School of History

The Shaping of a Port City: Liverpool and the Slave Trade

The impact of Liverpool’s slave trading past is still visible in the architecture of the city today: the city quite literally took shape in the 18th Century, when Liverpool became the European capital of the slave trade. We will explore the material culture of the city and the individuals whose part in its transformation was slavery related. We will also consider the impact of this history on the city today and how it has been remembered.

Aims

- To use the material culture of the city as a vehicle for historical interpretation.
- To use primary evidence such as diaries and letters, ships’ logs, letter books, parish records, wills and maps as a window to the merchant community of the second half of the 18th century and the town they inhabited.
- To consider the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade on the character and perceptions of Liverpool today.
- To use the students’ own knowledge and understanding of history to draw parallels with the rise of Liverpool.
- To consider the role of museums in transmitting memory.
- To encourage students to conduct their own research and attempt written responses

Learning Outcomes

- An understanding of the sensitive and contentious nature of the study of transatlantic slavery.
- An understanding of the relationship between historical interpretation and cultural context.
- Make deductions on the basis of applied criteria.
- Distinguish between fact, opinion, prejudice and stereotype.

Teaching and learning strategies

A combination of teacher lead sessions, collaborative work and fieldwork.

Session One, Tutor One (AR): The Zong Massacre

The details of this shocking event were exposed in a trial in London in 1783. This was not a trial for murder but an insurance claim: the insurers had refused to pay up after the Zong’s captain had thrown 132 enslaved Africans overboard, alive, in order to obtain the compensation.

The ship’s owners were the Liverpool firm of William Gregson and Sons, slave traders, and Lord Mayors of the town: Gregson’s Well and Gregson Street are reminders of this family’s businesses.
Using a Powerpoint presentation we will explore how the Zong Massacre reveals the reality of the slave trade, a truth which had been concealed because of the profits it made for those involved in Liverpool and the rest of the country.

**Session Two, Tutor One: Why Slavery? Why Liverpool?**

Using the International Slavery Museum as a source we will use the second gallery *The Economics of Slavery* to discover how Liverpool and the North West were transformed by the involvement in the slave trade and trade with the plantations in the Americas. Here we will focus on the journals and correspondence of the enslaved Africans and the captains, merchants and suppliers of trade goods to see how the slave trade operated.

In this section the students will be organised in groups of four to investigate and report back on the different sections of this gallery.

**Session Three: Tutor One: How Slavery Has Been Remembered: Critiquing the Slavery Museum**

The students will once again operate in groups of four: they will be allocated one of the seven sections of the museum and will give a general appraisal the effectiveness of this section to focusing on the following criteria in particular

- identify what are the *key messages* which you think the Museums’ creators were aiming to put across.
- how has colour and design been used to create an atmosphere?
- what sort of images have been used and how do they make you feel?
- which image/ object/ story or installation has provoked the strongest response from you – explain why.

Together we will discuss the role of museums in transmitting the past

**Session One, Tutor Two (LW): Built on Slavery?**

This session will highlight important buildings in the city that have a connection to slavery and the slave trade. The history of these buildings will help to demonstrate how wealth from the trade was responsible for the improvement, development and growth of the fabric of the city, including many of the town’s most important historic buildings and institutions

**Session Two, Tutor Two (LW): Staying Power**

Session Two will focus on the history of black people in Liverpool, demonstrating how the townspeople’s involvement in the slave trade brought a black presence to the port during the 18th
century. These events have led to a continual presence in the town establishing what is considered to be Britain’s oldest black community.

Session Three, Tutor Two (LW): From Struggling Seaport to Second City of the Empire

Students will learn how slavery and the slave trade helped to boost Liverpool’s economy in various diverse ways during the 18th and 19th centuries. This fillip was an important factor in Liverpool transforming itself from a port mainly concerned in trade with Ireland and other areas of Britain to the town becoming a major world trading centre having mercantile connections with most regions of the globe.

Group Presentation Titles

How important was the slave trade for Liverpool in the 18th century?

OR

How did slavery impact on the built environment of Liverpool?

OR

How has the slave trade been remembered in Liverpool?

Liverpool and the Slave Trade - Online collections

- Liverpool and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles ed, Liverpool Maritime Museum 2007, Google Books online This is essential reading.
- Especially:
- Chapter 1 Liverpool’s Dominance in the British Slave Trade 1740-1807, Kenneth Morgan,
- Chapter 8, Cemented in Blood, Jane Longmore, p 227
- and Chapter 7, The Wealth and Social Aspirations Of Liverpool’s Slave Merchants.. P164
http://books.google.com/books?id=leM1rrKIQosC&pg=PA135&lpg=PA135&dq=Liverpool+and+the+slave+Trade,+Anthony+Tibbles&source=bl&ots=1UXQPTgO33&sig=Ec_hJ8OXLdZRjNSY0HWwWvAZHXs&hl=en&ei=XUWHTNeQD9OQjAf7IKmiCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&sqi=2&ved=0CDwQ6AEwCQ#v=snippet&q=Jane%20Longmore&f=false


http://www.ihbc.org.uk/context_archive/108/slavery/one.html

Collections of Liverpool records online including the 1766 directory of merchants tradesmen and principal inhabitants.
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=cxlHAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&q=1766+liverpool#v=onepage&q&f=false

See how many inhabitants identify themselves as slave traders?

A contemporary account of Liverpool in 1812 (just after the Abolition of the Slave Trade (bear in mind that this does not have access to all the data about Liverpool and the slave trade (p 19-35))
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=VZABAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&q=stranger+in+liverno#v=onepage&q&f=false