
Activity 6: The Brookes Slave Ship Image

Introductory Activity

- Feeling the Brookes ship. Ask pupils to move around a space cleared of furniture. Gradually reduce the amount of space available until there is barely room to move at all. Then ask pupils to sit on the floor. There may be some laughing initially, but ask them to keep still and silent for one minute. Then repeat the silence, but this time let the minute overrun. Then ask pupils how they felt. Did they think the second minute was ever going to end? Can they imagine being so cramped for almost half a term?
- Ask pupils in pairs to discuss why the conditions on board ship might have been so awful. Share their thoughts as a class.
- Now ask pupils to look at the image 'Description of a Slave Ship' in detail. Give students some of the statistics relating to the amount of space available.
- Do you think that the space allowance made for each man, woman and child is sufficient? (You could try measuring pupils to see how much space you think each person might need.)

In many cases, merchant ships were modified to transport enslaved Africans to America to work on the plantations. Enslaved Africans were squashed into small spaces on the ships. They were chained together by their hands and feet so they could not move freely. This procedure was adopted as a matter of course when the ship was in port but sometimes during the passage. Many became diseased, malnourished, and some committed suicide. Even with a high death rate and enslaved Africans who were unfit for working, the slave traders still made a big profit. Slave ships sailed from major ports in England such as Liverpool and Bristol and many ship owners were English. The journey could take up to six months yet, despite the brutal conditions, between 80 and 90% of the Africans on board reached their destination alive.

The Brookes slave ship was designed to carry 454 people on each voyage but a House of Commons committee discovered it was actually carrying over 600 enslaved Africans. The abolitionists (people who campaigned

against slavery) used an image of the ship to show the cramped conditions below the decks. This picture shows the ship with 454 Africans on board, the regulated number of enslaved people. The original creator of this image is unknown but it was produced around 1800. It was commissioned by Thomas Clarkson and was based on the measurements presented to Parliament.

Activity 6: The Brookes Slave Ship Image

Points to consider:

Why was this image created?

How effective do you think it was in the movement to stop slavery?

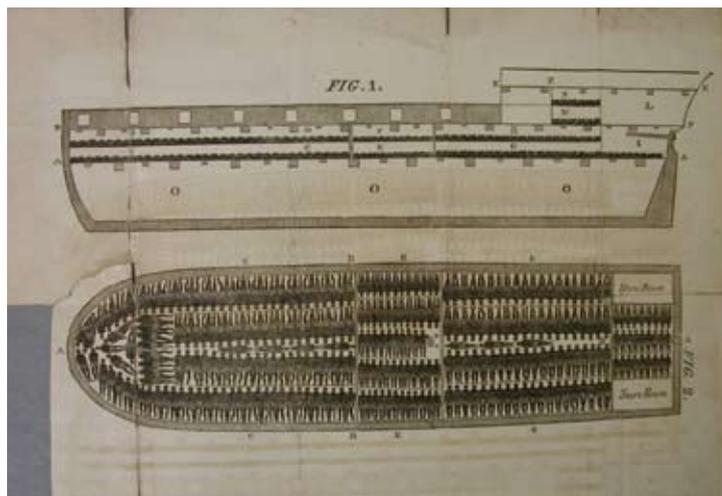
Why did the slave ships carry so many enslaved Africans if they were getting ill and dying from the cramped conditions?

Can you think of any modern day examples of powerful images being used in campaigns?

We do not know who created this image. How reliable do you think it is as a piece of historical evidence?

What does this image make you feel about slavery?

There are two pictures to the right, one is the complete image and one is a detailed close up.

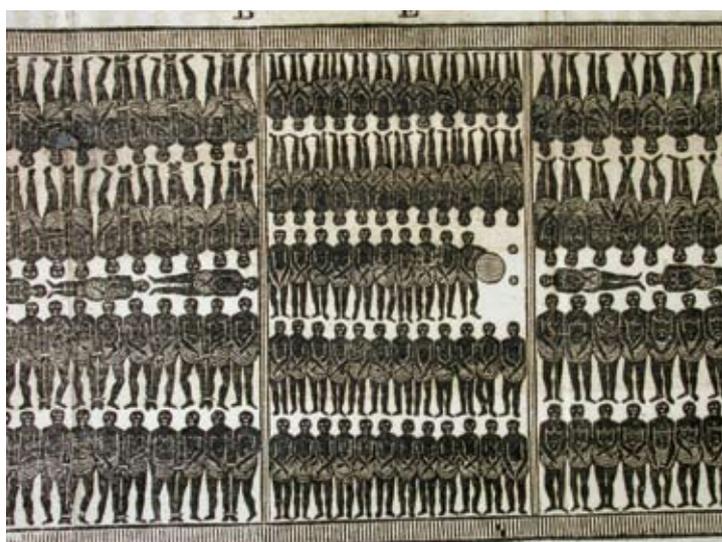


Plan and elevation of accommodation for slaves on board the slave ship 'Brookes'.

Tyne and Wear Archives Service

Extended Work

- Ask pupils to develop an extended piece of writing, which begins ... 'If this ship could speak what story would it tell us?'



Plan of accommodation for slaves on board the slave ship 'Brookes'. (detail)

Tyne and Wear Archives Service