

### National 4 & 5

## The Atlantic Slave Trade

1770-1807



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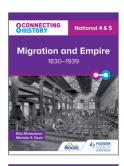
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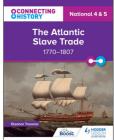
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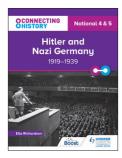


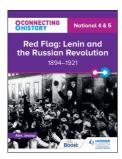
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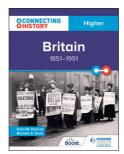




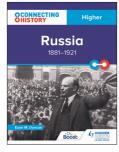




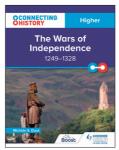




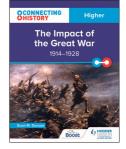














#### About the author of The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770–1807:

Eleanor Trevena is a classroom practitioner with many years' experience teaching students at all levels. Eleanor has taught a wide range of History topics, including the Atlantic Slave Trade. She is a co-author of our *BGE S1–S3 History: Second, Third and Fourth Levels* resources.

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# The Atlantic Slave Trade,

1770-1807



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## Contents

Introduction			VI
Chapter 1	The Triangular Trade		
	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 1.5 1.6	The organisation and nature of the slave trade The effects of the slave trade on British ports The effects of the slave trade on African societies The effects of the slave trade on Caribbean plantations 'Slave factories' on the African coast The economics and conditions of the 'Middle Passage'	3 6 10 16 19 22
Chapter 2	Britain and the Caribbean		
	2.1 2.2 2.3 2.4	The importance of tropical crops such as sugar The influence of the British in the Caribbean The impact of the Caribbean trade on the British economy The negative impact of the slave trade on the development of the Caribbean islands	34 38 42 49
Chapter 3	The experience and resistance of enslaved people		54
	3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6	Living conditions on the plantations Working conditions on the plantations Terror on the plantations Other forms of slave labour on the Caribbean islands Resistance on the plantations Fear of revolt	56 59 64 67 69 74
Chapter 4	The abolitionist campaigns		
	4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.8 4.9	Origins of the abolitionist movement Increased support for the abolitionist movement outside and within Parliament The role of William Wilberforce Arguments of the abolitionists: Christian, humanitarian, economic Methods of the abolitionists Attitudes and evidence of enslaved people and former enslaved people Resistance to the trade by enslaved people Opposition to the abolition of the slave trade The debate over reasons for the eventual success of the abolition campaign	78 82 85 87 89 94 98 101
Index			111



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## Introduction

The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in human history. Historians have calculated that, between 1514 and 1866, there were more than 36,000 slave voyages across the Atlantic Ocean. These voyages transported over 12 million captive people from Africa to the colonies of the Caribbean and the wider Americas. As many as 2 million Africans died during the journey. For those who landed in the 'New World', slavery meant a life of unimaginable suffering.

Britain played a leading role in the slave trade. Between the middle of the seventeenth century and the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, British ships carried over 3.4 million Africans into enslavement. This topic focuses on the period between 1770 and 1807. During these years, individuals and organisations in Britain and its colonies made huge profits from the forced labour of enslaved Africans.

#### What is enslavement?

Forms of enslavement have existed since ancient times. Slavery is people exploiting people by entrapping them and depriving them of their freedom. It has taken different forms, but typically involves forcing people to work without pay and in harsh conditions. Slavery has always existed and still does.

The particular type of slavery that you will learn about in this topic was a global institution that involved Europeans exploiting the forced labour of Africans to make huge profits. Slavery, as operated by the European powers, was a form of **chattel enslavement**. This means that the people who were enslaved were treated as property and could be bought and sold at the whim of their enslavers. It was also race-based and hereditary, meaning that the children of enslaved people were born with enslaved status.

Enslaved people were the first to fight against the slave trade, through acts of resistance. At the start of the period we are studying, few people in Britain questioned the morality of the slave trade. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, a movement emerged in Britain that aimed to put an end to it completely. The campaign achieved success in 1807 with the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. It is important to note that illegal slave trading continued for decades after this and slavery itself was not abolished in the British Empire until 1833.

