

## **Developing Historical Questions About the Slave Trade**

### **OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO LESSON**

This is an introduction to the database that can also serve as an introduction to the topic. It exposes students to the vast amount and variability of material in the database.

### **OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

- Develop the technological skills necessary to explore the content of the database, create search queries, and assess and interpret search results.
- Gain an understanding of the regional, demographic, and maritime contours of the slave trade
- Analyze historical data as a means of learning how to form compelling research questions

### **SUGGESTED GRADE AND COURSE**

7-12<sup>th</sup> grade

World History; US History

### **STANDARDS**

NCHS Standards: World History (Grades 5-12): Era 6,

Standard 4B

### **RESOURCES/MATERIALS**

Students will use the database directly, either in class or outside of class in the library, computer lab, or at home (if these are options).

### **ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES**

1. Set up students with a computer logged on to the database homepage: [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org). They can work individually, in pairs, or small groups.
2. Assign the first question. (e.g., “Of the three vessels that disembarked the most slaves during the slave trade, how many flew the English flag?”). In response, students search for the answer, designing search queries without advice.
3. After an allotted time, take answers from each group. Then discuss how, technically, the groups found the answer. This discussion should be aimed at helping those who

Struggled using the database.

4. Ask three or four more questions, having a discussion about search techniques after each. Some suggested questions: In which year did the most slaves arrive in Barbados? On how many voyages did all the slaves die during the Middle Passage? In which region of Africa did the most ships purchase slaves? Which nation sailed the most voyages in the 18<sup>th</sup> century?
5. Once students are getting the hang of the exercise, make each student write up his or her own question (this can be done for homework). Those questions are collected, shuffled, passed out, and pursued. Afterwards, let students confer with the author of the question they answered, and then share the questions and their search methods with the class.

### **Wrap-Up/Assignment**

After this introductory exercise, have students form small groups and talk about the patterns or interesting anomalies they found. Together they should write research questions that could serve as a paper assignment (e.g., “Why did four of the ten ships that carried the most slaves sail in 1859?”).

### **ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION**

By measuring the success students are having in finding answers to the questions and the appropriateness of the questions they create, their facility with and understanding of the database’s offerings can be assessed.

### **VOCABULARY**

Maritime jargon used on the website (e.g., *rig*, *sterling cash*, *places of call*).

### **FURTHER READINGS & DISCUSSION**

Eltis, David. “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 58 (January 2001): 17-46.

What different types of information does the database contain? What kinds of questions can the database answer? What kinds of questions is it unable to answer? What other resources do we need to answer the questions we have about the database numbers?