

# Understanding Slavery Initiative

## **Sensitivities**

Teaching this subject raises questions about how to discuss related contemporary issues such as anger, racism, shame, guilt, blame and ignorance, which will inevitably come up in lessons.

The research and consultation undertaken by Understanding Slavery Initiative established that teachers and museum educators would like more access to advice, support and training to tackle debates on related social issues, cultural identity and racism.

## **Race, racism, prejudice and conflict**

It's important as a teacher to share issues and concerns with students; make the issues part of the teaching

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How do teachers address the issue of racism/racist statements in a lesson? Is this an issue of classroom management? Discipline or discussion?

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Teachers have expressed concerns about approaching the subject because of the inequities between the Black and White people in the history and the potential for divisions amongst students from different ethnicities.

Students may respond inappropriately to images and objects because they are unaware of the content or context of what they are being shown. Starting with a discussion about rights, respect, and reverence, particularly the extent to which people were subjugated during enslavement, will aid better understanding and a deeper learning experience.

Creating opportunities to discuss the racism and stereotyping that were used to justify the continuance of the slave trade can help students understand how inappropriate and derogatory views have made their way into society today.

Discuss the meanings and intent of racist language and why it is inappropriate. Note that in the past this history, its documents, maps and artefacts have been represented from a primarily European perspective. Discuss possible African perspectives being careful not to create an 'us' and 'them' scenario in the classroom. The history of transatlantic slavery is a global history and should be taught as such.

Referring to the school or college anti-racist policy will give instruction and guidance on ways to address racism or prejudice during lessons.

## **The magnitude of violence and oppression**

The violence and levels of oppression represented in the history and its related artefacts can be very difficult for both adults and young people to come to absorb. These aspects of the history will raise concerns with students and it is essential to create or suggest support structures to discuss their concerns.

Showing film clips or images of extreme violence during this period can further propagate the victimisation of the enslaved Africans who suffered through this horrific period. Consider teaching materials carefully keeping in mind the lesson's learning objectives and find alternative ways in which they can be met effectively and sensitively.

It is important not to judge other's emotional responses. They can often be based on lived experience. Some students may react differently to the history. Some laugh because they are uncomfortable. Some cry. Some go silent.

## **Respect**

Students may respond inappropriately to images and objects because they are unaware of the content or context of the materials they are being shown. Starting with a discussion about respect and reverence particularly the extent to which people were ill treated during slavery will aid better understanding and deeper learning experience.

We have a responsibility to set the record straight, but sensitively

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## **Cultural perspectives and interpretations**

Some students might feel alienated, Black and White. There is a need to be conscious of not creating a "them and us" situation

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The ways in which individuals interpret the history of the transatlantic slave trade can be based on their cultural perspectives or geographical location. Teaching the full facts of this history will enable young people to understand the global impact of the slave trade, as well as the moral and ethnical issues, and will support more informed perspectives.

Avoid teaching the subject of enslavement during Black History Month. Transatlantic slavery is a global history and should not only

focus on a particular group that suffered as a consequence.

Black History month was designed to provide knowledge and education about the various achievements of people of the African Diaspora as a significant part of history. African history does not begin with enslavement and therefore choosing to teach the subject at this time of year could cause students to view transatlantic slavery as synonymous with Black history.

For more approaches to addressing sensitivities please see [Unlocking Perceptions](#).

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