



# Olaudah Equiano and Mary Prince Teaching Activities



# OLAUDAH EQUIANO AND MARY PRINCE POSTER PACK

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The pack includes a poster each about Olaudah Equiano and Mary Prince, two heroes of the abolitionist campaigns to end the slave trade and slavery.

OLAUDAH EQUIANO lived in the mid to late 18th century and campaigned to end the slave trade, working alongside William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharpe. He died before the slave trade was legally ended in Britain (in 1807) but had spent many years travelling to inform the public about slavery including writing a very successful book of his own life experience.

MARY PRINCE lived most of her life enslaved in the Caribbean, where slavery was not legally abolished until 1834 after the passing of the Slave Emancipation Act a year earlier. By this time Mary was in London and had presented her testimony about the horrible conditions endured by the enslaved to the ladies of the Anti-Slavery Society.

The personal testimonies of these two remarkable Black heroes contributed immeasurably to the campaigns to bring about the legal abolition of the slave trade and then the abolition of the institution of slavery in British territories overseas.

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust has worked with schools to create biographies about these heroes. The posters in this pack have been created using the art-work by Manchester pupils and students for the biographies (The biography books are available to purchase separately.)

Teaching Resources that support classroom use of the posters and biography books are:

- THE LIFE OF MARY PRINCE/THE LIFE OF OLAUDAH EQUIANO – EXTENDED READING & COMPREHENSION ACTIVITY

Created by the AIUEducation Trust, these provide more detail about both lives of the heroes including long quotations from their own testimonies, with accompanying comprehension questions. Each section can be free-standing to allow teachers to define groups and set tasks (such as feed-back to the class) as appropriate.

## A note on sources:

As Equiano's narrative is written in eighteenth century English that is quite inaccessible to most of our children, only the very first quote in this exercise is directly from the Penguin edition of Equiano's own narrative. All other quotes and page numbers are from the adaptation of his Narrative by Ann Cameron, published as *The Kidnapped Prince, The Life of Olaudah Equiano*, (Knopf), 1995

The newspaper letter can be found in archive microfiche of the Manchester Mercury, held at the Central Library, Manchester.

All quotes in the Mary Prince pages refer to the version of Mary's testimony published by Penguin in 2000 edited by Sara Salih

- WHO WAS MARY PRINCE/WHO WAS OLAUDAH EQUIANO? – RECALL QUESTION SET

These are sheets of questions designed to recall and summarise what pupils have learned about the two heroes.

- SENTENCE ORDER EXERCISE

A straight-forward sentence ordering task about the lives of the heroes.

• "TO BE FREE IS VERY SWEET"/ 'A SON OF AFRICA' - TEXT COMPREHENSIONS FOR YEAR 6 GUIDED READING  
These are Text Comprehension question sets, to use in Year 6 Guided reading, with the books published by the AIU Education Trust: Olaudah Equiano, Son of Africa, and "To Be Free is Very Sweet": The Life of Mary Prince.

Both books are available to purchase separately

If you use these materials in schools I would be very happy to receive feedback and comments:  
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# THE LIFE OF MARY PRINCE

## SECTION 1: MARY'S CHILDHOOD

Mary Prince was born enslaved and lived with her mother and sisters for the first 12 years of her life. She said childhood was:

“the happiest period of my life....the tasks given out to us children were light, and we used to play together with Miss Betsey, with as much freedom almost as if she had been our sister.” (p.7)

**Question: Who do you think Miss Betsey was?**

At the age of 12, Mary was sold in the market place and separated forever from her family. She described the auction:

“We followed my mother to the market-place where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall...I as the eldest, stood first, Hannah next to me, then Dinah; and our mother stood beside, crying over us. My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body....At length the vendue master who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle arrived...He took me by the hand and led me out into the middle of the street, and, turning me slowly round, exposed me to the view of those who attended...I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or lamb.” (p.11)

**Question: Which animals does Mary think they were treated like and what makes her feel this?**

Mary found that her new owner was very cruel:

“She taught me to do all sorts of household work; to wash and bake, pick cotton and wool, and wash floors and cook. And she taught me (how can I ever forget it!) more things than these; she caused me to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin when applied to my naked body by her own cruel hand. And there was scarcely any punishment more dreadful than the blows I received on my face and head from her hard heavy fist. She was a fearful woman, and a savage mistress to her slaves.” (p14)

**Question: Name three of the things the 'savage mistress' used to hit Mary with.**

## SECTION 2: MARY'S WORKING LIFE

Sold again at the age of 17, Mary was sent to work on another island, where the slaves were badly treated:

"We slept in a long shed, divided into narrow slips, like the stalls used for cattle. Boards fixed upon stakes driven into the ground, without mat or covering, were our only beds".

