
Darwin and slavery



Activity 1: Design an anti-slavery logo and motto
Subject: History / Design and Technology
2 x 50 Minutes

Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[Darwin and slavery](#)

What do I need?

[Who's who](#)

[Slavery factfile](#)

[Letter 206](#) Charles Darwin to Catherine Darwin, 22 May - 14 July 1833

[Letter 219](#): Susan Darwin to Charles Darwin, 15 October 1833

[Letter questions](#)

Learn about Darwin's views on slavery and key people (and objects) in the British anti-slavery movement. Design your own logo/emblem to send out a message against human trafficking today.

What do I do?

1. Read through 'Who's who?' and slavery factfile.
2. Read through the letters and answer the letters questions.
3. Read the story of the Wedgwood medallion.
4. Using all that you have read, discuss:
What does the medallion mean? Why was it made? Who was it for? Why do you think it was so successful?
5. Design a logo/emblem and a slogan for a fashion item that could be used as a statement against modern human trafficking/slavery.
6. Present and explain your design to the class and vote for the most successful design.

Darwin and slavery

Who's who?

Thomas Clarkson

Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) was a leading campaigner against the slave trade in Britain and worldwide. After publishing a pamphlet against slavery in 1786, he took a leading role in the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Josiah Wedgwood and William Wilberforce were also members. Clarkson spent years of his life travelling around Britain researching and raising public awareness of the horrors of the slave trade. His actions helped ensure that the 1807 Slave Trade Act was passed.



Image of Thomas Clarkson ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 235. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Caroline Darwin

Caroline Sarah Darwin (1800-1888) was Darwin's sister. He wrote to her whilst on the *Beagle* voyage. She married their cousin Josiah Wedgwood II in 1837.

Catherine Darwin

Emily Catherine Darwin (1810-1866) was Darwin's sister. In a letter he wrote to her whilst on the *Beagle* voyage, he told her he hoped that England might be the first European nation to abolish slavery.

Darwin and slavery: Who's who?

Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



Susan Darwin

Susan Darwin (1803-66) was Darwin's sister. They wrote regularly to each other during the *Beagle* voyage. She conveyed much family news to him and referred to herself as 'Granny' in her letters as she was always giving him advice. She also corrected his grammar and spelling.

Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano (born around 1745-1797) was enslaved as a child and taken from Nigeria to North America. He became the slave of a naval captain who renamed him and they travelled extensively. Equiano eventually bought his freedom and travelled to London where he was encouraged by abolitionists to write his life story. *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* was first published in 1789. It was one of the first publications by an African writer to be widely read in England. Through its success he was able to fund educational and economic projects in Africa and London.



Darwin and slavery: Who's who?

Asa Gray

Asa Gray (1810–88) was an American botanist. He wrote numerous botanical textbooks and works on North American flora. Gray was appointed Professor of Natural History at Harvard University in 1842, a post he held until his death in 1888. He was president of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Darwin started to write to him in 1855, and they corresponded until Darwin's death, exchanging around 300 letters. Gray was one of Darwin's leading supporters in America. He was also a devout Presbyterian. The longest running and most significant exchange of correspondence for Darwin dealing with the subjects of design in nature and religious belief was with Asa Gray.



Mary Prince

Mary Prince (born around 1788) was born into slavery in Bermuda. At the age of 12, she was sold for £38. After suffering floggings and hardships from several owners she married a former slave who had bought his freedom. Prince travelled to London, England, in 1828 as a domestic slave but was soon made homeless. She was persuaded to publish her life story as a means to promote the abolition cause. *The History of Mary Prince* was published in 1831. Slavery was illegal in Britain at this time but not in Prince's homeland. It is not known whether she was ever able to return home as a free woman.



Josiah Wedgwood

Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95) is most famous for his role in establishing the Wedgwood family pottery company but he was also a social reformer. In 1787 he became a leading member of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and remained active in anti-slavery reform throughout his life. He was close friends with William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson; leading abolition campaigners and reformers. Josiah Wedgwood was Charles Darwin's grandfather.

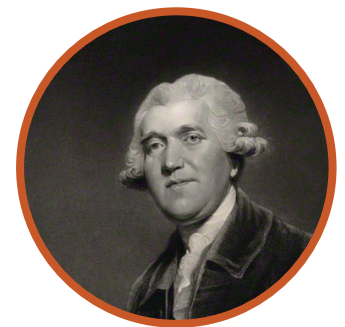


Image of Josiah Wedgwood ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG D37630. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Darwin and slavery: Who's who?

