

Teacher's Guide 1.1: **What made Thomas Clarkson so angry?**

Pupils' Challenge

Thomas Clarkson was a quiet, hardworking student from Cambridge University.

In 1785 he entered an essay writing competition that changed his life.

Can you work out what made him so upset and angry?

Introduction



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Thomas Clarkson was born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire on 28th March 1760. His father was the local headmaster but he died when Thomas was just six years old.

Thomas worked hard at school and won a place at Cambridge University. His aim was to join the church but in 1785 he entered an essay writing competition that would change his life completely.

As he carried out the research for his essay he became increasingly shocked, angry and upset about what he was reading.

He wrote: "It was but one gloomy subject from morning to night. In the daytime I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief."

The topic for Clarkson's essay was slavery. His tutor Dr. Peckard had set students the title: 'Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their wills?' Clarkson, like many people in Britain at the time, knew very little about the slave trade. However, as he started to read up on the subject he soon began to learn the horrific story .

Starter Task: The whole class uses a picture puzzle ([Resource 1.2](#)), together with other visual and verbal clues, to briefly introduce Thomas Clarkson, relevant local history, his essay on slavery, and to guess what made him so angry.

Use [Resource 1.3](#) to help choose a song. Adapt [Resource 1.2](#) as necessary to reflect connections between Thomas Clarkson and local history.

Display [Resource 1.2](#) on the IWB and ask pupils the following question: What connects the man in the portrait (Thomas Clarkson), the building (*as relevant as possible to your area), the song (recalling slavery) and these objects (sugar, tobacco etc.)? **Feed** in any extra clues and **use** information from [Teacher's Guide 1.1](#) to introduce Clarkson.

Play a song that recalls the history of slavery

Ask pupils what topic they think Clarkson had been given for his University essay? **Feed** in more picture clues and **use** information from [Teacher's Guide 1.1](#) to introduce the connections between Clarkson, Suffolk/Cambridge* and the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Ask pupils what made Thomas Clarkson so angry.

Main Task What was the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade?

Step 1 Overview

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (or Triangular Trade) had three stages:

Stage 1 Britain to Africa

- Slave ships from **Britain** left ports like London, Liverpool and Bristol bound for West Africa carrying goods such as cloth, guns, ironware and drink that had been made in Britain.
- Later, on the West African coast, these goods were traded for men, women and children who had been captured by slave traders or bought from African chiefs.

Stage 2 Africa to the West Indies

- African dealers kidnapped people from villages up to hundreds of miles inland. They marched these people to the coast where they would be traded for goods. The prisoners would be forced to walk long distances with their hands tied behind their backs and their necks connected by wooden yokes.
- On the African coast, European traders bought enslaved peoples from travelling African dealers or nearby African chiefs. Families were separated.
- The traders held the enslaved Africans until a ship appeared, and then sold them to a European or African captain. It often took a long time for a captain to fill his ship. He rarely filled his ship in one spot. Instead he would spend three to four months sailing along the coast looking for the fittest and cheapest slaves.
- Ships would sail up and down the coast filling their holds with enslaved Africans. On the brutal **Middle Passage** enslaved Africans were densely packed onto ships that would carry them to the **West Indies**.
- There were many cases of violent resistance by Africans against slave ships and their crews. These included attacks from the shore by 'free' Africans against ships or longboats and many cases of shipboard revolt by slaves.

Stage 3 West Indies to Britain

- In the **West Indies** enslaved Africans would be sold to the highest bidder at slave auctions.
- Once they had been bought, enslaved Africans worked for nothing on plantations.
- They belonged to the plantation owner like any other possession and had no rights at all. The enslaved Africans were often punished very harshly.
- Enslaved Africans resisted their enslavement in many ways, from revolution to silent, personal resistance. Some refused to be enslaved and took their own lives. Sometimes pregnant women preferred abortion to bringing a child into slavery.
- On the plantations many enslaved Africans tried to slow down the pace of work by pretending to be ill, causing fires or 'accidentally' breaking tools. Whenever possible, enslaved Africans ran away. Some escaped to South America, England or North America. Also there were hundreds of slave revolts.
- Two thirds of enslaved Africans taken to the Americas ended up on sugar plantations. Sugar was used to sweeten another crop harvested by enslaved Africans in the West Indies – coffee.

- With the money made from the sale of enslaved Africans, goods such as sugar, coffee and tobacco were bought and carried back to Britain for sale.

Pupils' Task: Use stimulus material from a variety of websites together with [Teacher's Guide 1.1](#) to give a brief overview of the triangular trade.

