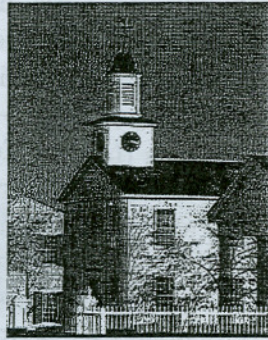


DEBATE AND TOWN MEETING



You have been introduced to the concepts of forced labor in Africa in chapter 14 lesson one. Now, you will be assigned characters to role-play during a mock town meeting. As a group, you must prepare for a debate on the proposed abolition of slavery in Britain and its colonies. You must argue from the point of view of your assigned role rather than your own personal point of view.

It is early nineteenth century (1800) and Britain is trying whether or not to decide whether to abolish slavery. The British government has called the town meeting. The teacher will assume the role as moderator/facilitator. Starting with group #1 (plantation owners in the West Indies), each group will share their positions on the subject and argue their sides. The most useful skill in a debate is the ability to listen critically to all speakers that will reinforce and develop their position. Keep in mind to focus on the following points in your arguments: Economics, moral decision-making and slavery.

Circle your assigned position when it is assigned.

ROLES

1. British citizens owned most of the plantations in the West Indies. The sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations gave their owners great wealth and power. The British owners sold their crops (sugar, coffee, and cotton) to Great Britain at very high prices. Harvesting coffee, sugarcane, and cotton was labor intensive; it took many people to do the work by hand. The enslaved Africans did the harvesting, and the owners depended on slave labor to make profits from the coffee, sugar, and cotton.

2. Merchants in Britain functioned as brokers. They arranged for the trade between Britain and America, between the West Indies and British merchants who brought the enslaved Africans, and among the businesses in Great Britain. The merchants in England and in Western Europe in general sent cotton, liquor, guns, and metalwork to Africa in exchange for enslaved Africans. The people who were made slaves were chained and carried across the ocean in the holds of ships. The enslaved Africans who survived the voyage—more than one-third did not—were sold in the Americas (North, Central, and South) in exchange for sugar, tobacco, rum, and other products. Buyers of the Africans were the owners of the plantations. American products (mostly sugar, coffee, and cotton) were traded to Europe at extremely high prices, netting big profits. These crops were profitable because of the cheap labor provided by enslaved Africans.
3. Enslaved Africans were taken mostly from villages near the coast of West Africa. These men, women, and children were taken from their families by whites or by blacks working with white slave traders. They were branded, chained, and shipped across the ocean in the holds of slave ships. The plantation owners bought them, and the enslaved Africans lived out their lives working in their owners' fields. They were never to see their homes or families in Africa again. Over a period of about 200 years more than fifty million blacks were taken from Africa. Their families never knew what happened to them.
4. Ship builders and ship owners lived mostly in Liverpool and Bristol, seaport cities in England. Once the triangular trade was in place, the shipping trade in these cities increased by five times what it had been. Eric Williams (1966) reports that it was a common saying that the bricks in Bristol and the docks in Liverpool were built with and cemented by the blood of enslaved Africans. The ship owners and ship builders would lose immense amounts of business if the slave trade were to stop, which would mean many of the people they employed would be out of jobs.
5. The peoples of Africa were devastated and brutalized by the slave trade. Approximately fifty million of their strongest, healthiest men and women were stolen from their homes and traded. Tribes began to trade prisoners to the whites for guns, which offered them some protection against other tribes and the slave traders. The African societies were deeply affected by the loss of their young and the fear that drove many tribes to work for the whites.
6. Sailors were employed on ships carrying triangular trade goods. They depended on that trade for work. Shipping increased to a level at least five times what it had been before the slave trade, keeping sailors and those in related trades (boat repair, warehouse workers, refinery workers, barrel and cask makers, and others) in jobs and money. Sugar refinery workers in Bristol petitioned Parliament in 1789 against the abolition of the slave trade, saying that the prosperity of the West Indies depended on continuing the practice.

7. Abolitionists in Britain, the United States, and the British colonies were against the West Indian slave trade, but British capitalism depended on slave-grown cotton from North America and the slave-picked coffee beans and sugarcane of the Indies. The abolitionists, many from religious backgrounds, had to recognize both the moral rightness of their cause and the economic dependence of the British economy. They were not popular with those who depended on the triangular trade, which was nearly everyone.
8. British politicians found themselves in a precarious position. They faced the same combination of factors as the abolitionists did; they might be morally opposed to the slave trade (and some were), but they were responsible to the British citizens who were supported by the trade. These politicians were not often abolitionists, but they were pressured by abolitionists and other citizens to change their policies, despite the economic pressures to continue those policies.
9. The West Indian farmers and peasants were severely affected by the triangular trade. More and more of their farmland was stolen from them by the British so that it could be planted in coffee, cotton, and sugar, which meant that the West Indians had less land on which to farm food. It also meant that they had less chance to make the money they needed to feed themselves and their families. Since enslaved Africans were brought in to work for nothing, the displaced farmers could not even find work on the coffee, cotton, and sugar plantations owned by British citizens. The land was ruined by the cash crops, which destroy soil for other farming.

10) Oba kings of the Benin African Empire were active members in the slave trade. The Oba of the Benin would have their armies gather prisoners from rival empires to trade with European slave entrepreneurs. Throughout the early centuries of the slave trade (1500-1800) the Europeans would trade iron products, guns, liquor, and other raw materials from Europe to Benin in Africa. In return, Benin would give the Europeans African slaves. These slaves would then travel west by ship on the Middle Passage. The Europeans would protect Benin from rival African Empires as well. They would do this by setting up forts and have European military presence in Africa to protect Beninian people. In this situation both the Benin people and the European's would benefit from one another.

11) Freed/Escaped slaves also had an active role in the slave trade. The freed/escaped slaves were able to achieve their freedom by many different means. Some escaped from their owners. Some were eventually given their freedom by their owners because they were sent to the Northern Colonies where slavery was not as prevalent or accepted in society as in the Southern Colonies and the West Indies. Escaped slaves proved to Europeans and the world that they were not inferior, but were able to become active members of society. They became educated, held political powers, and involved themselves in civic activities. Freed/escaped slaves were able to tell anyone that would listen the horrors and atrocities of the slave trade. Their true stories would be used as the justification to end the Atlantic Slave Trade and abolish slavery. They had the mental and physical wounds to prove they were telling the truth.