William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a British politician and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. He was an evangelical Christian and with Thomas Clarkson and writer and social reformer Hannah More, and others, joined the Testonites (a group of abolition activists who met in Teston, Kent). Wilberforce led the parliamentary campaign against slavery for 26 years before the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807. His strongly conservative values meant that his policies for the UK came under attack. Wilberforce died 3 days after hearing that the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 had been passed.



Image of William Wilberforce ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG D11346. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Britain and the Slave Trade

Slavery factfile

1787 - Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade formed. It had 12 members, including Thomas Clarkson. The majority of members were Quakers.

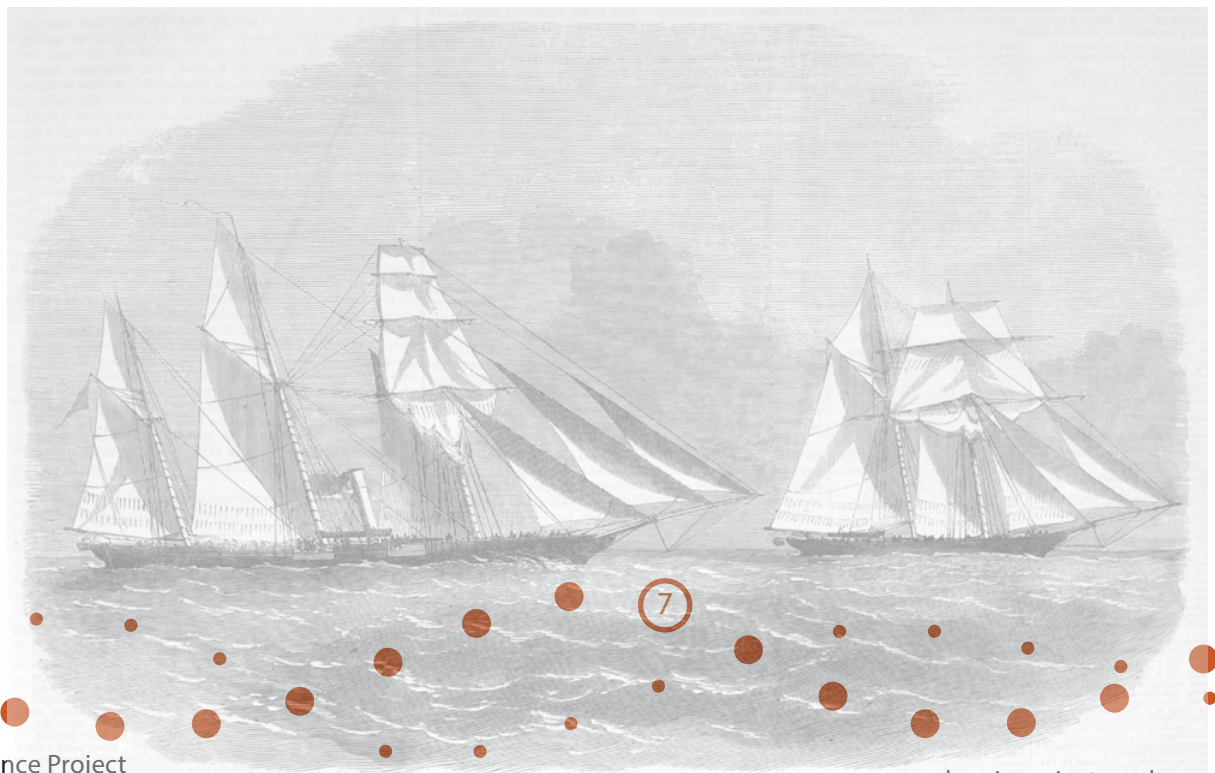


1789 - Olaudah Equiano's autobiography was published.

Equiano was kidnapped as a child and sold as a slave to a Royal Navy officer in Virginia. He finally bought his freedom and joined abolitionists in Britain. His autobiography, *'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African'*, was a widely read and influential account.

1807 - Slave Trade Act.

The act abolished trade in the British Empire but not slavery itself.



Britain and the Slave Trade: Key dates and facts

1823 - Anti-Slavery Society was formed.

