

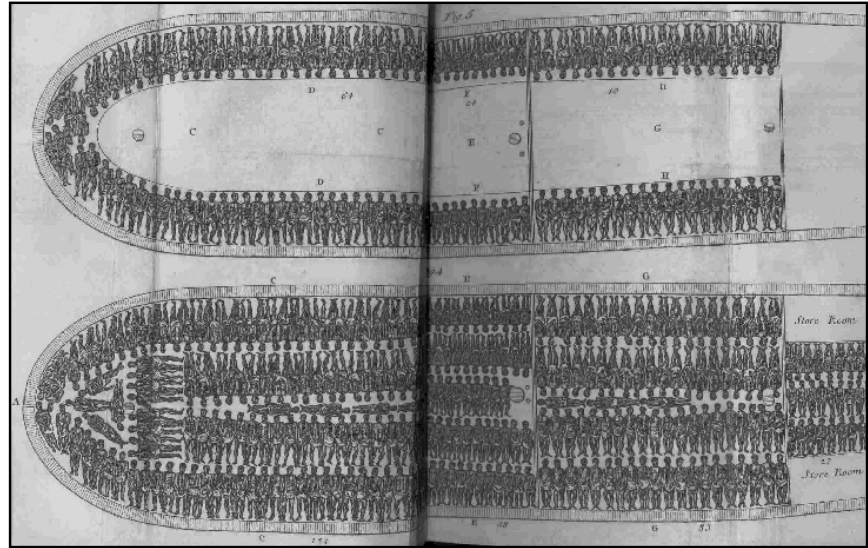


Activity twelve

Techniques of abolition (10 to 20 minutes)

Please work in groups and use the following information to complete the tasks below.

This is a print showing how Africans were packed into the slave ship *Brookes*, with text recording the dimensions and amount of space available. It was commissioned by Thomas Clarkson from the abolitionist publisher James Phillips in 1788. Abolitionists used it to inform and shock the public. Each person only had a space 16 inches (40 cm) wide to lie in. They could neither sit up fully nor stand. Over 7000 posters of the plan were printed and distributed to promote the abolition campaign.



The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishments of the Abolition of the Slave Trade by Thomas Clarkson - this image depicts the slave ship *Brookes*

The ship *Brookes* was built in Liverpool in the 1780s and carried over 600 enslaved Africans on two Atlantic crossings in 1783. The print actually shows only 482 people but overcrowding was common, and they were packed into the hold for the six-to-eight week journey. The *Brookes* image was used to campaign for a limit in the number of enslaved Africans on board. An Act of Parliament in 1788, the Dolben Act, limited the number of slaves that could be carried according to the ship's tonnage. This meant the *Brookes* could then only carry 454 Africans.

For many people in the 18th century images such as these were crucial for their understanding of the arguments for abolition. There was only limited access to newspapers and, of course, there was no television or radio. Spreading a message like this was difficult.

Task 1

Discuss how effective you think these images are for spreading an abolition message.

What is the message that they convey about enslaved Africans?

Task 2

In your groups you are responsible for writing an 18th century campaign plan for telling people about the horrors of the slave trade and slavery. What are the key things that you think the public should know. How do you present it - as a poster, on a cup, on a sugar bowl?

What are the limitations for spreading a campaign in the 18th century? What images should be used?

Task 3

What modern/recent forms of campaigning are similar to the abolition campaign?

What would you use if you had the task of running those campaigns today?

FACT Dates towards abolition

- 1776 David Hartley introduces a debate in the House of Commons 'that the slave trade is contrary to the laws of God and the rights of man'. It is defeated.
- 1787 The Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade is founded.
- 1788 The first restrictions on the operation of the slave trade are made by the Dolben Act.
- 1789 William Wilberforce presents the first abolition bill to the House of Commons, but it does not pass.
- 1792 519 petitions are handed into Parliament, the greatest number ever submitted about one subject, totalling over 400,000 names.
- The House of Commons votes in favour of the abolition of the trade, but the House of Lords rejects the bill.
- 1807 The Abolition Bill is passed and becomes law in March. However it does not end slavery, just the trade.

FACT Petitions

Submitting petitions was a traditional way of political campaigning. Many people who signed petitions could not vote in elections so that this was their only means of expressing their opinion to Parliament. The petition, which required special wording, was attached to blank sheets of paper and deposited at various points around a town. Organisers would then advertise in the local press, inviting people to sign. When completed, the sheets were stuck together, rolled into bundles, and presented to Parliament by an MP.

One hundred and two petitions against the slave trade were submitted to Parliament in 1788, rising to 519 in 1792. This was the greatest number ever submitted on one particular subject, totalling over 400,000 names.

J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The mobilisation of Public Opinion against the slave trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), 114.