The Atlantic Slave Trade

Objectives

- Explain how triangular trade worked.
- Understand the nature of the Middle Passage and describe its effects.
- Analyze the impact of the Atlantic slave trade.

Terms, People, and Places

Olaudah Equiano, Middle Passage, triangular trade, molasses

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence

Use a flowchart like the one below to record the events that led to millions of Africans being shipped to the Americas.

1. Enslaved Africans like Olaudah Equiano formed part of an international trade network that arose during the 1500s. The Spanish established colonies in the Americas, the slave trade— and with it the entire international trade network—intensified.

2. European powers established colonies in the Americas, the slave trade intensified, and with it the entire international trade network—the American national trade network that arose during the 1500s. The Spanish national trade network known as triangular trade worked in the following way. On the first leg, merchant ships brought European goods—including guns, cloth, and cash—to Africa. In Africa, the enslaved Africans were exchanged for sugar, molasses, and other products manufactured at plantations owned by Europeans.

3. On the final leg, merchants carried sugar, molasses, cotton, and other American goods such as furs, salt fish, and rum made from molasses. These goods were shipped to Europe, where they were traded at a profit for the European commodities that merchants needed to return to Africa.

Vocabulary Builder

- Commodity, p. 123
- Commodity, n. anything bought and sold
- Restrain, p. 125
- Restrain, v. to keep under control or keep from action

WITNESS HISTORY

Forced Into Slavery

“The first object which assaulted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship which was then riding at anchor and sailing for its cargo. Those filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board.”

So wrote Olaudah Equiano. In the 1750s, when he was 11 years old, Equiano was seized from his Nigerian village by slave traders. He was then transported as human cargo from West Africa to the Americas.

Focus Question: How did the Atlantic slave trade shape the fates and economies of Africans and Europeans?

Prepare to Read

Build Background Knowledge

Ask students to recall what they know of the impact the slave trade had on African states. Ask them to predict what impact the trade would have on the American colonies.

Set a Purpose

- Write the section Focus Question and write it on the board. Tell students to refer to this question as they read. (Answer appears with Section 4 Assessment answers.)
- Focus: Point out the Section Focus Question and write it on the board.
- Preview: Have students preview the Section Objectives and the list of Terms, People, and Places.

Note Taking

Have students read this section using the Structured Read Aloud strategy (TE, p. T20). As they read, have students fill in the flowchart with the sequence of events that led to millions of Africans being shipped to the Americas.

Vocabulary Builder

Use the information below and the following resources to teach the high-use words from this section.

High-Use Words

Commodity, p. 123
Restrain, p. 125

Definitions and Sample Sentences

Commodity, n. anything bought and sold in port cities, longshoremen load ships with containers filled with commodities.

Restrain, v. to keep under control or keep from action The trainer taught the girl to restrain her eager dog with a word of command.
Teach

Triangular Trade Across the Atlantic

Instruct

Introduce: Vocabulary Builder
Have students read the Vocabulary Builder terms and definitions. What do they predict will be the commodities discussed here? What commodities might need to be restrained and why?

Teach
Describe the three legs of the triangular trade and explain how the trade worked. Ask What three routes made up the triangular trade and what were the cargoes on each route? (Europe to Africa: cash and goods such as guns and cloth; Africa to the Americas: enslaved Africans; the Americas to Europe or other European colonies in the Americas: sugar, molasses, and cotton.) Who benefited from the traffic in human slaves? (A great many people benefited directly and indirectly, including merchants and port cities in Africa, the Americas, and Europe; shipbuilders in New England; planters in the West Indies, and so on.)

Quick Activity
Show students The Atlantic Slave Trade from the Witness History Discovery School® video program. Ask them to explain the short- and long-term effects of the Atlantic slave trade.

Independent Practice
Biography To help students better understand the tragedy of Africans forced into slavery, have them read the biography Joseph Cingue, who lead the mutiny on the ship Amistad, and complete the worksheet. 

Monitor Progress
As students fill in their flowcharts, circulate to make sure they understand the events that led to millions of Africans being shipped to the Americas. For a completed version of the flowchart, see Note Taking Transparencies, 126

Answer
The triangular trade was immensely profitable to merchants and to industries such as shipbuilding, fishing, tobacco growing, and sugar cane growing and processing.

History Background
African-born or Not? Recent scholarship suggests that Olaudah Equiano may not have been born in Africa. Though historians agree that he was a slave and became a leading spokesperson for the abolitionist movement in the United States, there is evidence (a U.S. Naval document) that suggests he was actually born in South Carolina. This would make his account of his youth in Africa and on the Middle Passage voyage a composite creation, drawn from the lives of others he knew. Some historians believe that Equiano may in fact have lied to the Navy about his birthplace in order to present himself, for reasons unknown, as American-born. If this is the case, the story of his Igbo life in Africa would be true. Even if Equiano was not African-born, historians agree that his story of eighteenth-century African society is accurate and remains a unique and effective way of understanding the past.

Industries and Cities Thrive
Triangular trade was immensely profitable for many people. Merchants grew wealthy. Even though there were risks such as losing ships at sea, the money to be made from valuable cargoes usually outweighed the risks. Certain industries that supported trade thrived. For example, a shipbuilding industry in New England grew to support the shipping industry. Other colonial industries, such as fishing, raising tobacco, and processing sugar, became hugely successful.