Members included Thomas Clarkson, Josiah Wedgwood, and William Wilberforce.



1831 - The Baptist War

Major revolt of enslaved Africans broke out in Jamaica, led by Baptist preacher Sam Sharpe. It was brutally suppressed and led to around 500 deaths. The two resulting enquiries are thought to have contributed to the Slavery Abolition Act, 1833.



1831 - *The History of Mary Prince: a West Indian Slave* is published

Mary Prince's autobiography describes her treatment as a slave in the Caribbean. Prince was born in Bermuda and sold at the age of 12. She was then passed 'from one butcher to another' and suffered years of torture. She came to England as a servant in 1828 and was encouraged to share her story by abolition campaigners. It is not known whether she returned home.

THE
HISTORY OF MARY PRINCE,
A WEST INDIAN SLAVE.
RELATED BY HERSELF.

8

The image shows the front cover of the book 'The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself'. The cover is made of aged, yellowish-brown paper. The title is printed in a serif font, with 'THE' at the top, 'HISTORY OF MARY PRINCE,' in the middle, and 'A WEST INDIAN SLAVE.' at the bottom. Below the title, it says 'RELATED BY HERSELF.' There is a small circular stamp with the number '8' in the center. The book is tilted slightly to the right.

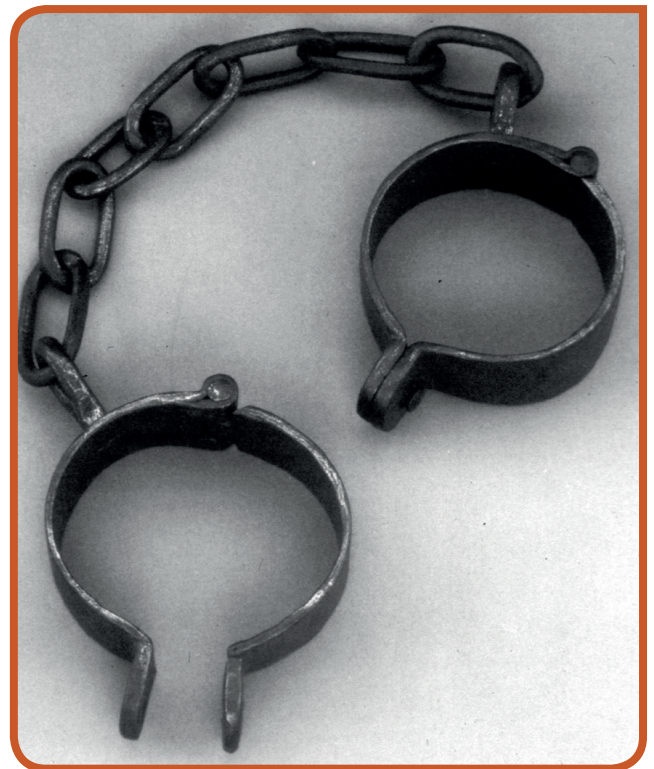
Britain and the Slave Trade: Key dates and facts

1833 - Slavery Abolition Act

The act abolished slavery throughout the British Empire (with initial exceptions of the territories held by the East India Company, Ceylon and St Helena). The Act applied only to those under the age of 6. Those older were forced to become apprentices. The Government paid out £20 million in compensation (roughly 40% of annual expenditure) for the loss of business assets.

1838 - The Apprenticeship scheme failed.

Full emancipation was granted in the British Empire.