Bring this to life by using the classroom as a 'living map' of the North Atlantic coast line – see plan ([Resource 1.4](#)) - exploring the capture, exchange, transportation and sale of enslaved Africans using role play and objects (such as cloth, toy guns, beads, manufactured goods, sugar, coffee, tobacco).

Extension Task: To reinforce their learning, pupils could match images of the trans-atlantic slave trade with one of the three stages of the trade triangle.

(Create a slide show of images to illustrate the stages using the links provided in [Useful websites](#)).

Useful definitions

Slave

To be a slave is to be owned by another person.

A slave is a human being classed as property who is forced to work for nothing.

Slavery

Slavery refers to a condition in which individuals are owned by others, who control where they live and what work they do. Slavery had previously existed throughout history, in many times and most places. The ancient Greeks, the Romans, Incas and Aztecs all had slaves.

Chattel Slave

A chattel slave is an enslaved person who is owned forever and whose children and children's children are automatically enslaved. Chattel slaves are individuals treated as complete property to be bought and sold.

Chattel slavery was supported and made legal by European governments and monarchs. This type of enslavement was practised in European colonies from the sixteenth century onwards.

Enslaved person

An enslaved person is an human being who is made to be a slave. This language is often used instead of the word slave, to refer to the person and their experiences and to avoid the use of dehumanising language.

Step 2 Dig deeper

A brief history of trans-atlantic slavery

1) What was Africa like before the trans-atlantic slave trade was established?

Many Europeans thought that Africa's history was not important. They argued that Africans were inferior to Europeans and they used this to help justify slavery. However, the reality was very different. A study of African history shows that Africa was by no means inferior to Europe. As you can see below, the people who suffered the most from the trans-atlantic slave trade were civilised, organised and technologically advanced peoples, long before any European had time to suggest they were backward peoples.

Egypt was the first of many great African civilisations. It lasted thousands of years and achieved many magnificent and incredible things in the fields of science, mathematics, medicine, technology and the arts. Egyptian civilisation was over 2,000 years old even before the city of Rome was built.

In the west of Africa, the kingdom of **Ghana** was a vast Empire that spread across an area the size of Western Europe. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries it traded in gold, salt and copper. It was like a medieval European empire, with a collection of powerful local rulers, controlled by one King or emperor. Ghana was highly advanced and prosperous. It is said that the Ghanaian ruler had an army of 200,000 men.

The kingdoms of **Benin** and **Ife** were led by the Yoruba people and sprang up between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Ife civilisation goes back as far as 500BC and its people made objects from bronze, brass, copper, wood and ivory. Studies of Benin show that they were highly skilled in ivory carving, pottery, rope and gum production.

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, the kingdom of **Mali** spread across much of West and North-East Africa. At its largest, the kingdom was 2,000 kilometres wide and there was an organised trading system with gold dust and agricultural produce being exported north. Mali reached its peak in the fourteenth century. Cowrie shells were used as a form of currency and gold, salt and copper were traded.

Between 1450-1550, the **Songhay** kingdom grew very powerful and prosperous. It had a well organised system of government, imported fabrics from Europe and a developed currency. Timbuktu became one of the most important places in the world. Libraries and universities were built and it became the meeting place for poets, scholars and artists from other parts of Africa and the Middle East.

Forms of slavery existed in Africa before Europeans arrived. Some countries in the African continent had their own systems of slavery. People were enslaved as punishment for a crime, payment for a debt or as a prisoner of war. African slavery was different from what was to come later:

- Most enslaved people were captured in battle.
- In some kingdoms, temporary slavery was a punishment for some crimes.
- In some cases, enslaved people could work to buy their freedom.
- Children of enslaved people did not automatically become slaves.

2) How did the arrival of European traders change Africa?

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries European traders (mostly from Portugal) started to get involved in the slave trade. European traders had previously been interested in African nations and kingdoms such as Ghana and Mali due to their sophisticated trading networks. Traders then wanted to trade in human beings. They took enslaved people from western Africa to Europe and the Americas.

At first this was on quite a small scale, but the slave trade grew during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as European countries conquered much of the Caribbean islands and North

and South America. The Europeans wanted to enslave people to work in mines and on tobacco plantations in South America and on sugar plantations in the West Indies. Millions of Africans were enslaved and forced across the Atlantic as labourers.

Slavery changed when **Europeans** became involved as it led to generation after generation of peoples being taken from their homelands and enslaved forever. It led to people being legally defined as a **chattel slave**.

