

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| Guidance on structuring the story summary | *See also the* ***planning and teaching podcasts****, which provide some useful context to the chapter.*  *This chapter is designed to be taught in a short number of lessons.*  **Beginning the story**   * The opening text of the chapter (**read** ‘Mahogany in Britain’) helps to set the scene of the popularity of mahogany in eighteenth-century Europe and begins to hint at the connections to the transatlantic trade. The story notes the growing number of workshops to create mahogany furnishings and mahogany arriving on the docks alongside other goods. This passage is an important introduction to why and where mahogany was arriving into Britain from. Consider reading aloud or storytelling approaches with this passage. Use the images on the slides to set the scene (**slides 2**–**4**). * Alternatively, the story of mahogany in Britain (**read** ‘Mahogany in Britain’) could be set as a homework task, to engage students’ curiosity and prepare them for the start of the story if needed. Images of the tea set, furniture and mahogany tree will support students in their world-building of Henrietta Howard and mahogany (**slides 2**–**4**). * Students will engage with where mahogany originated from and its connections to enslavement in the next part of this summary story (**read** ‘Mahogany in Jamaica: Kingston, 1761’ and ‘Cutting mahogany: a glimpse from the sources’). This section lends itself to reading aloud or listening agenda approaches. You may wish to ask students to identify details such as the importance of Kingston, the number of enslaved people in 1761, plantation experiences and reasons for felling mahogany. This will help students to begin to understand the experiences of enslaved people in Jamaica (**slides 5 and 7** provide some example questions you may wish students to answer, with possible answers on **slides 6 and 8**). * Before focusing on the Middle Passage and transatlantic trade, students should consider how Europeans developed their knowledge of the value of mahogany (**read** ‘Europeans seek knowledge of mahogany’). Teacher reading aloud will work best here. Asking follow-up questions about where knowledge of mahogany might have originated from may help students to puzzle the broader connections of the transatlantic trade before they hear about the linguistic origins of mahogany (**read:** ‘Knowledge crosses the Atlantic’). Again, teacher reading aloud will work best here (**slides 9 and 11** provides some example questions you may wish students to consider, with possible answers on **slides 10 and 12**).   **Developing the story**   * The next part of the summary story focuses on the experiences of enslaved people during the Middle Passage and across the transatlantic trade system. Some of the geography of this may be unfamiliar to students. Use the map of the transatlantic trade triangle to support students in developing their sense of place and locating key locations, such as Whydah (**slide 13**). * Introduce students to the different parts of the transatlantic slave trade (**read** ‘The Middle Passage’ and ‘The triangular trade’). Given the sensitive nature of this text and the range of places, statistics and dates involved reading aloud and students follow would work best. Reading both of these sections in full before proceeding to a worked activity will allow students a chance to ask any questions they might have before continuing. * Having read the text as a class, paired re-reading could be used whilst students annotate a copy of the map shown in the slides (**slide 14**) with details about the passage of the *Hannibal* ship, the number of people trafficked and enslaved and the amount of mahogany and other goods. * Students will then discover more about Whydah in West Africa (**read** ‘West Africa: The port of Whydah’) and you may wish for them to add some further annotations to their map (**slide 14**). Again, the sensitive nature of this text lends itself to teacher reading aloud to provide students with the opportunity to ask any questions they might have. * This would likely be a good opportunity to discuss with students the potentially surprising statistic that only 4 per cent of enslaved people were taken to North America. You may wish to discuss with students other places that enslaved people were taken to, allowing them to build upon their understanding of enslavement in Jamaica. While this is not in the textbook chapter, you could discuss with students that around 40 per cent of enslaved people were taken to Brazil to work on sugar plantations. This could lead to a discussion around the different raw materials that were produced as part of the transatlantic trade and the role of climate in determining where many enslaved people were taken.   **Concluding the story**   * By this point students should have a clear understanding of why mahogany was so popular and the experiences of enslaved people during the Middle Passage and across the transatlantic trade as a whole. The final part of this story focuses on the knowledge of mahogany held by West African women. * Consider storytelling approaches when reading about the knowledge of West African women about mahogany (**read:** ‘Mahogany in West Africa’). Show students the image of West African women in a mahogany forest. Ensure that students consider the idyllic nature of the forest and create a sense of wonder around *m’oganwo* from the perspective of West African women. This part of the story is to demonstrate the different values placed on mahogany by West African people and the Europeans who exploited both human beings and mahogany resources. Use the image of women in West Africa to support this world building (**slide 15**). * The final part of this story encourages students to consider where our knowledge of the transatlantic trade comes from. A variety of reading strategies could work here, including reading aloud, storytelling, independent reading and paired re-reading. This section of the text invites students to consider statistical evidence, alongside archival records to further centre the human experience of those involved in the transatlantic slave trade. * After completing this final section of the story, students could be encouraged to annotate an image of a mahogany tree divided into four sections in order to highlight the centrality of mahogany to the story of the transatlantic slave trade: (1) West African knowledge of mahogany, (2) European interest in mahogany, (3) Experiences of enslaved people linked to mahogany and (4) Developing knowledge of the transatlantic slave trade. This task will support students in developing their understanding that our historical knowledge is formed from many different sources and the same story can be told in multiple different ways (**slide 16** provides some guidance on what this might look like). * You may wish to end the story with a brief 15-question quiz to test students’ knowledge of mahogany and the transatlantic slave trade (**slide 17** and **slide 18** for answers).   *The additional Multiple Choice Questions can be used, with or without multiple choice responses, as a quick knowledge recall aid/check at relevant points in the enquiry.*  Potential lesson breakdown:   |  | | --- | | **Two-lesson summary story** | | * Mahogany in Britain * Mahogany in Jamaica | | * The Middle Passage, triangular trade and West Africa |   Possibilities for shortening the summary story to a single lesson:   * The story of Henrietta Howard, Marble Hill and mahogany arriving in London can be set as homework to prepare students for the start of the enquiry. * Centre the lessons around the Middle Passage and triangular trade and use storytelling to explain the role of mahogany alongside this. |
| Suggested homework | * The story of Henrietta Howard, Marble Hill and mahogany arriving in London can be set as homework to prepare students for the start of the enquiry. * If students have focused their in-class studies on Henrietta Howard and mahogany, they could consolidate their understanding of the transatlantic slave trade by annotating a copy of the map (**slide 13**) with key information about Whydah, ships such as the *Hannibal* and experiences on plantations. * Students could focus on sources related to the Middle Passage as a potential homework, following careful preparation and guidance in lessons. This could include guided reading related to sources such as Olaudah Equiano’s account. |
| Building subject knowledge | **Historical scholarship**   * London Museum blog post from Curator Danielle Thom: [Frances Burney’s mahogany desk: a symbol of slavery](https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/collections/london-stories/frances-burneys-mahogany-desk-symbol-slavery/) * National Trust for Scotland from Dr Désha A Osborne: [Facing our past: the difficult history of mahogany](https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/facing-our-past-the-difficult-history-of-mahogany) * English Heritage research paper by L. Brown (2010): [‘The slavery connections of Marble Hill House’ (PDF)](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/siteassets/home/learn/research/the-slavery-connections-of-marble-hill-house.pdf)   **Podcasts/documentaries**   * A short film produced alongside the National Trust as part of their research into mahogany, the transatlantic slave trade and its connection to National Trust properties. This film is an artistic response to the experience of enslaved people, linked to mahogany: [Mahogany (2018)](https://www.zodwanyoni.com/mahogany) |