

## Voices from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

### Overview

In this lesson, students will gain an understanding of the history of the African slave trade, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the development of slavery in America through discussing historical facts, art work, and excerpts from the book *Copper Sun*. Students will focus on the humanization of those enslaved by completing a project in which they assume the persona of an African forced into slavery and recreate a personal journal kept by the enslaved.

### Grades

7-8

### Essential Questions

- What was lifelike for the individual human beings before they were forced into slavery?
- What were the causes and effects of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade?
- What was the Triangle Trade Route and how did it affect the continents involved?
- What was the experience of enslaved Africans during the Middle Passage?
- What were the experiences of individuals who were enslaved? What was the effect of enslavement on their livelihood and culture?
- How did slavery develop in the southern colonies, particularly in North and South Carolina?
- In what ways did slavery impact the foundations of America?

### Materials

- Voices of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format)
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
  - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu)
- *Copper Sun*, a novel by Sharon Draper (either one copy for reading aloud, or multiple copies for students to read individually or in partners)
- Heart shapes for cutting and distributing to students, attached
- Journals from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Assignment Sheet, attached

### Duration

60-90 minutes (depends upon amount of student discussion; time can be split over two class periods)

### Procedure

#### Day 1

#### The Humanness of those Enslaved

1. As a warmup to this lesson, give each student a cut out shape of a heart (attached). Tell students that they are going to read the first pages of a book called *Copper Sun*, in which they will be introduced to a young, 15-year-old Ashanti girl named Amari. If multiple copies of the book are available, tell students to read page 1-11, stopping at “And as Kwasi stomped and glided through the dust that evening, it seemed to Amari that he really was flying.” (It is important to stress to students to not read beyond this point until told to do so.) If multiple books are not available, teachers should read this section out loud to the class.

2. Tell students that after they have read the section and met Amari, they should use what they have read and additional creative inferences that they deduce to decorate the heart shape so that it represents her personality, her life, her hopes and dreams, etc. Students should use adjectives that describe Amari and her experiences, phrases that note what is important to Amari, artistic pictures and symbols that illustrate Amari and what her life is like, etc.
3. Once students have finished reading and decorating their heart shape, further discuss:
  - What is your first impression of Amari? What types of adjectives, words, phrases, pictures, etc. did you use to describe her on your heart?
  - Describe Amari's relationship with her little brother Kwasi. How can you relate?
  - How do you think Amari envisions the future of her relationship with Besa?
  - Visualize Amari's village. What do you see? Smell? Hear?
  - What do you think is important to Amari? What does she value?
  - What role do you think women in this society play?
  - Interpret the quote on pg. 5: "We must welcome our guests then Amari. We would never judge people based on how they looked-that would be uncivilized."
  - Predict what will happen next, following page 11.
4. Tell students that you are going to read the next pages of the book to them. Instruct students to keep their decorated hearts in hand and to listen for any moment when Amari experiences something painful (emotionally or physically) throughout the next chapter. Tell students to tear a piece of their paper heart off at every such moment. (Teachers should begin reading at the top of page 12 and read through the end of chapter 3, page 20.) Once finished, many students will have nothing but a pile of pieces in front of them. Discuss:
  - What painful circumstances did Amari experience? At this point in the book, what has become of all the dreams and hopes she held in her heart?
  - Of everything that has occurred thus far, what would you say was most painful for Amari and why?
  - If you could say anything to Amari, what would you say? If you could place yourself in this story, what would you do?
  - On pg. 12, Amari says, "An Ashanti, how could this be?" What do you think the explanation is?
  - Imagine losing everyone you love this quickly. How would you feel at the end of this chapter if you were Amari?
5. Explain to students that it is important to focus on the individuality and humanness of Africans who were enslaved. Often, when considering enslaved people, we strip them of any identity beyond this forced role. As historian Jeffrey Crow notes:

Those enslaved "...were active, not passive, beings who in the face of [terrible circumstances]...struggled to maintain their dignity, their african heritage, and even their lives, from the violent and brutalizing aspects of slavery obtained in North Carolina as elsewhere. They were...*rational* men and women who from necessity had to weigh the impact of each and every action they made. The slightest misstep in racial etiquette and expected behavior could bring whipping or mutilation."