(p.19)

***Question: What makes Mary feel she is being treated like an animal again?***

Mary described the work she had to do on Turk's Island:

"I was given a half-barrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to my knees in the water, ...and worked through the heat of the day, the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment." (p,19)

***Question: How does Mary describe the sun in this passage?***

After ten years Mary leaves Turk's Island, going with Mr D when he retires to Bermuda. She often stood up to her 'master':

"I then told him I would not live longer with him, for he was a very indecent man – very spiteful and too indecent; with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh. So I went away to a neighbouring house and sat down and cried till next morning, when I went home again, not knowing what else to do." (p.24)

***Question: Why does Mary have to go back to this man even though she doesn't like him and is strong enough to stand up to him?***

### SECTION 3: HOW MARY RESISTED THE OPPRESSION OF SLAVERY

Mary tried to save money to buy her own freedom:

“The way in which I made money was this - When my master and mistress went from home, as they sometimes did, and left me to take care of the house and premises, I had a good deal of time to myself and made the most of it. I took in washing and sold coffee and yams and other provisions to the captains of ships. I did not sit still idling during the absence of my owners; for I wanted, by all honest means, to earn money to buy my freedom.” (p.27)

***Question: Why do you think the slave-owners were confident about leaving the slaves alone? Can you think of reasons why the slaves didn't just run away?***

Mary got married to a freeman called Daniel James, but her owners were really angry about this:

“Mrs Wood was very angry – she grew quite outrageous – she called me a black devil and asked me who had put freedom into my head. ‘To be free is very sweet’, I said: but she took good care to keep me a slave” (p.31)

In 1828, Mary came to England and told her life-story to people in the Anti-Slavery Society. Mary's testimony was written down in a book. It was the first life of a Black woman published in Britain.

“In telling of my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves – for when I think of my own griefs, I remember theirs”. (p.22)

***Question: How did Mary hope to help the other slaves?***

***Question: Thinking about the Life of Mary Prince, write three reasons why you think slavery was wrong.***

# THE LIFE OF OLAUDAH EQUIANO

## SECTION 1: EQUIANO'S CHILDHOOD

Olaudah Equiano was born in West Africa in about 1745. He described a happy childhood as the son of a village chief:

"Our children were named from some event, some circumstance or fancied foreboding at the time of their birth. I was named Olaudah, which in our language signifies.. fortunate, also; one favoured, and having a loud voice and well spoken". (p.41Narrative)

**Question: Look in a dictionary to explain the meaning of 'fortunate'?**

But Equiano was kidnapped when he was just eleven:

"I was eleven. I was with my only sister, who was always my favourite playmate. As usual, all the grown-ups were gone to the fields. My sister and I were left to take care of the house. Two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both. We had no chance to cry out or resist. Quickly they covered our mouths and ran off with us into the woods. ...The next day the kidnappers pulled my sister away from me. We held on to each other and begged them not to separate us, but the kidnappers took my sister and carried her away." (p.14)

**Question: Where were all the grown-ups when Equiano and his sister were kidnapped?**

Eventually, Equiano was taken to the coast to be sold and shipped overseas:

"The first thing I saw was a vast ocean, and a ship, riding at anchor, waiting for its cargo. The ocean and ship filled me with astonishment that soon turned to fear. I was taken to the ship and carried on board! The crew had strange complexions and long hair. Their language was very different from any I had ever heard. Some of them thumped me and tossed me around to see if I was healthy. I was sure that I had got into a world of bad spirits and that they were going to kill me." (page 24)

**Question: What three things seem strange to Equiano about the crew?**

Equiano became aware of the misery of the other people on board the ship:

"When I looked around the ship I saw a furnace boiling on the deck, and many black people all chained together, every one of their faces full of sorrow, I was overpowered by horror, and fainted. When I recovered, I saw some black people around me. They were some of those who had brought me on board and they were receiving their pay. They tried to cheer me, but in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces and long hair.

