Understanding the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Learning objective: To understand the origins and impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the movement towards abolition.

Read the passage below carefully. Use your historical knowledge and the information provided to answer the questions in full sentences.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Transatlantic Slave Trade was a brutal system involving the forced movement of millions of African people. European merchants captured individuals from their homes, treating them as property to be sold for profit. These enslaved people were transported across the Atlantic Ocean in inhumane conditions to work on plantations, producing goods like sugar, cotton, and tobacco.

Life for enslaved people was defined by extreme hardship, lack of freedom, and constant danger. However, they were not passive victims; they resisted through rebellion, preserving their cultures, and escaping whenever possible. By the late 18th century, a growing abolitionist movement in Britain began to challenge this system. Activists, including formerly enslaved writers and brave campaigners, highlighted the cruelty of the trade. They lobbied Parliament, held public meetings, and produced pamphlets to change public opinion. Their persistence eventually led to the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which made it illegal for British ships to transport enslaved people. While this was a significant step, it would take many more years of campaigning before slavery itself was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833.

Word bank: Abolition · Transatlantic · Enslaved · Human Rights · Profits · Resistance

1. According to the text, what were three specific goods that enslaved people were forced to produce on plantations? (2 marks)

2. In which year did the British Parliament pass the Slave Trade Act, and what did it achieve? (2 marks)

3. Why does the author describe the enslaved people as not being 'passive victims'? (2 marks)

4. What does the text imply about the role of public opinion in changing government laws during the 18th century? (2 marks)

5. Do you think the abolitionist movement was successful? Explain your answer using evidence from the text. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a commemorative plaque or monument that honours the bravery of those who campaigned for the abolition of slavery. Include symbols that represent freedom and justice.

Extension challenge: Research a historical figure who campaigned for the abolition of slavery, such as Olaudah Equiano or William Wilberforce. Write a short paragraph explaining one specific method they used to influence public opinion.