Point out to students that it is important to remember that the thousands of Africans who were enslaved were individuals, such as the case with Amari, with day-to-day lives, hopes, dreams, fears, intelligences, etc., just like us. The pieces of what was once Amari's full heart represents the experience of thousands of individual lives that were captured and forced into slavery.

Students will likely be anxious to find out what happens to Amari. Allow them to predict what will happen next, then explain that they are going to learn more about slavery in general before learning Amari's fate.

### **Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade**

6. Project the image found on slide 2 of the *Voices of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Power Point* and ask students to brainstorm and discuss the following:
  - What do you see in this picture?
  - What do you think the shading represents?
  - What is the story behind this drawing? (Imagine what happened right before this, what is happening now, and what you predict will happen next?)
  - What do you think the artist was trying to convey in this drawing?
  - What do you already know about slavery? (Write responses on the board.)
  
7. Explain to students that the remainder of class will be spent discussing the history of the **African slave trade** and the development of **slavery** in America.
  
8. It is important that the Power Point be used as a catalyst for class discussion and not lecture. Some suggested discussion points are located below. As you facilitate discussion, you may wish to instruct students to take notes in Cornell Note format, or another preferred way. Teachers should amend and edit the Power Point as they deem necessary - to request an editable PPT version of the presentation, e-mail [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu)). During discussion, allow students to express opinions and state their understanding of facts. However, the teacher should respectfully dispel any incorrect or stereotypical information that is discussed.
  - Slide 3:
    - What do you think the word “Trans-Saharan” refers to and why?
  - Slide 8:
    - Based on this map, what do you think the Triangle Trade Route was?
    - How do you think each continent was impacted by this trade?
    - We know that enslaved Africans were brought to the colonies once they began to form along the East Coast of North America. What impact do you think those enslaved had on the colonies?
  - Slide 9:
    - What does “Middle Passage” refer to? What do you already know about the Middle Passage?
    - Ensure students have a proper understanding of what the term refers to, such as “the trip enslaved Africans were forced to take across the Atlantic Ocean; the trip would take months, and much of this time was spent chained in the bowels of a slave ship.)
    - What do you see in this picture, and how does it illustrate the Middle Passage?
  - Slide 10:
    - What do you imagine life in aboard a slave ship for those enslaved would have been like?
  
9. Tell students that it is time to check back in with Amari. Chapter 7 in *Copper Sun* deals with the beginning of Amari’s trip on the Middle Passage. For the purposes of this lesson, it is recommended to skip ahead to this point. Explain to students that at this point in the story, Amari has been marched to the shore and placed on a slave ship along with hundreds of other captives, though she is not aware of where she is, where she is going, where Besa is, or why this is all happening. Read the chapter out loud and discuss:
  - In your opinion, what is the worst part of what Amari has had to deal with thus far?
  - What did you visualize as I read this chapter to you?
  - Interpret the line, “The ship of death was surprisingly very much alive.”
  - What do you think Amari is thinking at this point in the story? What do you think will happen to her?
  
10. Continue with the Power Point, sharing the information on slides 11-14. On slide 15, encourage students to imagine and visualize all aspects of the months spent on a slave ship by both those enslaved and those in control. Make sure they consider all senses, and respond with what they think they would see, hear, smell, feel, etc. Further discuss:
  - Compare and contrast this drawing with the one we viewed at the beginning of this Power Point.
  - What do you see here?

- What is the story behind this drawing as compared to the other?
- What do you think the artist was trying to convey in this drawing?
- Although people who were enslaved experienced terrible things, they often still attempted to rebel against the cruelty and oppression, both outwardly and inwardly. What are some ways in which enslaved people resisted?
- What qualities would it take in a person to survive something like this? In what ways can you view the act of survival itself as resistance?