"No", they said." (page 25)

**Question: What thing on the deck makes Equiano scared he will be eaten?**

## SECTION 2: EQUIANO'S EXPERIENCE OF A SLAVE SHIP & AUCTION

Equiano described the horrors of the slave ships in which people were crammed together in filth, with little air, food or water. Many died on this journey of the 'middle-passage', or chose to kill themselves if they could:

"In the hold of the ship many of us died, victims of the greed of our purchasers. All of us were penned together, crowded so close that we could hardly turn around. Our chains galled us. Open tubs were used for toilets. Often children fell into them and nearly drowned. The heat caused heavy perspiration, and the air became unfit to breathe. It sickened us. It almost suffocated us. And in this thick, fetid, pestilential air the shrieks of women and the groans of the dying vibrated hour upon hour." (p.28)

**Question: The old-fashioned adjective 'Pestilential' comes from the word 'pestilence'. Look in a dictionary for the word pestilence to find out what Equiano means in the phrase 'pestilential air'.**

Eventually, Equiano arrived in the Caribbean having survived the long journey across the Atlantic ocean:

"One day the whites on board gave a great shout and made many signs of joy to us. We did not know why, but as the vessel drew nearer we plainly saw the island of Barbados and its harbour...

Many merchants and planters came on board, though it was in the evening. They put us in separate groups and examined us and made us jump. They pointed to the land signifying we were to go there. We thought these ugly men meant they were going to beat us soon. Then we were all put down under the deck again. There was much dread and trembling among us and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all night. At last the crew, who heard us, got some old slaves from the land to calm us. They told us that no-one was going to eat us. We were going to work." (p.30)

**Question: Why do you think the merchants and planters made the slaves jump?**

Soon Equiano experienced a slave auction:

"We were taken to a merchant's yard, where we were all penned together like so many sheep... Someone beat a drum. Then all the buyers rushed at once into the yard where we were penned to choose the parcel of us that they liked best. They rushed from one group of us to another, with tremendous noise and eager faces, terrifying us all. Three men who were sold were brothers. They were sold in different lots. I still remember how they cried when they were parted. Probably they never saw each other again." (p.31)

**Question: Which animals does Equiano think they were treated like and what makes him feel this?**

### SECTION 3: EQUIANO'S WORKING LIFE

Equiano was sold to a lieutenant in the Royal Navy called Michael Henry Pascal. One of the first things Pascal did was give Equiano a new name:

“Captain Pascal named me Gustavus Vassa. I understood him a little and told him I didn't like that name...At first I refused to answer to my new name, but he cuffed me for it. Finally I gave up. I have been known as Gustavus Vassa ever since.” (p.37)

**Question: Why do you think slave-owners gave people different names?**

Equiano became a personal servant to Pascal and when Pascal went to war, Equiano went with him:

“My station during the engagement was on the middle deck, where I was posted with another boy to bring powder to the aft-most gun. At this station my gun-mate and I had a very great risk, for more than half an hour, of blowing up the ship. For when we took the cartridges out of the boxes, the bottoms of many of the cartridges were rotten. Gunpowder ran all over the deck, very near the match tub....Also we were very much exposed to the enemy's shots...I expected every minute to be my last, especially when I saw our men fall so thick about me.” (p.58)

**Question: What was the problem with the cartridges?**

In December 1762, the war ended. Equiano expected to be paid for his work and to be given a share of the prize money. He was shocked when Pascal sold him to another Captain and he was sold again to a Philadelphia merchant named Robert King. For the next four years, Equiano worked for King, but was allowed to trade for himself and gradually made enough money to buy his freedom:

“We went into the room where my master was, and I bowed to him. With my money in my hand and many fears in my heart, I prayed him to be as good as his offer to me: ‘You promised me my freedom as soon as I could purchase it’, I reminded him. ‘I will not be worse than my promise’, said my master. He took the forty pounds sterling and told me to go to the secretary of the Register Office and get my freedom papers drawn up.” (p.108)

**Question: Can you think of a reason why Equiano said he had ‘many fears in my heart’ – what was he worried about?**

After Equiano purchased his own freedom in 1766, he continued to work for Robert King for another year, until July 1767 when he boarded a ship destined for England.