Slave manacles

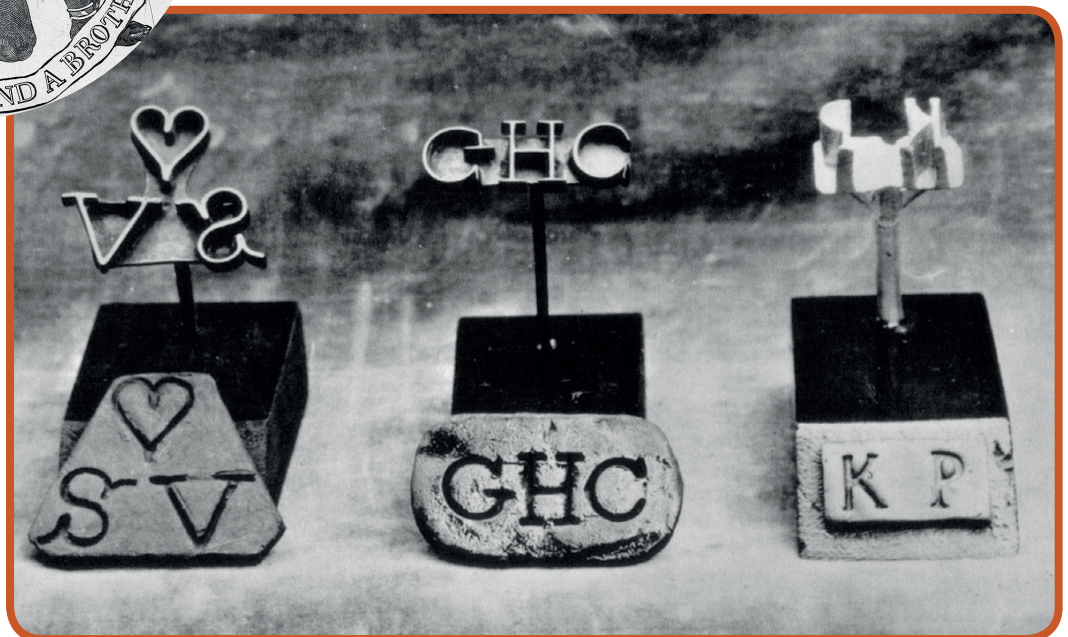


1839 - British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society founded

It exists today as Anti-slavery International..

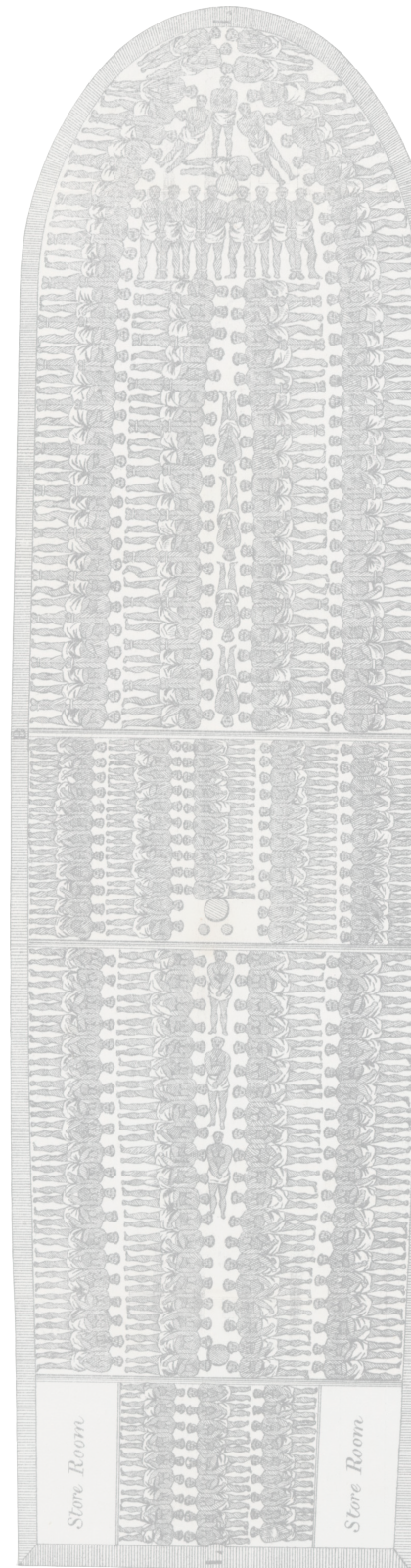
Slave branding irons

Images: www.slaveryimages.org, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library.



Facts

- The Middle Passage refers to the journey by sea between Africa and the Americas during which so many enslaved people lost their lives due to the appalling living conditions on board ship.
- By the middle of the 18th century British ships were carrying about 50,000 slaves a year. Royal Navy sailors said that they could smell the stench of a slave ship from 10 miles downwind.
- Between 10 and 28 million people were taken from Africa.
- At least 12 million Africans were taken across the Atlantic to North and South America and the West Indies.
- Up to 20% of them died chained in the holds of the slave ships during the journey.
- Britain had one of the worst records in transatlantic slave trading – around 2.5 million people in the 18th century.



The Brookes slave ship

www.slaveryimages.org, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library.