### Exploring the Voices of the Individuals Enslaved

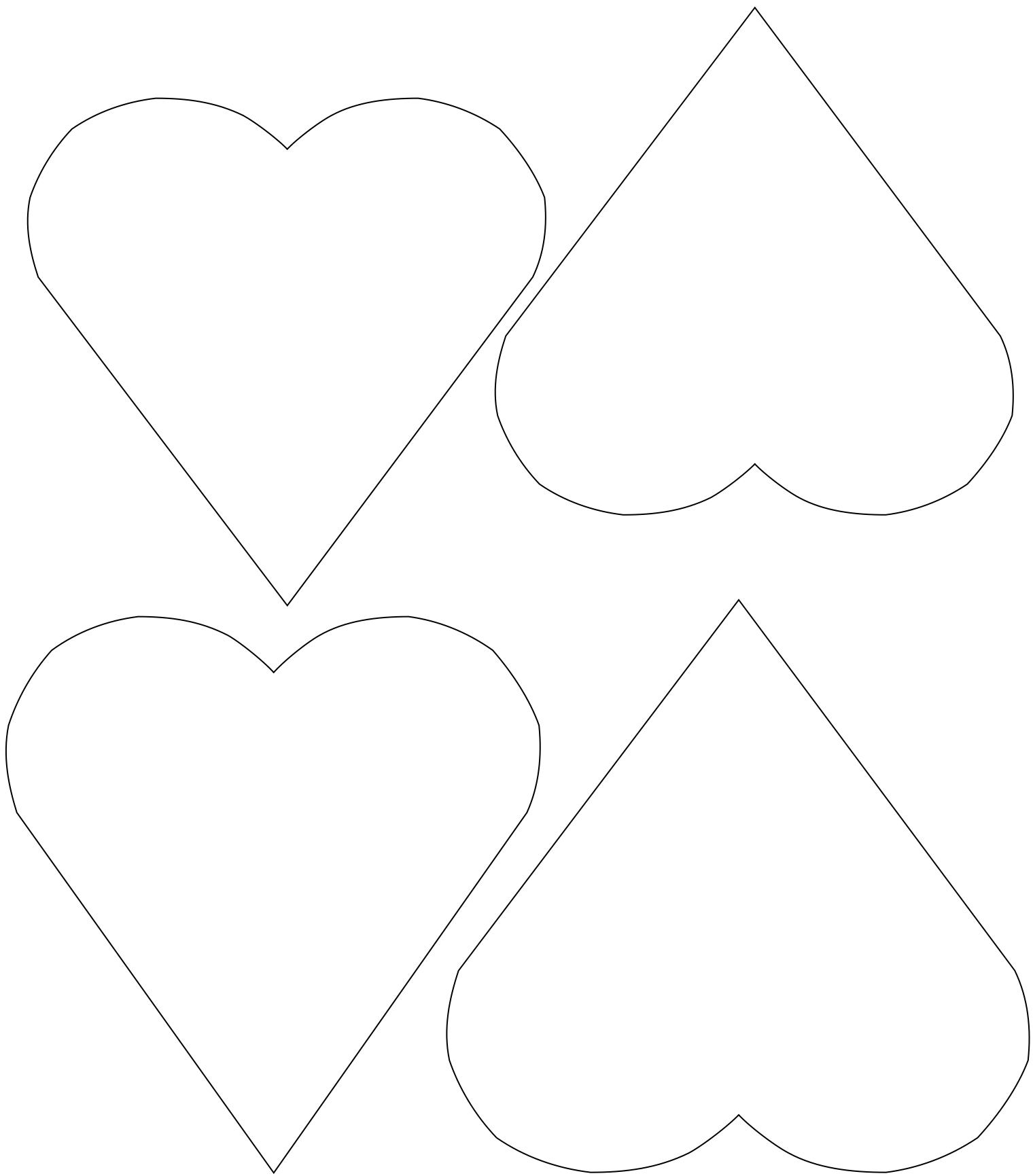
11. Once you arrive at slide 16 of the Power Point, remind students that Africans who were sold into the slave trade had identities beyond being “a slave.” They were people living their lives and performing day-to-day activities. These people were individuals with skills, hopes, dreams, and feelings. They had identities beyond the world they were forced into once captured. To solidify this line of thinking and understanding for students, tell them that they will recreate a journal that details a person’s life both before and after being sold into slavery.
12. Hand out the “Create a Journal Assignment” (attached) and discuss the quote on slide 17 to frame the project. Students should be realistic and respectful in their development of the fictional journal, and teachers should give specific direction as to the level of description expected in the journals. (Students may lean towards providing very graphic realities of enslavement in their journals and teachers should let them know up front what is acceptable to write as part of this assignment and what is not. Remember that the goal is to solidify the humanity of those enslaved, as well as the numerous ways they resisted and survived.)