## SECTION 4: LIFE AS A FREEMAN

Equiano lived in London and worked as a hairdresser and personal servant to an English scientist, Dr. Charles Irving. In 1773, he accompanied Irving on an expedition through the Arctic. He returned to the life of a sailor and made many trips through the Mediterranean to countries of southern Europe. He became involved in anti-slavery activities working with Granville Sharpe. He joined the London Black abolitionist group, the 'Sons of Africa'. Equiano's Anti-slavery work included lobbying MPs, writing open letters to the press and speaking at public meetings. In 1786, he was made Commissary to the Black Poor in London, the first black man to be granted a government post in Britain. In 1789 Equiano published his book "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African" and set about promoting the book to the growing number of people concerned to abolish the slave trade.

***Question: Find three activities Equiano did to help the anti-slavery campaign.***

An example of a letter to a newspaper by Equiano follows:

Manchester August 18th 1790

Sir,

Having received Great Marks of Kindness from many Ladies and Gentlemen here, (who have subscribed to my Interesting Narrative) particularly Thomas Walker, Esq., the Rev. Dr Bayley, Mr Ralph Kirkham, Mr Isaac Moss, jun., Mr Richard Routh, Mr John Lowe, jun., & Family, & Mr Lloyd. I beg you to suffer me thus publicly to express my grateful acknowledgment to them for their Favours, and for the Fellow-feeling they have discovered for my very poor and much oppressed Countrymen; these acts of Commiseration have fill'd my Heart with Gratitude, therefore, permit me Sir, on Behalf on myself and the rest of my Brethren, to offer this sincere Thanks, for the Testimony of your Regard to the Sable People.

May your endeavours meet with the desired success and may the all bountiful Creator bless you all in Time and Eternity.

I am, Gentlemen, Your obedient humble servant,  
Gustavus Vasa, the African.

Published in the Manchester Mercury, August 31st 1790

## WHO WAS MARY PRINCE?

1. When was Mary Prince born?

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.....

2. Which part of the world did she live in?

.....  
.....

3. What happened to Mary when she was 12 years old?

.....  
.....

4. What animals did Mary think she was treated like at the slave auction?

.....  
.....

5. Write down two facts Mary tells us about the way slaves were treated.

.....  
.....

6. Why did Mary tell people her life-story – what was she hoping would happen?

.....  
.....

7. Use this space to draw a picture



## WHO WAS EQUIANO?

1. When was Equiano born?

.....  
.....

2. Which part of the world did he live in when he was a child?

.....

3. What happened to Equiano and his sister?

.....  
.....

4. Equiano was scared of the crew on the slave ship. What did he think they were going to do to the slaves?

.....  
.....

5. Write down two facts you remember about what it was like on the slave ships

.....  
.....

6. Equiano cared about the slaves and wanted them all to be free. He wrote a book about slavery . The book was called "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African." What other things did Equiano do to try to put an end to the slave trade?

.....  
.....

7. Use this space to draw a picture



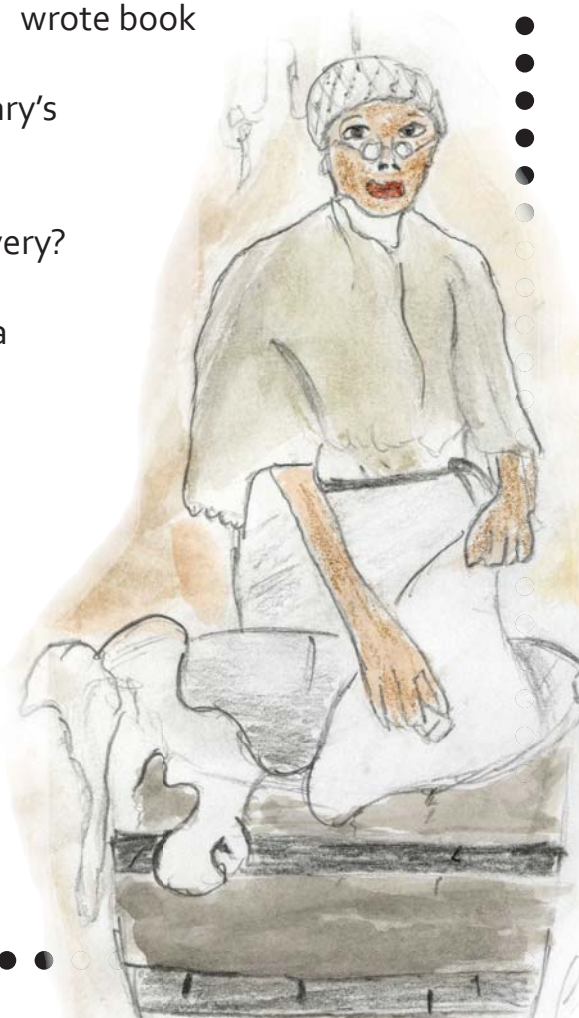
## "TO BE FREE IS VERY SWEET": MARY PRINCE