Letter 206: Charles Darwin to Catherine Darwin, 22 May
1833

Maldonado. Rio Plata
May 22d. 1833

My dear Catherine

... I have watched how steadily the general feeling, as shown at elections, has been rising against Slavery.— What a proud thing for England, if she is the first European nation which utterly abolishes it.— I was told before leaving England, that after living in Slave countries: all my opinions would be altered; the only alteration I am aware of is forming a much higher estimate of the Negro's character.— it is impossible to see a negro & not feel kindly towards him; such cheerful, open honest expressions & such fine muscular bodies; I never saw any of the diminutive Portuguese with their murderous countenances, without almost wishing for Brazil to follow the example of Hayti; & considering the enormous healthy looking black population, it will be wonderful if at some future day it does not take place.

— There is at Rio, a man (I know not his titles) who has large salary to prevent (I believe) the landing of slaves: he lives at Botofogo, & yet that was the bay, where during my residence the greater number of smuggled slaves were landed.— Some of the Anti-Slavery people ought to question about his office: it was the subject of conversation at Rio amongst some of the lower English.—...

Charles Darwin

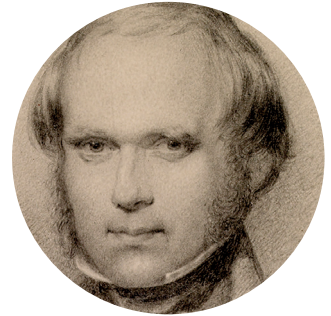


Letter 219: Susan Darwin to Charles Darwin, 15 October 1833

Shrewsbury
Oct 15th. 1833

My dear Charles.

...— I think Papa particularly enjoyed your last letter & desires me to tell you most affectionately from him that he is exceedingly glad you have engaged a Servant as he is sure it will conduce very much to your comfort & only regrets you had not one sooner.— Pray tell us next time what countryman he is? if he had been a Negro, you wd. have said so I am sure: when you were praising their character— I have copied out what you say about the ill conduct of the man appointed to prevent Slaves Landing at Rio & I shall shew it At Sarah who will I daresay take notice of it.....



I have just been reading an account of Ceylon in a kind of novel called "Cinnamon & Pearls" the descriptions of the vegetation are so beautiful that I don't wonder you have a great desire to go there as of course you have read some more faithful history of it in Humboldt.— I have a much greater wish to see some tropical country than the old common place France & Italy—and I wonder people don't travel more to Madeira than sticking to Europe.— You will rejoice as much as we do over Slavery being abolished, but it is a pity the Apprenticeship does not commence till next August as that is a great while for the poor Slaves to be at the mercy of the Planters who I shd. think wd. treat them worse than ever.— I grudge too very much the 20 million compensation money: but perhaps it would never have been settled without this sum.—The Poor Laws in Ireland will I suppose next Session be the great topic of interest. I have been reading some pamphlets which make me rather against the system.—

...Letter comes from you & your absence does not make you at all less loved I can promise you by every one of us & all who know you. God bless you my dearest old fellow & Believe me always yr most affecte Granny

Susan Darwin.

Letter questions:

1. In letter 206 to Catherine, Darwin says that people expected that visiting 'slave countries' would change his view of slavery. What do you think were the expected changes and why?
2. How has his view changed in reality?
3. How does he talk about other races and peoples in the letter? What does it tell us about him and the time that he was writing?
4. In letter 219, Susan mentions the Apprenticeship, which was part of the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. Use your factfile to explain what she is referring to.
5. What is the £20 million compensation money and why does Susan begrudge it?

Josiah Wedgwood and the anti-slavery medallion

Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95) is most famous for his role in establishing the Wedgwood family pottery company but he was also a social reformer. In 1787 he became a leading member of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and remained active in anti-slavery reform throughout his life. He was close friends with William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson; leading abolition campaigners and reformers.



Wedgwood used the seal of the Society to create a medallion that was mass produced and widely distributed (at his own cost).

The medallion became very popular and was worn in bracelets, brooches and necklaces. It also appeared on snuff boxes and was hung on walls. Wherever it was displayed the medallion showed the wearer's support of the anti-slavery cause. The image is now the best known of the anti-slavery campaign at that time. Wedgwood is celebrated for his early use of marketing techniques to ensure that his message reached a wide audience.



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