

Olaudah Equiano Recalls The Middle Passage

Answer Key



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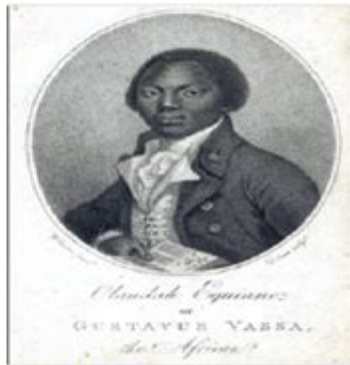
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Olaudah Equiano Recalls the Middle Passage

By Olaudah Equiano
1789

Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), known by people as Gustavus Vassa, was a freed slave turned prominent African man in London. Equiano became an abolitionist and began to record his life story after being freed. The following text is an excerpt from Equiano's autobiography, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, in which Equiano tells the tale of his brutal voyage across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. As you read, take note of Equiano's use of imagery and figurative language to depict his experience on the ship.

[1] The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country.



"Olaudah Equiano" by Unknown is in the public domain.

When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I felt motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not...

Soon after this the blacks who brought me onboard went off, and left me abandoned to despair. I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery¹ in preference to my

1. Possibly a reference to Equiano's earlier kidnapping in Nigeria, before being sold into slavery.

Understanding Olaudah Equiano's Account of the Middle Passage

Olaudah Equiano recalls the Middle Passage in his autobiography, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano," which provides a harrowing yet enlightening perspective on the transatlantic slave trade. Equiano, a prominent African abolitionist and former enslaved person, chronicles his experiences from his capture in Africa to his eventual

freedom. His detailed narrative sheds light on the brutal realities of the Middle Passage, the journey undertaken by enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. This article will explore Equiano's recollections, the historical context of the Middle Passage, and its significance in understanding the implications of slavery.

The Historical Context of the Middle Passage

The Middle Passage refers to the stage of the triangular trade in which millions of enslaved Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas. Spanning from the 16th to the 19th centuries, this horrific journey was characterized by extreme overcrowding, disease, and inhumane treatment. Understanding the historical backdrop of this period is crucial to grasping the depth of Equiano's narrative.

1. The Triangular Trade:

- The triangular trade was a system of transatlantic trade routes connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas.
- European traders would exchange goods for enslaved Africans, who were captured and sold into slavery.
- The journey w

Frequently Asked Questions

What was the Middle Passage as described by Olaudah Equiano?

The Middle Passage refers to the brutal sea voyage that enslaved Africans were forced to endure while being transported from Africa to the Americas, characterized by overcrowded ships, inhumane conditions, and high mortality rates.

How does Equiano's account of the Middle Passage contribute to our understanding of slavery?

Equiano's detailed narrative provides a personal perspective on the horrors of the Middle Passage, highlighting the physical and psychological trauma experienced by enslaved individuals, thus enriching historical understanding of the slave trade.

What emotions does Equiano express in his recollections of the Middle Passage?

Equiano expresses profound fear, despair, and anguish during his recollections of the Middle Passage, illustrating the deep psychological impact of the experience on those who were enslaved.

In what ways did Equiano's narrative influence public perception of slavery in his time?

Equiano's narrative raised awareness about the inhumanity of the slave trade, mobilizing public sentiment against slavery and contributing to abolitionist movements in Britain and beyond.

What literary techniques does Equiano use to convey the horrors of the Middle Passage?

Equiano employs vivid imagery, emotional appeals, and firsthand testimonies to convey the horrors of the Middle Passage, making his narrative both compelling and persuasive.

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