Thriving trade led to successful port cities. European cities such as Nantes, France, and Bristol, England, grew prosperous because of triangular trade. In North America, even newly settled towns such as Salem, Massachusetts, and Newport, Rhode Island, quickly grew into thriving cities. Even though few slaves were imported directly to the northern cities, the success of the port cities there was made possible by the Atlantic slave trade.

Checkpoint
How did triangular trade affect colonial economies?
The Trek to the Ships
The terrible journey began before the slave ships set sail. Most Africans were taken from inland villages. After they were enslaved, they were forced to march to coastal ports. Men, women, and children were bound with ropes and chains, often to one another, and forced to walk distances as long as a thousand miles. They might be forced to carry heavy loads, and often the men’s necks were encircled with thick iron bonds.

Many captives died along the way. Others tried to escape, and were often quickly encountered and brutally punished. Those who survived the march were restrained in coastal holding pens and warehouses in slave shipping ports such as Elmina, Ghana, or Goree, Senegal. They were held there until European traders arrived by ship.

Horrors of the Middle Passage

For enslaved Africans, the Middle Passage was a horror. To merchants, the Middle Passage was just one leg of triangular trade.

Horrors of the Middle Passage

With the overwhelming numbers of Africans being transported, the conditions on the ships were deplorable. Many enslaved Africans suffered from disease, malnutrition, and overwork.

To calculate the distance an enslaved African might have traveled to reach the West Indies, have students trace the triangular trade routes on the map. Ask them to calculate the distance an enslaved African from the interior might have traveled to reach the West Indies. Web Code nhp-1541 will take students to an interactive map. Have them complete the interactivity and then answer the questions in the text.

Independent Practice
Circulate to make sure that students are creating accurate charts or graphs, based on the information in this section. Check Reading and Note Taking Study Guide entries for student understanding.

Answers

Thinking Critically

1. Map Skills
   What were slaves exchanged for in the West Indies?

2. Draw Inferences
   Why are there so few first-person slave narratives?

Horrors of the Middle Passage/Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Introduce
Ask students to view the infographic on this page and then read the Cowper poem on the next page. Use the Numbered Heads strategy (TE, p. T23) to give an active class discussion about the various ways people could justify the slave trade.

Teach
Trace the Middle Passage that enslaved Africans faced from capture to forced labor. Ask What does the way Africans were restrained suggest about enslaved Africans’ will to escape? (The severity and ubiquity of the restraints suggest that Africans resisted slavery with all their might and ingenuity and that only iron bands could stop them from escaping.) What impact did the slave trade have on African society? By stealing workers for slave labor, the slave trade devastated African societies, tearing apart families and causing economic and social upheaval.

Analyzing the Visuals
Direct students to the map of the triangular trade. Have students trace the triangular trade routes on the map. Ask them to calculate the distance an enslaved African from the interior might have traveled to reach the West Indies. Web Code nhp-1541 will take students to an interactive map. Have them complete the interactivity and then answer the questions in the text.

Inferencing
Using the text on the next page, have students create a chart or graph showing the approximate number of Africans forced into slavery and sent to the Americas between 1500 and the mid-1800s.

Monitor Progress
Circulate to make sure that students are creating accurate charts or graphs, based on the information in this section. Check Reading and Note Taking Study Guide entries for student understanding.

Vocabulary Builder

Enslaved—(Skr. SPRAWN) v. to keep under control; to keep from action

Adapted Section Summary, p. 144
Adapted Reading and Note Taking Study Guide, p. 143

English Language Learners
Use the following resources to help students acquire basic skills:

Adapted Reading and Note Taking Study Guide
Adapted Note Taking Study Guide, p. 141
Adapted Section Summary, p. 144

Less Proficient Readers
Refer students to the infographic on this page. Remind students that this visual shows the terrible experience Africans faced from the moment they were captured. Divide the infographic into thirds and ask volunteers to explain how the images relate to the capture and transport of slaves to the coast, the Middle Passage, or forced labor in the West Indies.
Answers

1. What do each of the key terms and people listed at the beginning of the section have in common? Explain.

Note Taking

2. Reading SKILL: Recognize Sequence

Use your completed flowchart to answer the Focus Question: How did the Atlantic slave trade shape the lives and economies of Africans and Europeans?

Primary Source

3. William Cooper wrote the following poem in the 1750s. How does he use irony to express his disapproval of the slave trade?

Reading and Note Taking

4. Comprehension and Critical Thinking


2. Recognize Assumptions: What European assumptions about Africans does the Atlantic slave trade show?

3. Predict Consequences: Would the growth of the American colonies have been different if there had been no Atlantic slave trade? Explain.

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Writing About History

Web Code: nba-1541

Writing About History

Quick Write: Gather Evidence to Support a Thesis Statement

Once you have written your thesis statement, gather specific evidence—facts and quotes—that support it. For example, assume for this section that your thesis statement concludes that the Atlantic slave trade was the most influential event of the age of exploration. Gather specific evidence from the section that supports this statement.

For additional assessment, have students access Progress Monitoring Online at Web Code: nba-1541.

Section 4 Assessment

1. The key terms and places all relate to the slave trade. Identify three.

2. It destroyed African economies and societies; it enriched European economies. Identify three.

3. merchant bought goods and slaves to be resold or traded for other goods and slaves; slave was bought and sold; plantation owner bought slaves and used them to produce cash crops

4. It shows that some Europeans assumed that African lives were less important than their own and that trade was more important than African misery.

5. Sample: ‘The colonies’ economies might have grown more quickly because laboring jobs would attract many people and give them money to spend.'