

The History of Britain



The history of Britain is very long. It includes people who came to Britain from lots of different backgrounds and different parts of the world.

It is believed that Black people have lived in Britain since the Roman Empire. This was about 2000 years ago.

The Vikings came to Britain from Denmark. Can you think of any other people who came to Britain in the past?

Slavery

Slavery has existed for thousands of years. Slaves are enslaved people who are not paid for their work, have no rights and often live in awful conditions.

Just 500 years ago, many people from Africa were kidnapped and enslaved. Life for people who were enslaved was very difficult and they were treated very badly. It is a very sad part of history.

Britain was involved in slavery for over 200 years.

Although slavery has now been banned in many countries, unfortunately, some people in the world are still enslaved.



The Slave Trade

In the 1500s, Britain began to buy and sell people from Africa who were then **enslaved**.

Men, women and children were forcefully taken from their homes, put on British ships and then sold to slave owners in America and the Caribbean.

The enslaved people were made to work in the fields growing sugar, cotton and tobacco. They were never paid for the very hard work that they did. Over 12 million people were taken away from Africa and enslaved. It is thought that Britain was responsible for transporting around 4 million people who were enslaved.



How do you feel about Britain being involved in **slavery**?

Slavery in the British Empire

Many towns and ports in Britain became very rich because of the slave trade.

There was a lot of [racism](#) in Britain. Black people in Britain were often treated very badly. Some people tried to make them feel they were different to White people. This is very wrong.

In 1765, groups of people began to campaign for the freedom of slaves.

Did You Know...?

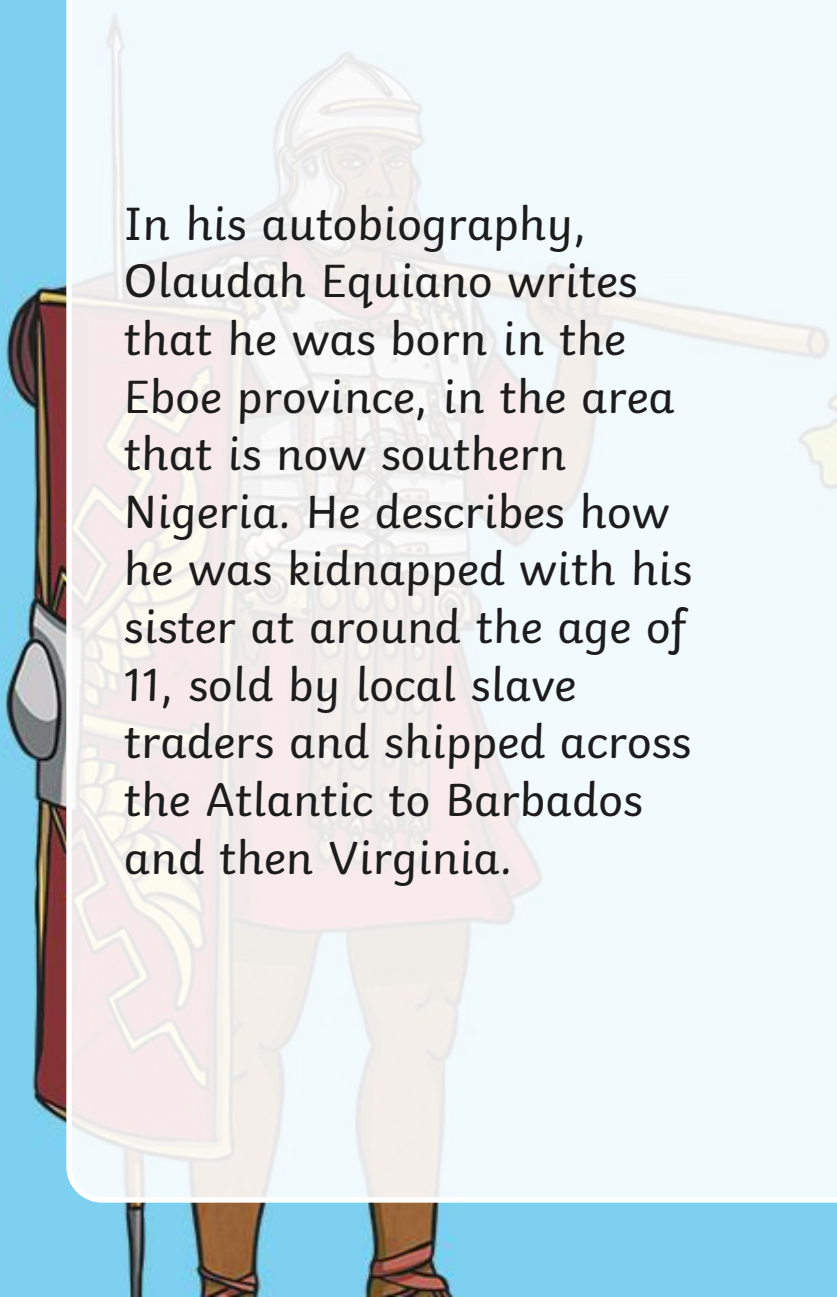
Lots of Black and Minority Ethnic people arrived in Britain in the 1700s; some were slaves, some servants and some sailors. In 1760, over 20,000 Black people lived in Britain.