In June 2020, Members of the European Parliament backed a resolution calling on the European Union to recognise the slave trade as a 'crime against humanity' and to make 2 December the European Day commemorating the abolition of the slave trade.

In this book you will learn about the organisation and nature of the slave trade, and its impact on Britain, the Caribbean and Africa. You will learn about the experience of captives in the 'slave factories' on the African coast and the horrific conditions they experienced on board the ships that carried them across the Atlantic Ocean. You will discover the traumatic nature of daily life for enslaved people on the plantations of the Caribbean. You will examine the ways in which enslaved people resisted and how their enslavers responded to these acts of resistance. Lastly, you will learn about the reasons why the slave trade was ended in 1807.

#### Language

When studying this topic, it is **vital** to pay attention to language and how it is used.

Primary sources often describe enslaved people using words and terms that we now know to be offensive. These terms have been avoided where possible or, if used, they are explained in the Glossary section.

We have, for the most part, used 'enslaved person/people' over 'slave/s', where possible, except when used in primary sources and by historians, or when it would make the text too repetitive and difficult to understand. We have also retained instances that specifically link to the SQA's key issues, so the assessment connection is clear to students.

The word 'enslaved' highlights the fact that African people were **forcibly** placed and held in the condition of slavery, whereas the term 'slave' suggests that slavery was their natural condition. Similarly, participants in acts of resistance against the slave system are referred to as 'freedom fighters', 'anti-slavery activists' or 'abolitionists'.

We use the word 'captive' as this is defined as a 'person who is enslaved, dominated or imprisoned'. This appropriately conveys that captives were indeed prisoners, captured and held against their will.

One final point of note: The slave trade is a very broad topic, and it would be impossible to cover everything in one course. This book specifically examines the period between 1770 and 1807. It focuses on the British slave trade and its impact on Britain, west and west-central Africa, and the Caribbean.

Whether revising for an N4 or N5 assessment, or deepening your understanding of a particular area, this book will help you.

Each chapter covers a specific issue that might appear as an N4/5 assessment item, and the information contained in the following pages will support you in writing a powerful response.

Good luck!



#### Note

#### **Sensitive content**

Readers should be aware that a few sections of this textbook include content which may prompt distress in some people. Any sections containing such content will show a sensitive content box on the page, like the one shown here on the right.

CAUTION: SENSITIVE CONTENT

However, readers should bear in mind that the subject matter as a whole covers themes such as racism, torture and abuse, and so there will be sections throughout containing challenging material. These sections may be equally upsetting and affect people differently, depending on their individual lived experiences.

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## Chapter 1

### The Triangular Trade

The aim of this chapter is to establish how the slave trade operated. It will explain the 'triangular' nature of the slave trade and highlight what happened at each stage of the triangle.

It will examine the impact of the slave trade on British ports, African societies and Caribbean plantations. It will explore the conditions experienced by captives in the 'slave factories' on the African coast. Finally, it will discuss the conditions experienced by captives on board the ships that transported them across the Atlantic Ocean.

Together, this will allow you to respond to questions from Key issue 1: The Triangular Trade.

#### Link to the assessment

#### National 4 and 5

#### Key issue 1: The Triangular Trade

- The organisation and nature of the slave trade
- The effects of the slave trade on British ports
- The effects of the slave trade on African societies
- The effects of the slave trade on Caribbean plantations
- 'Slave factories' on the African coast
- The economics and conditions of the 'Middle Passage'

#### **Note**

The SQA course specification refers to 'The effects of the slave trade on West Indian plantations.' The term 'West Indies' is outdated. Instead, 'Caribbean' is used throughout this book.