1. Who was Miss Betsey?
2. Why did Mary think Miss Fanny was fond of her?
3. What job did Mary do for Mrs Pruden?
4. How did Mary feel about being taken away from her family?
5. How was Mrs I- cruel to Mary?
6. Which of Mary's owners do you think was the worst? Explain your answer.
7. Mary often described being treated like an animal: how do you think this made her feel?
8. Mary ran away several times but always ended up going back: why was it so hard for the slaves to stay 'run away'?
9. Why did the Woods family get very angry when Mary got married?
10. Draw a timeline of Mary's life:

Born first sold Turk's Island Married Came to London wrote book

11. What is the name of the woman who wrote down Mary's testimony?
12. How would you explain the meaning of the word slavery?
13. What do you think are the worst things about being a slave?
14. When was the Abolition of Slavery Act passed by the British Parliament?

(This text comprehension was created by Jackie Ould for Year 6 Guided reading of "To Be Free is Very Sweet": The Life of Mary Prince, published by AIU Education Trust)



## 'SON OF AFRICA': OLAUDAH EQUIANO

1. How did Olaudah feel about being taken from his family?
2. Why was he given a new name?
3. What was his job on the ship?
4. What were the names of his two owners?
5. Which owner do you think was the worse? Explain your answer.
6. How did he get his freedom?
7. What did he do after he was free?
8. Why did he want to stop slavery?
9. What did he do to help end slavery?
10. Draw a time line of his life.

*Born*

*captured*

*free*

*wrote book*

*married*

*died*



11. When did slavery end?
12. How would you explain the meaning of the word slavery?
13. What do you think are the worse things about being a slave?
14. What do you value most (appreciate) about your own freedom?

(This text comprehension was created by Frances Jackson, for Year 6 Guided Reading of Olaudah Equiano, Son of Africa, published by AIU Education Trust.)

MARY PRINCE SENTENCE SEQUENCE: QUESTION SHEET

Put these sentences in the right order to tell the story of Mary Prince's Life.

When she was getting old, Mary told her life-story to help other slaves.

.....

Mary Prince was born in Bermuda.

.....

When Mary came to England she ran away from Mr.Wood.

.....

She was taken away from her mother and sold when she was 12.

.....

She had to work very hard in the hot sun and in salty water.

.....

## MARY PRINCE SENTENCE SEQUENCE: ANSWER SHEET

Mary Prince was born in Bermuda.

She was taken away from her mother and sold.

She had to work very hard in the hot sun and in salty water.

When Mary came to England she ran away from Mr.Wood.

Mary told the story of her life to help other slaves.

OLAUDAH EQUIANO SENTENCE SEQUENCE: QUESTION SHEET

Put these sentences in the right order to tell the story of Equiano's life

When he was free, Equiano campaigned to free other slaves.

.....

He was taken on a ship to Barbados.

.....

After being a slave for 11 years, Equiano was able to buy his freedom.

.....

Equiano worked hard for his master and saved up his money.

.....

Equiano was kidnapped from his village in Africa.

## EQUIANO SENTENCE SEQUENCE: CORRECT ORDER

Equiano was kidnapped from his village in Africa.

He was taken on a ship to Barbados.

Equiano worked hard for his master and saved up his money.

After being a slave for 11 years, Equiano was able to buy his freedom.

When he was free, Equiano campaigned to free other slaves.