

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

Lesson Guide

Objectives:

The students will be better able to:

- Describe the experiences and values of an 18th-century slave trader.
- Obtain information from a variety of primary sources.

Time:

- *First Person Narrative*: 2:45 minutes
- *Analysis Questions*: 6 minutes

Grade Level: 6th-12th

Vocabulary:

The first person narratives contain several words that may be unfamiliar to 21st-century readers. Whenever these words are used within narratives or primary sources, the Web page will include definitions for those words. Good historians always have a dictionary nearby when doing research or writing, so students should as well.

Here is the list specific to this activity:

- *Ebo* – the English word Hawkins used to refer to the Igbo people (West Africa)
- *embarkation* – to put or go on board a ship or other vehicle
- *shallop* – a small open boat propelled by oars or sails and used chiefly in shallow waters
- *fetter* – a restraint device, usually shackles or chains for the feet
- *dysentery* – a disease characterized by severe diarrhea with passage of mucus and blood and usually caused by infection

Materials:

- Computer with Internet access (with Flash plug-in & Adobe Reader)
 - *Life at Sea—1680 to 1806* Web site (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/oral_histories/life_at_sea/)
 - Transcript of the audio clip (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/pdf/transcript_hawkins.pdf)
- Student Worksheet PDF (print or digital) (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/pdf/worksheet_hawkins.pdf)
- Printer (recommended)



Preparation:

1. Visit the Joseph Hawkins page of Life at Sea—1680 to 1806 (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/oral_histories/life_at_sea/hawkins.htm) to preview the content.
2. Download & print the transcript (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/pdf/transcript_hawkins.pdf) for the Joseph Hawkins recording. Consider making copies for students.
3. Print the student worksheet (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/pdf/worksheet_hawkins.pdf) to distribute to students.

Standards:

NCHS 5-12 United States History Standards

Era 2, Standard 3: How the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies, and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the America

NCHS 5-12 World History Standards

Era 6, Standard 4: Economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas, 1500-1750

Era 7, Standard 2: The causes and consequences of the agricultural and industrial revolutions, 1700-1850

NCHS 5-12 Standards in Historical Thinking

2B: Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage

2C: Identify the central question(s)

2E: Read historical narratives imaginatively

2F: Appreciate historical perspectives

4B: Obtain historical data from a variety of sources

4C: Interrogate historical data

4F: Support interpretations with historical evidence



Introduction:

In order to better understand events and people of the past, historians examine many different types of primary sources. Government records, letters, photographs and artifacts are just a few examples of primary sources.

First-person narratives are a very valuable type of primary source since they are the words of people who actually lived through the events they speak of. The audio recording used in this lesson is a dramatic reading of a first-person account written by a real person of the time period.

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.

Task:

Students use their listening skills to discover important information from the first-person narratives, then work with several supporting primary sources to answer questions about Joseph Hawkins and/or his experiences.

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?

This narrative looks at the slave trade from the viewpoint of a man whose work it was to buy, secure and load human cargo onto slave ships. His account describes how slaves were bound then later how they were shackled. Hawkins noted the captives' grief at being shackled and yet still bound them and put them on board remarking, "...delay at this point would be fatal." His words imply that he is resigned that this suffering is the price of doing business in the slave trade.

The Resistance and Revolt illustration represents a rare slave insurrection on board a slave ship and shows how some slave ships included a built-in barricade behind which the crew could fire upon any revolt on board.

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.

In addition to his fears about an uprising, Hawkins remarks that there were about 500 slaves on board, 50 of whom seemed to be sick with a serious illness. He describes the symptoms as dysentery and severe inflammation of the eyes and face.

The Slave Ship model shows the cramped conditions endured by captives. The decision on how many people to crowd into the hold was a business decision based on how many would survive the crossing.

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?

Hawkins's narrative describes getting the fever and going blind. This meant an end to his seafaring career.



Compare/Contrast:

Hawkins' narrative pairs well with *Middle Passage* (Olaudah Equiano, *Enslaved African Man*, 1756).

