**SOURCE SHEET - living conditions for captives during the Middle Passage**

**A)** They had not so much room as a man in his coffin, either in length or breadth. It was impossible for them to shift or turn with any degree of ease. …every man slave is to be allowed six feet by one foot four inches for room, every woman five feet ten by one foot four, every boy five feet by one foot, and every girl four feet six by one foot…

**B)** On the subject of the stowage and its consequences, **Dr. Trotter** says, that the slaves in the passage are so crowded below, that it is impossible to walk through them, *without treading* on them. Those, who are out of irons, are *locked spoonways* (in the *technical phrase*) to one another. It is the first mate’s duty to see them stowed in this way every morning; those who do not quickly into their places, are compelled *by a cat-of-nine-tails*.

**D)** In the interval of being upon deck they are fed twice. They have also a pint of water allowed to each of them a day…

These meals, says **Mr. Falconbridge**, consist of rice, yams, and horse-beans, and now and then a little beef and bread.

**C)** On being brought on board, says **Dr. Trotter**, they show signs of *extreme distress and despair, and regret at being torn from their friends and connections;* many retain those impressions for a long time; in proof of which, the slaves on board his ship being often heard in the night, making an howling melancholy noise, expressive of extreme anguish.

**F) Captain Hall** says, after the first eight or ten of them come on board, the men are put into irons. They are linked two and two together by the hands and feet, in which situation they continue till they arrive, in the West Indies, except such as may be sick, whose irons are then taken off. The women however, he says, are always loose.

**E)** **Mr. Falconbridge** was down only fifteen minutes, and became so ill by it that he could not get up without, and was disabled (the dysentery seizing him also) from doing duty the rest of the passage. On board the same ship he has known two or three instances of *a dead and living slave found in the morning shackled together*.

Trotter (Thomas M.D.), surgeon in the Royal navy, was a voyage in the African slave-trade, from Liverpool, in 1783, as surgeon of the Brookes, Captain Noble. He was ten months on the coast.

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Netwon (the Rev. John) Rector of St. Mary, Woolnoth, made five voyages to Africa; in the last in 1754 he was master of a slave ship. He lived on shore about a year nad a half, chiefl at the island of Plantanes, at the mouth of R. Sherbro.

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Hall (Captain) of the Royal Navy, was at Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands from 1769 to 1773, and from 1780 to 1782 at those places, and at Jamaica and St. Domingo.

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A woman…who was brought on board, refused sustenance, neither would she speak. She was then ordered the thumb-screws, suspended in the mizzen rigging, and every attempt was made was made with the cat to compel her to eat, *but to no purpose*. She died in three or four days afterwards.

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**G)** A woman…who was brought on board, refused sustenance, neither would she speak. She was then ordered the thumb-screws, suspended in the mizzen rigging, and every attempt was made was made with the cat to compel her to eat, *but to no purpose*. She died in three or four days afterwards.

**Who’s Who**

**Reverend John Netwon** served on five slaving voyages in the mid-18th century. On the last of these he served as captain. Later in life he became an abolitionist, and was the author of the hymn ‘Amazing Grace’.

**Dr. Thomas Trotter** was a surgeon in the Royal Navy. In 1783, he went on a slaving voyage from Liverpool, serving as surgeon of the *Brookes*.

**Mr. Alexander Falconbridge** was a surgeon who went on four slaving voyages in the 1780s. His experiences convinced him to join the abolitionist movement, in which he became a leading figure.

**Captain Hall** served in the Royal Navy from the 1760s to 1780s, and was stationed at a series of slave colonies, including Barbados, the Leeward Islands, Jamaica and St. Domingue.

**Glossary**

**Abolitionis**t: A person who wishes to ban a system or practice e.g. the institution of slavery

**Advocate**: to publicly support something

**Cat-of-nine-tails**: a multi tailed whip

**Dysentery**: an infection of the intestines

**Locked Spoonways**: fitting together like spoons when lying down

**Melancholy**: sadness, depression

**Mizzen Rigging**: the rigging which supports the mast of a ship

**Sustenance**: nourishment in the form of food and drink

**Questions**

Individual written activities

1. Why do you think captains of slave ships choose to pack their captives so tightly together below deck?
2. Look at **sources B, C, D, E,** which describe the living conditions below deck. How do they contradict what **Mr. Norris** says?
3. What general sense do you get of slave’s living conditions? Write down a few keywords that sum up your impressions.
4. Look at **source F**. Why do you think male slaves were chained up, whilst female slaves were not?
5. In **source G**, a woman starves herself to death, in spite of torture. Why do you think slaves went to such lengths to commit suicide?
6. All of the sources are extracts from a pamphlet called *An Abstract of the Evidence delivered before a select committee of the House of Commons in the years 1790 and 1791; on the part of the petitioners for the abolition of the slave-trade* (1791). None of the extracts are testimonies from enslaved Africans themselves. How does this affect our understanding of their experiences?

Small group discussion activities

1. Compare and discuss your answers with your group.
2. What do you think the worst thing about being an enslaved captive on the Middle Passage would be?
3. Imagine that you are an enslaved African aboard a slave ship. How would you react to such treatment and conditions and why?

**Websites for further information**

<http://abolition.e2bn.org/index.php>

http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/search.html