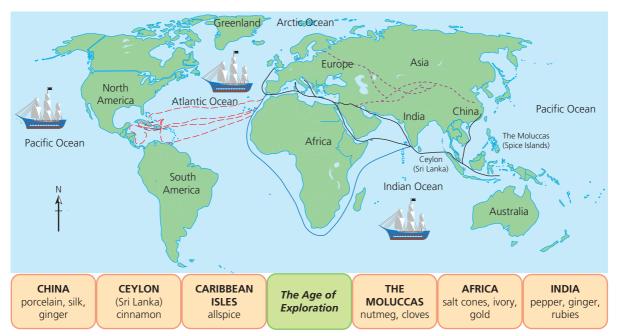
#### **Background**

During the 400 years in which the Atlantic slave trade operated, more than 12 million people were taken from their homes in Africa and sold to European traders. They were transported across the Atlantic Ocean to **colonies** in the Caribbean and the wider Americas. Here, their forced labour was used to produce goods that were sold in Europe for huge profits.

#### How did the slave trade begin?

Europeans first came to west Africa in the early fifteenth century, searching for new trade routes to the East. They discovered the wealth of the continent and began trading in products such as gold, ivory and spices. They also began trading in people.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to trade in enslaved Africans. They were quickly followed by other European countries, including Britain.



**Figure 1.1** The 'Age of Exploration', also known as the 'Age of Discovery', began in the fifteenth century and continued into the seventeenth century. During this period Europeans began exploring the world in search of new trade routes. This was the period in which the Atlantic slave trade began.

#### How did Britain become involved in the slave trade?

In 1562, an English adventurer called John Hawkins set sail from England to Sierra Leone with three ships. Off the coast of Sierra Leone, he captured 300 Africans and took them to the Spanish colony of Hispaniola, in modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Upon arrival, he sold the captives to the Spanish settlers. Hawkins made so much money from his voyages that he was subsequently sponsored by Queen Elizabeth I of England, who provided him with ships, supplies and guns.

In 1663, a **Royal Charter** established the Company of Royal Adventurers of England trading with Africa. Shareholders included King Charles II and his brother, the Duke of York, who later became King James II. The company was renamed the Royal African Company in 1672. Between the 1670s and the 1730s, the Royal African Company transported around 150,000 African men, women and children into slavery. This was more than any other British company in the whole history of the Atlantic slave trade.

By the period 1770–1807, Britain had become the dominant slave-trading power. Other European powers who were involved in the slave trade were Portugal, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. In this topic we will focus on the role of Britain.

#### 1.1 The organisation and nature of the slave trade

The Atlantic slave trade is also sometimes referred to as the 'Triangular Trade'. Broadly speaking, the trade followed a triangular pattern, as shown in Figure 1.2. There were three main stages: the journey from Britain to Africa, the voyage from Africa to the Caribbean and the return journey from the Caribbean back to Britain.

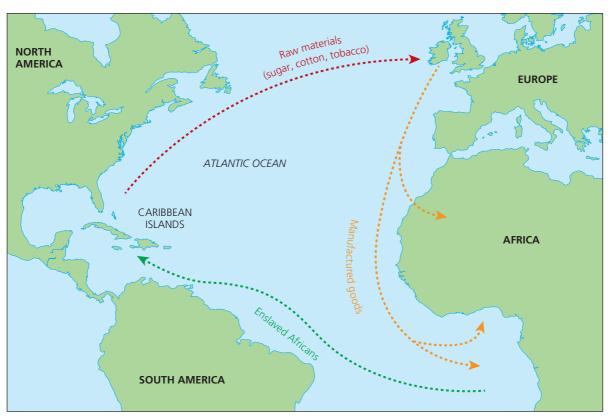


Figure 1.2 A map showing how the slave trade was organised

#### 1.1.1 Stage one

The first stage of the triangle involved ships sailing from ports such as Liverpool to the west coast of Africa. These ships were loaded with trade goods that would be exchanged for captive Africans once the ships arrived on the African coast. Typical trade goods included glass beads, cloth, metals, alcohol and weapons (Figure 1.3). Traders would also import large quantities of shells, typically cowrie shells, to use as a means of payment for enslaved people (Figure 1.4).



**Figure 1.3** Glass beads used in slave trading. In west and west-central Africa, millions of these beads were traded for people.



**Figure 1.4** Cowrie shells from the Maldives in the Indian Ocean were one of the major forms of currency across west Africa from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries

On the coast, British traders paid taxes and offered gifts to local African traders who controlled the supply of captives. They also established trading posts, known as 'slave factories' or 'slave castles'. You will learn more about the slave factories later in this chapter.

