

'How powerful were Slaves?' Rationale for Lesson Plans

One of the most important elements to come out of this investigation is to try to move students away from a two-dimensional understanding of slavery to become better aware of the intricacies that existed. Often with such a complex subject the temptation is to 'reduce' the content so that it is more easily digested by students; the result being that students can give a narrative account of events but are not necessarily challenged in the process. It was the desire to move away from this that led me to the idea of addressing slave power, specifically the relationship between slave and slave master.

The aim is to move students away from the idea that slaves were powerless subordinates and to accept that the relationship was far more nuanced than that and that slaves actually possessed a great deal of *potential* power (even if they did not necessarily exercise that power). Students will hopefully recognise that the livelihood and, indeed, lives of slave masters was reliant on the complicity of slaves. Any disruption meant that slave masters were in very real danger; the brutality meted out to the slaves in order to achieve their compliance was done out of fear rather than sheer sadism. The use of government documents was crucial to this understanding as the information given in the documents relating to slave power was often given unintentionally, providing the opportunity for students to discuss the provenance and purpose of the sources. I have chosen to use government documents as they stand, in their original appearance, as I feared that abridging them would result in a loss of their wider meaning. I have provided transcripts for the documents which can be given to students and the option is open for teachers to provide glossaries for students, dependent on the ability of their class.

This activity rests on challenging student preconceptions towards slavery and so the starter activities for both lessons begin this process. By presenting students with traditional views of slave power through an image of shackles and a written extract describing the brutality faced by slaves, I wanted students to look at these images through very different eyes and see them as signs not just of the power of slave master but also of the potential power of slaves; thereby setting them up for the rest of the investigation. In order to understand slave power fully I thought it was important for students to look at the different types of resistance that were available to slaves and to consider what might motivate slaves to rebel in such a way as well as the potential impact that this might have on slave masters. This would hopefully encourage students to reflect on the complex nature of this relationship between the two groups.

The interim plenary is a method for checking student understanding of the learning outcomes by giving them the opportunity to reflect on their learning with other students but also challenging them. I felt that drawing the answer, as opposed to writing it, would allow for weaker students who might perhaps struggle with verbalising their responses to such a complex issue to engage with the question whilst also challenging higher level students who might be used to producing written answers to respond in an alternative manner. Through differentiating the activity and scaffolding students by guiding lower ability students to think about the practical elements of slavery and slave power and then for higher ability students to think about their drawing as a representation, students will be able to demonstrate what they have learnt which can then also serve as a useful starting

students to discuss the wider elements of the question as well as help to clear up any misunderstandings or queries on the subject. I also felt it was important to have a creative outlet at this point as there would be more written work for students responding to the key question in the second lesson.

The carousel activity within lesson two was designed to give students an insight into the multifaceted nature of the subject. By engaging with a variety of different topics and subjects, all associated with this key relationship, students are asked to make a judgement on what they learnt about the nature of slave power at the end of each station. By adding this to their living graph, students can better understand the complexities of this relationship between slave and slave master as well as suggesting reasons behind any shifts in power. I have deliberately included more stations than the standard one hour timing allows so that teachers can have a greater flexibility with the lesson in terms of which stations are used in the carousel activity and, if needs be, extend the lesson over a longer period of time.

The role play and written activity at the end of the investigation is also to extend students learning and to provide them with a means to verbalise their complex response to the question in a creative manner and to reach a substantiated judgement. The requirement that students use the documents to support whatever points that they are making within the activity means that students will have to engage with the documents throughout the investigation.