The teacher should determine how much time to permit for completing the project, as well as how much time will be provided in class for research and/or brainstorming. Close class by helping students begin brainstorming ideas and addressing questions.

- **Teacher note:** It is important the instructions for this writing activity be very clear. Students are honoring the individual lives and humanity of enslaved people and their culture, then critically examining the realities of enslavement through the consideration of the individual experience, and NOT writing as an enslaved person themselves. Similar to the [USHMM’s Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust’s](#) recommendation to “Make responsible methodological choices,” educators do not want students to participate in any type of simulation or writing activity that leaves them with the impression that they now know what it was like to live or suffer during enslavement.

### Culminating Activities

- Show excerpts from “Slavery and the Making of America,” a PBS documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/about/index.html>.
- Use [Copper Sun](#) as a supplemental classroom novel.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Journals from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

*“Finding the promise and possibility within [the history of slavery] requires us to consider the lives of the enslaved on their own terms. Trapped in an unimaginable hell, enslaved people forged unbreakable bonds with one another. Indeed, no one knew better the meaning and importance of family and community than the enslaved. They fought back too, in the field and in the house, pushing back against enslavers in ways that ranged from feigned ignorance to flight and armed rebellion. There is no greater hope to be found in American history than in African Americans’ resistance to slavery.” ~Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries*

Africans who were sold into the slave trade had identities beyond being “a slave.” They were people living their lives, surviving as human beings, and performing day-to-day activities. These people were individuals with skills, hopes, dreams, and feelings. They had identities beyond the world they were forced into once captured. Considering the quote from Dr. Jeffries above, you will use what you have learned in class and conduct further research to detail the life of an individual before and after being forced into slavery.

#### Steps for Completion:

1. Choose a region of Africa and a particular time period to research. In your research, focus on finding out information that will help you infer the day-to-day life of the person from whose perspective your journal is written. For example, you may want to find out information about:

- Environment
- Jobs and daily habits
- Culture
- Traditions
- Religion
- Food

2. Begin to create this person’s journal entries. The journal should contain beginning, middle, and closing entries.

**Beginning entries** should be set in the person’s African home. In your beginning entries, consider:

- Who is this person writing from? Describe where he/she lives.
- What do they do each day?
- Who does he/she spend their time with (i.e., specific relatives, friends, community members, etc.)?
- What do they enjoy?
- What are their hopes and dreams?
- What are their skills?

**Middle entries** should take place after the person has been captured. Write about the voyage across the Middle Passage and his/her arrival in the Americas.

- Where are they while writing each entry (on a boat, in a cell/stockade, at a sale, etc.)?
- How were they captured and by whom? What were they doing before being captured? What was their life like before being captured?
- What is happening around them?
- What do they see? Smell? Hear? Feel? Hope? Fear? Wish?
- How are they handling this situation?

- How are others around them handling this situation?
- What do they think is going to happen?
- How are they managing to survive?

**Final entries** should conclude your experiences.

- What has he/she discovered about themselves?
- What are their reflections regarding this experience thus far?
- What happens to him/her? (What is the last journal entry?)

3. Be creative in how you artistically design this person's journal. How might the experiences of the owner have impacted the design and type of the journal? Was it bought or homemade? Does it look aged? Has it suffered damage over the years? What materials would it have been made of and what would have been used to write the entries? Infer and be creative!

**Questions and Notes:**