The history of the slave trade

Slavery has existed for centuries in countries all over the world. But it wasn't until the fifteenth century that the European slave trade from Africa truly began. It continued for almost 400 years, and it changed the face of the world.

Slaves for Portuguese gold

In 1441, Prince Henry of Portugal sent a ship to Africa. The ship traded Portuguese gold, and brought back a present for the king – ten African slaves. A few years later, the prince sailed to Africa, bringing back 235 Africans slaves to Portugal.

The colonies

Over the next 100 years, Portuguese and Spanish settlers arrived in the Americas. Later the British and the French started colonies in the West Indies and the Caribbean islands.
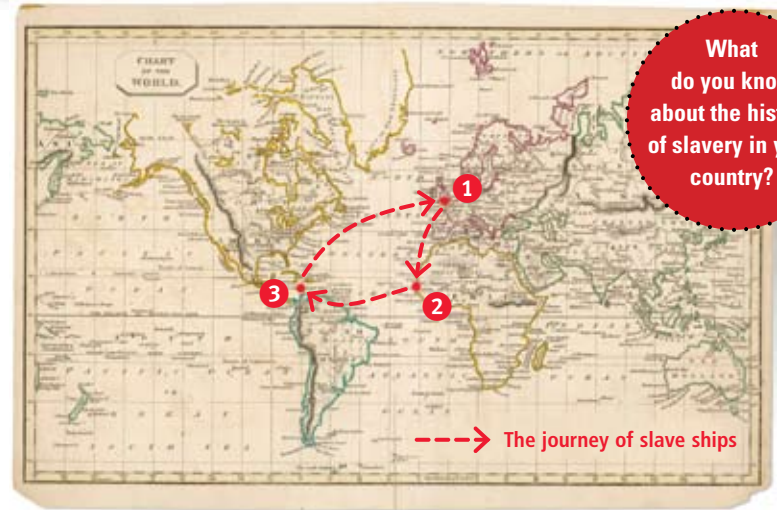
Tobacco and sugar

The British needed workers to work on their sugar and tobacco plantations. In 1619, the first African slaves were brought to the tobacco plantations in Virginia. And by the 1730s, Britain had become the biggest slave-trading country in Europe.

Across the Atlantic

Ships sailed from the British ports of Liverpool, Bristol and London. They traded British guns, cloth and glass, for slaves in west Africa. These slaves were usually prisoners of war, caught during fighting in Africa. The British sold the slaves in the Americas and the Caribbean, and the ships brought back sugar, rum, cotton and tobacco to Britain.

What do you know about the history of slavery in your country?

----> The journey of slave ships

People of Britain say No

From the middle of the eighteenth century, people such as William Wilberforce, James Stephen and Olaudah Equiano, a former slave, worked together to end slavery. In the later part of the 1790s, hundreds of thousands of people in Britain signed a paper saying No to slavery. Many people stopped buying sugar from the West Indies. British designer Josiah Wedgwood designed a badge for people to wear. Finally in 1807, the British government voted against slavery. However, it wasn't until 1900 that slavery really ended in the colonies of the West Indies.

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
settler   tobacco   cloth   rum   badge