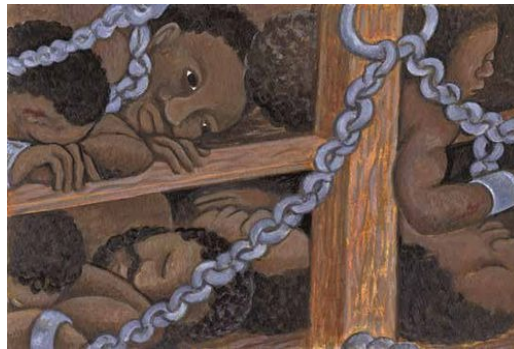


The Middle Passage

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

During the 1500s and 1600s, Europeans were establishing colonies throughout the Americas. As sugar plantations began to thrive there as a way for European colonists to make money, the demand for enslaved labor grew. Europeans filled this demand with enslaved people from Africa through the slave trade.

Africans typically passed through several stages in their journey into slavery. First, they were captured, sometimes by European slavers but usually during wars among African tribes. Next they were marched to a seaport such as Elmina. There they were packed into ships for the journey across the Atlantic. Those who survived the journey were sold at the slave market in a seaport in the Americas and transported to plantations.



The Middle Passage was a harsh experience that many did not survive.

The trip across the Atlantic Ocean was known as the Middle Passage. It was a terrible, dehumanizing experience. Slave ships usually carried between 150 and six hundred Africans. Enslaved people were treated like cargo, not people. They were chained on platforms. Each person had a space about six feet long and sixteen inches wide. Because they were chained in place, they could not even turn over.

As the ships passed through tropical latitudes, temperatures in the hold would rise to over one hundred degrees. Enslaved people were fed small amounts of rice and water twice a day.

The trip across the ocean took between two and four months depending on the weather and the destination. Illness and death were common occurrences. With people packed in close quarters, disease spread easily. Historians estimate that about fifteen percent of enslaved people did not survive the journey. The Atlantic slave trade lasted nearly three hundred years. In that time, European slave traders made approximately fifty-four thousand voyages across the Atlantic.