

# Primary Sources on the Middle Passage

## The Institution of Slavery

More important than mercantilism in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was the growth of slavery. By 1750, half of Virginia's population and two-thirds of South Carolina's population were enslaved. Increased Demand for Slaves The following factors explain why slavery became increasingly important, especially in the southern colonies:

1. Reduced migration: Increases in wages in England reduced the supply of immigrants to the colonies.
2. Dependable workforce: Large plantation owners were disturbed by the political demands of small farmers and indentured servants. They thought that slavery would provide a stable labor force totally under their control.
3. Cheap labor: As tobacco prices fell, rice and indigo became the most profitable crops. To grow such crops required a large land area and many inexpensive, relatively unskilled field hands.



## The Triangular Trade and the Middle Passage

Merchant ships would regularly follow a triangular, or three-part, trade route. First, a ship starting from a New England port such as Boston would carry rum across the Atlantic to West Africa. There the rum would be traded for hundreds of captive Africans. Next, the ship would set out on the horrendous **Middle Passage**. Those Africans who survived the frightful voyage would be traded as slaves in the West Indies for a cargo of sugarcane. Third, completing the last side of the triangle, the ship would return to a New England port where the sugar would be sold to be used in making rum. Every time one type of cargo was traded for another, the slave-trading entrepreneur usually succeeded in making a substantial profit.

## Instructions

Read and analyze the three provided 18<sup>th</sup> century primary sources over the Atlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage. Complete the organizer below each source by briefly explaining the document's main points/ideas and HAPP (historical context, audience, purpose, and point of view).

**H**istorical Context- What is going on in this time-period? How is this document influenced by the time-period? Is this document responding to issues in this period?

**A**udience (Intended)- For whom is this document written? How does the audience influence the message put forth in the document?

**P**urpose- What is the author trying to achieve? What impact is the author/ creator trying to have on the intended audience?

**P**oint of View- Do not write this off as just "bias." Why is **this** author putting forth **this** message at **this** time? Why do they have this specific opinion or attitude?

## Primary Source #1-Alexander Falconbridge (1788)

*Alexander Falconbridge was a British surgeon who took part in four voyages on slave ships between 1782-1787. He recorded some of what he witnessed and later went on to become an abolitionist.*

### Space on the Slave Decks

“...they are frequently stowed so close, as to admit of no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks...permit the indulgence of an erect posture; especially where there are platforms, which is generally the case.”

“...But the exclusion of fresh air is among the most intolerable. For the purpose of admitting this needful refreshment, most of the ships in the slave trade are provided, between the decks, with five or six air-ports on each side of the ship, of about five inches in length and four in breadth....But whenever the sea is rough and the rain heavy, it becomes necessary to shut these and every other conveyance by which the air is admitted. The fresh air being thus excluded, the Negroes' rooms soon grow intolerable hot. The confined air, rendered noxious by the effluvia [gases] exhaled from their bodies and being repeatedly breathed, soon produces fevers and fluxes [dysentery] which generally carries off great numbers of them. During the voyages I made, I was frequently witness to the fatal effects of this exclusion of fresh air.