A chattel slave is an enslaved person who is owned forever, and whose children and children's children are automatically enslaved. Chattel slaves are individuals treated as complete property to be bought and sold. Chattel slavery was supported and made legal by European governments and monarchs. This type of enslavement was practised in European colonies from the sixteenth century onwards.

- Europeans wanted lots of slaves so people were captured to be made slaves.
- Enslaved Africans were transported huge distances to work. They had no chance of returning home.
- Children whose parents were enslaved became slaves as well.

Some African rulers fought against the slave trade. However, other African rulers were willing to supply European traders with the extra enslaved people they wanted. As demand grew some African traders started to capture other Africans and sell them to the Europeans. The British, French and Portuguese often helped these rulers in wars against their enemies. African rulers who were willing to supply enslaved Africans became very rich and powerful. They became well armed with guns from Europe. The numbers of wars increased and they became more violent because of the guns African rulers received from Europe. Many Africans died for every enslaved person who was eventually sold.

3) Who benefited from the slave trade?

British involvement in the slave trade

For 300 years European countries forced Africans onto slave ships and transported them across the Atlantic Ocean. French, British, Dutch and Portuguese traders and nations overall made a great deal of money.

By the 18th century Britain dominated the slave trade. As demand for goods such as sugar grew, more and more Africans were taken to the West Indies to work as slaves on the plantations. 80,000 chained and shackled Africans were loaded onto British slave ships and transported across the Atlantic Ocean each year. 40,000 were carried by British slave ships.

The profits gained from slavery helped to finance the Industrial Revolution and the Caribbean islands became the hub of the British Empire. The sugar colonies were Britain's most valuable colony. By the end of the eighteenth century £4 million came into Britain from its West Indian plantations, compared with £1 million from the rest of the world.

Profit

In the slave trade triangle, ships never sailed empty and some people made enormous profits. The slave trade was the richest part of Britain's trade in the 18th century. Between 1750 and 1780 about 70% of the government's total income came from taxes on goods from its colonies. The money made on the Trans-atlantic Slave Trade triangle was vast and poured into Britain and other European countries involved in slavery, changing these countries' landscapes forever. In Britain, those who had made much of their wealth from the trade built fine mansions, established banks such as the Bank of England and funded new industries.

Who profited?

- British slave ship owners – Some voyages made 20-50% profit. Large sums of money were made by ship owners who never left England.

- British Slave Traders – who bought and sold enslaved Africans.
- Plantation Owners – who used slave labour to grow their crops. Vast profits could be made by using unpaid workers. Planters often retired to Britain with the profits they made where they had grand country houses built for them. Some planters used the money they had made to become MPs. Others invested their profits in new factories and inventions, helping to finance the Industrial Revolution.
- The factory owners in Britain – who had a market for their goods. Textiles from Yorkshire and Lancashire were bought by slave-captains to barter with. One half of the textiles produced in Manchester were exported to Africa and half to the West Indies. In addition, industrial plants were built to refine the imported raw sugar. Glassware was needed to bottle the rum.
- West African leaders involved in the trade – who captured people and sold them as slaves to Europeans.
- The ports – Bristol and Liverpool became major ports through fitting out slave ships and handling the cargoes they brought back. Between 1700 and 1800, Liverpool's population rose from 5,000 to 78,000.
- Bankers – Banks and finance houses grew rich from the fees and interest they earned from merchants who borrowed money for their long voyages.
- Ordinary people – The slave trade provided many jobs for people back in Britain. Many people worked in factories that sold their goods to West Africa. These goods would then be traded for enslaved Africans. Birmingham had over 4,000 gun-makers, with 100,000 guns a year going to slave-traders. Others worked in factories that had been set up with money made from the slave trade. Many trades-people bought a share in a slave ship. Slave labour also made goods such as sugar more affordable for people living in Britain.

Pupils' Task: Ask pupils what they think was the main reason why people in Britain supported slavery. Ask them to place the following three factors in order of importance and explain their answer: Greed, Ignorance, Racism.

Create a slide show of images to illustrate the information using the links provided in [Useful websites](#). Use the following questions to focus group research, feeding in information as necessary using [Teacher's Guide 1.1](#):

- (1) What was Africa like before the transatlantic slave trade was established?
- (2) How did the arrival of European traders change Africa?
- (3) Who benefited from the slave trade?
- (4) Why did so many British people support the slave trade?

Plenary Why was Thomas Clarkson so angry?

Pupils summarise why Clarkson became so upset/angry because of his research.