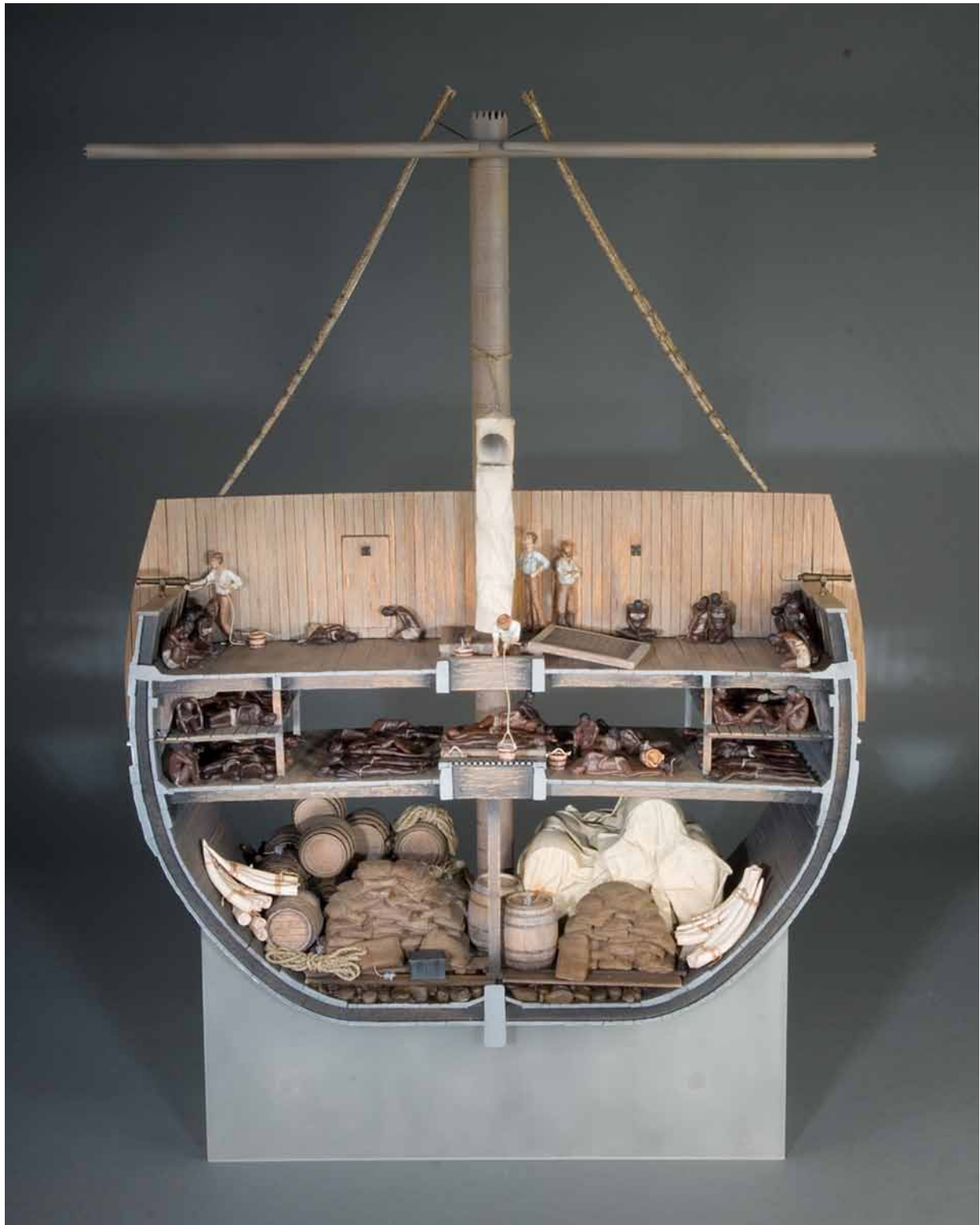
Supporting Primary Sources:

See pages 5 through 7 in this guide.

Additional Primary & Secondary Sources:

- Illustration on the cover of Hawkins memoirs showing Hawkins, eyes covered, dictating his story to a friend (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/1_2.html#LifeAtSea1)
- Section of the *On the Water* exhibition covering the Atlantic slave trade prior to 1800 (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/1_4.html)
- Essay entitled "Insurrection On Board Slave Ships," part of the Slavery in America Web site (http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs_es_insurrection.htm)

