The Price of Doing Business:
Joseph Hawkins, American Officer on a Slave Ship, 1795

Student Worksheet

Historical Context:
From the early days of the American colonies, forced labor and slavery grew to become a central part of colonial economic and labor systems. The slave trade was a vast system involving many types of people. As you listen to this first-person narrative and review the supporting primary sources, think about how learning the story of this man who served as the cargo superintendent (or supercargo) on a slave ship might build a better understanding of the American slave trade in the 18th century.

Instructions:
Answer the questions below using the accompanying primary sources found at: http://americanhistory.si.eduonthewater/oral_histories/life_at_sea/hawkins.htm. The questions are designed to help you practice working with historical documents. Some of these documents have been edited, but all are authentic. As you analyze the documents, take into account the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.

Questions:
1. Citing evidence from the words of Mr. Hawkins and one supporting primary source, do you think he believed there was a danger of the slaves resisting or escaping?

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2. According to Mr. Hawkins’s account and referring to at least one supporting primary source, state another danger faced by all travelers aboard the ship.

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3. Looking at the cover of Mr. Hawkins’s story and reviewing the transcript of his first-person account, what happened to him during this particular journey that ended his career?

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