#### Forms of enslavement

People could become enslaved in Africa in a number of ways:

- they could be kidnapped and sold to traders
- they could be enslaved as payment for debts
- they could be enslaved as punishment for a crime.

The main form of enslavement was military – traders purchased captives who had been taken as prisoners of war. It should be noted that when enslaved people were traded to Europeans by African traders, they were usually from other tribes rather than being members of the trader's own tribe.

Africans who were captured or sold inland faced a long trek to the coast on foot in groups known as **coffles**. They were usually chained or **yoked** together in twos or threes. Some were marched just a few miles, while those from further inland were forced to march hundreds of miles. Some might have been sold and re-sold multiple times along the way to the coastline. Countless numbers of captives died on the gruelling journey inland to shore, from shortage of food, exhaustion and illness.

Once on board the ships, many enslaved people were kept below deck, often imprisoned for months while the captain waited for other consignments or for the weather to change before setting sail. Some died even before beginning the journey to the Americas.

#### 1.1.2 Stage two

The second stage of the triangle was the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean on sailing ships, similar to the one shown in Figure 1.5. This was known as the 'Middle Passage'. The voyage could take a few weeks or a few months, depending on the weather conditions.



**Figure 1.5** This painting of a Liverpool slave ship by the artist William Jackson dates from around 1780. Note the four ventilation ports in the lower hull of the ship. This was the part of the ship in which captives were held during the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.

#### Preparing the captives for sale

On reaching the Caribbean territories the captives were 'prepared' so that they could be sold. They were washed and their sores and wounds were covered up to make them look healthier, so that they

would fetch a higher price. They were sold, either at **auction** to the highest bidder or in a **scramble**. A scramble was a type of sale in which the captives were kept together in an enclosure. Buyers paid a fixed sum in advance and, on a signal, rushed in and grabbed the captives they wanted.

Olaudah Equiano, a former enslaved person who later became an anti-slavery activist, described how he was sold in a scramble when he first arrived in the Caribbean:

#### Source 1.1

On a signal given, such as the beat of a drum, the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible on the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans.

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

#### Selling the captives

The healthiest captives were sold quickly, but it could be days or even weeks before those who were weaker were sold. Captives who were not sold or who were too ill upon arrival, the so-called 'refuse slaves', were often left to die unattended on the quayside of the port. They could also be sold at auction or transported on to other territories.

The enslaved Africans who had been sold were taken to **plantations**. Here they were forced to harvest the crops and produce the consumer goods that were in demand in Britain, such as sugar, cotton and rum. They might also be forced to work as domestic servants for their enslavers.

#### Note

The most important of all the consumer goods produced on the plantations of the Caribbean was sugar. You will learn more about the importance of sugar in the next chapter.

#### 1.1.3 Stage three

The third stage of the triangle involved ships sailing back to Britain loaded with the consumer goods produced by enslaved Africans.

The full cycle of an Atlantic slave-trade voyage could last up to eighteen months. Other journeys directly across the Atlantic were made to supply the Caribbean with goods produced in Britain, such as beef, salted fish, clothing and copper stills for distilling sugar. Ships also transported goods to supply the homes of enslavers, such as furniture, books and wine.

#### Key fact summary

#### The organisation and nature of the slave trade

The Atlantic slave trade followed a triangular route, from Britain to Africa, then from Africa to the Caribbean, and from the Caribbean back to Britain.

The first stage of the triangle was the journey from Britain to Africa, in ships loaded with trade goods such as cloth, metals and alcohol.

In Africa, trade goods were exchanged for captive Africans.

Captive Africans were transported across the Atlantic Ocean in ships – this part of the triangle was known as the 'Middle Passage'.



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#### What does the cover photo show?

A painting of a Liverpool slave ship, about 1780, by the artist William Jackson (National Museums Liverpool). During the period of the slave trade, more than 12 million people were taken from their homes in Africa and transported across the Atlantic Ocean in ships similar to this one.