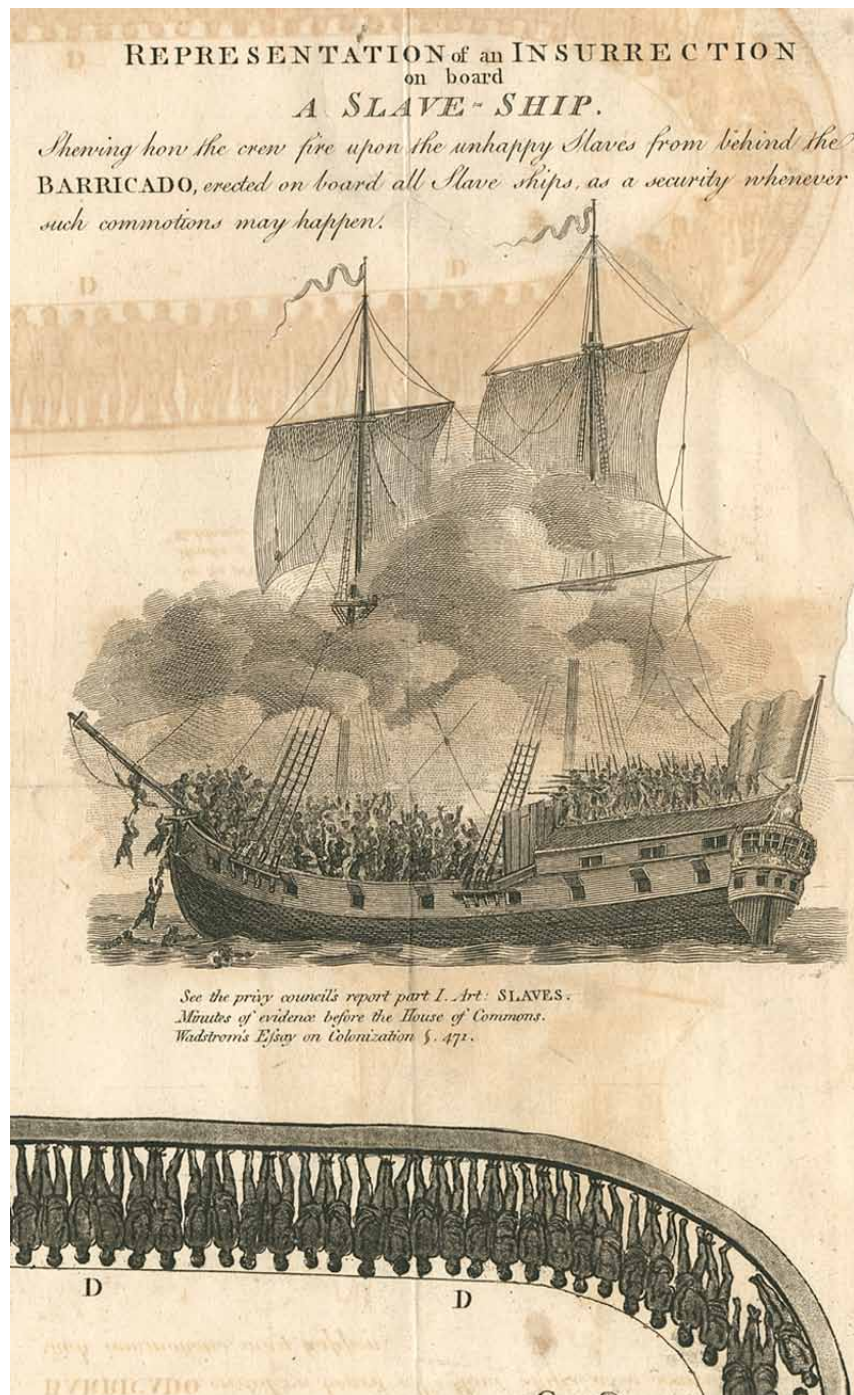




Slave Ship

This model shows a typical ship in the early 1700s on the Middle Passage. To preserve their profits, captains and sailors tried to limit the deaths of slaves from disease, suicide, and revolts. In the grisly arithmetic of the slave trade, captains usually chose between two options: pack in as many slaves as possible and hope that most survive, or put fewer aboard, improve the conditions between decks, and hope to lose fewer to disease.”





Resistance and Revolt

Enslaved people on the Middle Passage were not simply passive captives. Some refused to eat and had to be fed against their will. Others threw themselves overboard rather than submit to slavery. This image shows a rare revolt aboard a slave ship. The ship's officers are crowded behind the barricade while the captives fill the deck, some diving into the sea.

Plate, from Carl Bernhard Wadstrom's *An Essay on Colonization: Particularly Applied to the Western Coast of Africa*, 1794–1795

Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia





Ship's Medicine Chest, 1800s

Starting in 1790, American merchant ships larger than 150 tons and with more than 10 crew members were required to have medicine chests. The chests came with instructions, and the captain or first mate usually administered the medicines. This well-traveled example has labels from Baltimore, Maryland; Mamaroneck, New York; and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Gift of Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland