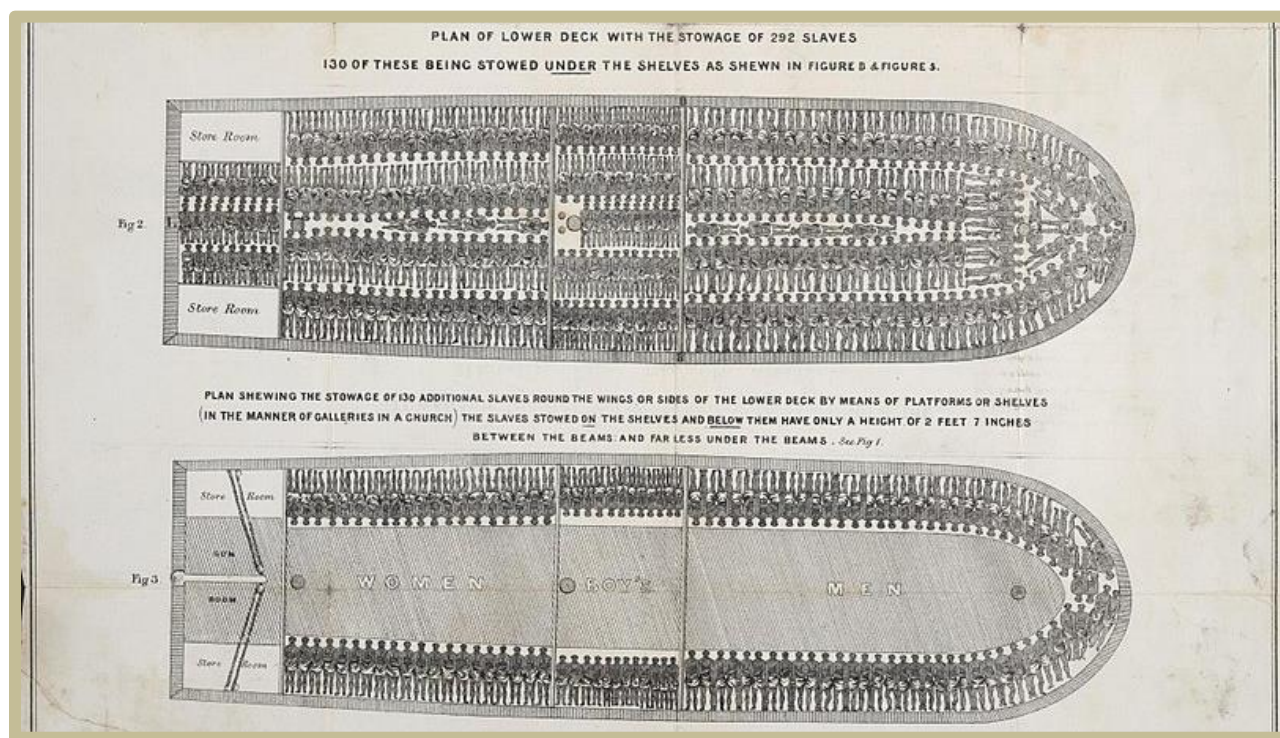
### Food

“...The diet of the Negroes while on board, consists chiefly of horse beans boiled to the consistency of a pulp; of boiled yams and rice and sometimes a small quantity of beef or pork. The latter are frequently taken from the provisions laid in for the sailors. They sometimes make use of a sauce composed of palm-oil mixed with flour, water and pepper, which the sailors call slabber-sauce. Yams are the favorite food of the Eboe or Bight Negroes, and rice or corn of those from the Gold or Windward Coast; each preferring the produce of their native soil....Upon the Negroes refusing to take sustenance, I have seen coals of fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel and placed so near their lips as to scorch and burn them. And this has been accompanied with threats of forcing them to swallow the coals if they any longer persisted in refusing to eat. These means have generally had the desired effect. I have also been credibly informed that a certain captain in the slave-trade, poured melted lead on such of his Negroes as obstinately refused their food....”

Main points/ideas?	
Historical Context	
Audience (Intended)	
Purpose	
Point of View	

## Primary Source #2- The Brooks Slave Ship Plan (1788)

*Brooks* was a British slave ship that launched from Liverpool, England in 1781. Between 1782 and 1804, she made eleven voyages in the triangular slave trade. She became infamous after prints of her “slave packing” were published in 1788. *Brookes* was reportedly allowed to stow 454 African slaves, by allowing a space of 6 feet by 1 foot 4 inches to each man, 5 feet 10 inches by 1 foot 4 inches to each woman, and 5 feet by 1 foot 2 inches to each child. However, a slave trader confessed the *Brookes* had carried as many as 609 slaves at one time.



Main points/ideas?	
Historical Context	
Audience (Intended)	
Purpose	
Point of View	

**Primary Source #3- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, autobiography (1789)**  
*Olaudah Equiano was an African who was transported taken from Africa and enslaved in the New World. Enslaved as a child in Africa, he was shipped to the Caribbean and sold to a Royal Navy officer. He was sold twice more before purchasing his freedom in 1766 and later went on to become a writer and abolitionist.*

**Jumping Overboard**

“One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen 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 quite dejected fellow, who on account of his illness was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and 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. Those of us that were the most active were in a moment put down under the deck, and there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her and get the boat out to go after the slaves. However two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other and afterwards flogged him unmercifully for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery.”

Main points/ideas?	
Historical Context	
Audience (Intended)	
Purpose	
Point of View	

## **SAQ PRACTICE (Atlantic Slave Trade)**

**SAQ # SCORE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer parts A, B, and C.

- A. Explain ONE economic cause of the growth of the Atlantic slave trade.
- B. Explain ONE social effect of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa.
- C. Explain ONE economic effect of the Atlantic slave trade in the Americas.

**ACE the SAQ**

**Answer the question**

**Cite Evidence**

**Explain Evidence**