

This picture shows enslaved people on a sugar plantation. They are cutting the sugar cane ready for it to be processed into the grains of sugar that people used in their food and drinks. The picture does not represent the horrible conditions enslaved people worked in or how exhausting this work was.

The Caribbean climate of hot, wet weather provided the perfect conditions for growing sugar. To satisfy the huge demand for sugar in Britain and Europe, vast areas of the islands were cultivated to grow the crop and thousands of enslaved people were imported to do the work.



William Clark, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons British Library

Using the following pictures and online research, write three short paragraphs explaining how these objects can tell us about the history of sugar and slavery. You can print out or draw the objects and add them to your text to make a small museum exhibition display.

FOR TEACHERS

Suggested websites for **you** to use to support the class with this activity: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zjyqtfr/revision/1> & <https://americanhistory.si.edu/on-the-water/living-atlantic-world/new-tastes-new-trades> & <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/story-sugar-5-objects> & <https://www.vam.ac.uk/search?q=slavery&astyped=> & <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/museum-life/wedgwoods-abolition-journey>



Sugar Cane

Sugar cane is a tall grass with fibrous stalks that are high in sucrose, a naturally occurring sugar found in plants.



Petr Adam Dohnálek, CC BY-SA 4.0

Sugar Cone

Raw sugar cane was processed through boiling and filtering until it was ready to pour into cone moulds. The sugar cones were then transported around the world for use in cooking and drinks such as coffee and tea.



Sugar cane knife, 1800s

© National Museum of Denmark

Birmingham was at the forefront of metal tool making. Many Birmingham companies produced metal goods that supported the trade in enslaved people from shackles, trading goods and tools for working on plantations.



Coffee Can and Saucer, 1790, Wedgwood

© Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The demand for luxury goods such as tea, coffee and sugar, increased across Europe during the 18th century. This pressure on production led to an expansion in the trade in enslaved people to work on plantations. Josiah Wedgwood was an important voice against slavery and he strongly supported the abolition of the trade. His company however, did make products such as coffee cups and sugar bowls therefore profiting indirectly from the slave trade.



Sugar Nippers, 18th century, Birmingham Made

© Philadelphia Museum of Art

Sugar nippers were hinged liked scissors and used to break pieces of sugar off the cones. They could be very plain in design, but some were high decorated to show status and wealth. In 1875 Henry Tate bought the patent (certificate of invention) for producing single portions of sugar in cubes. Bags of sugar followed and the use of sugar nippers and sugar cones came to an end.

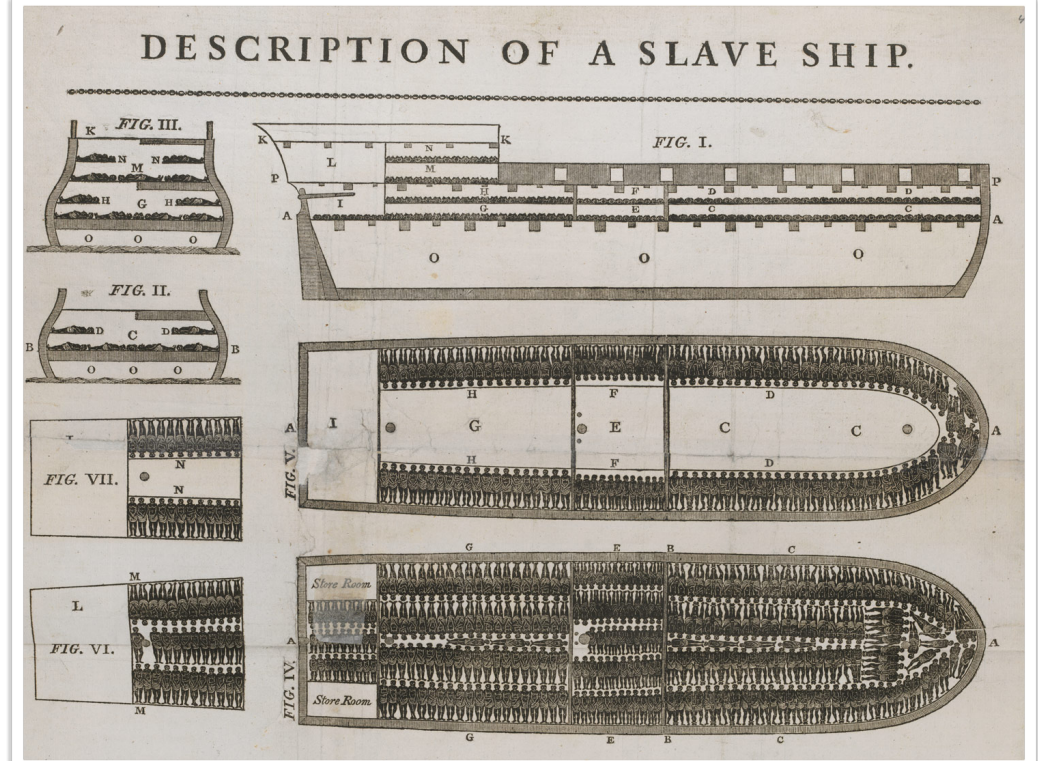


Toussaint L' Ouverture on horseback, 1802

Image & text British Library

Diagram of the Brookes slave-ship, 1808

Image & text British Library



This diagram of the 'Brookes' slave ship is probably the most widely copied and powerful image used by those campaigning to abolish the slave trade in the late 18th century. Created in 1787, the image illustrates how enslaved Africans were transported to the Americas and depicts a slave ship loaded to its full capacity - 454 people crammed into the hold. The 'Brookes' sailed the passage from Liverpool via the west coast of Africa to islands in the Caribbean. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship>

Toussaint L'Ouverture was a former enslaved person who helped fight colonial forces in the French colony of St Domingue (now known as Haiti). The uprising of enslaved people in 1791 led ultimately to the ending of slavery there and the creation of an independent country (Haiti) in 1804. By 1802 he had successfully led black resistance to several European invasions of St Domingue. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/toussaint-louverture-on-horseback>