Olaudah Equiano

Some slaves bought their freedom and told their stories.

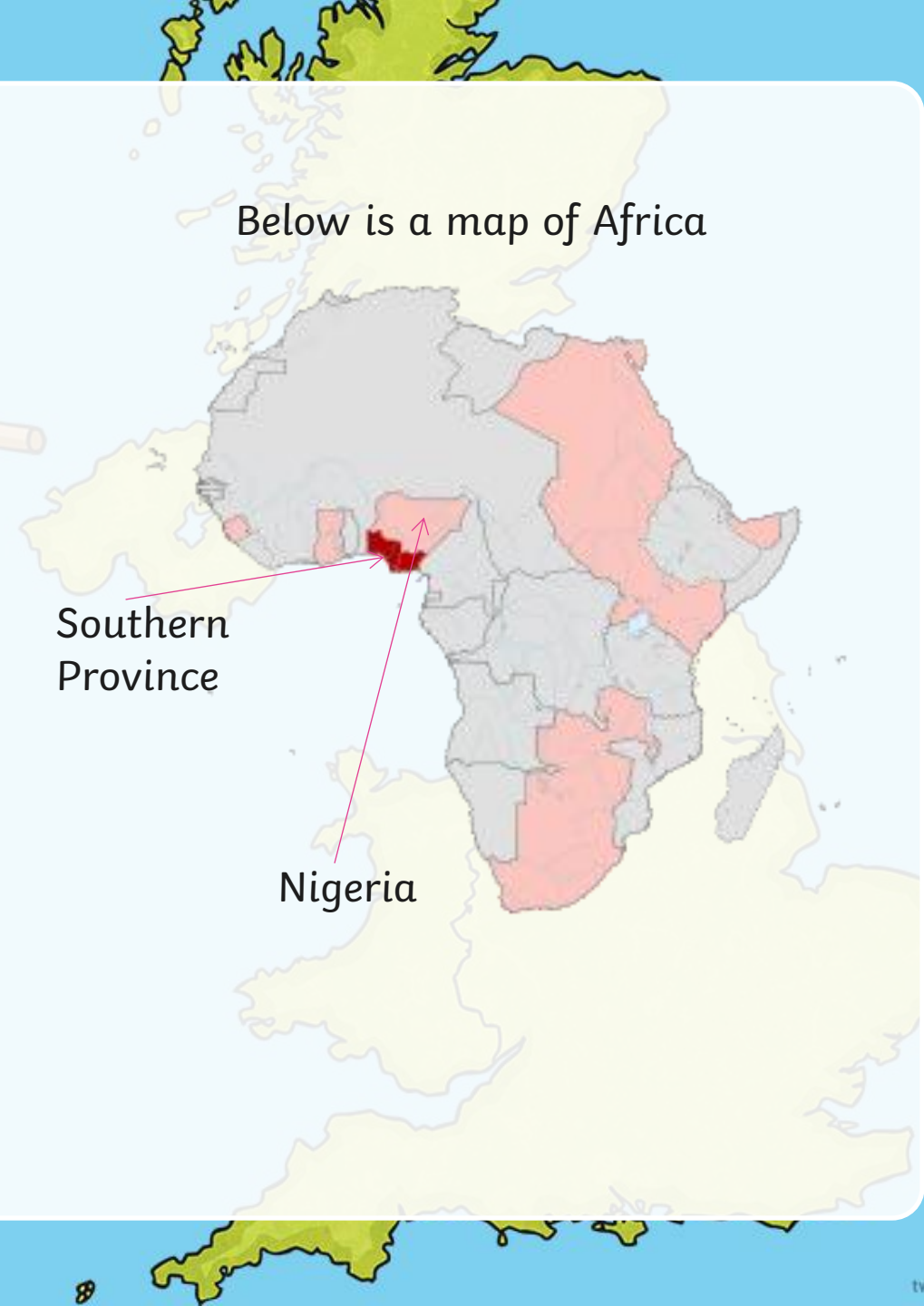
Olaudah Equiano wrote a book about his life as a slave and a sailor. People were shocked by how much he had suffered. He became very famous in Britain.





In his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano writes that he was born in the Eboe province, in the area that is now southern Nigeria. He describes how he was kidnapped with his sister at around the age of 11, sold by local slave traders and shipped across the Atlantic to Barbados and then Virginia.

Below is a map of Africa



Southern Province

Nigeria

In Virginia he was sold to a Royal Navy officer, Lieutenant Michael Pascal, who renamed him 'Gustavus Vassa'. Equiano travelled the oceans with Pascal for eight years, during which time he was baptised and learned to read and write.

Pascal then sold Equiano to a ship captain in London, who took him to Montserrat (in the Carribean Islands), where he was sold to the prominent merchant Robert King.

While working as a deckhand, valet and barber for King, Equiano earned money by trading on the side. In only three years, he made enough money to buy his own freedom for £40. Equiano then spent much of the next 20 years travelling the world, including trips to Turkey and the Arctic.

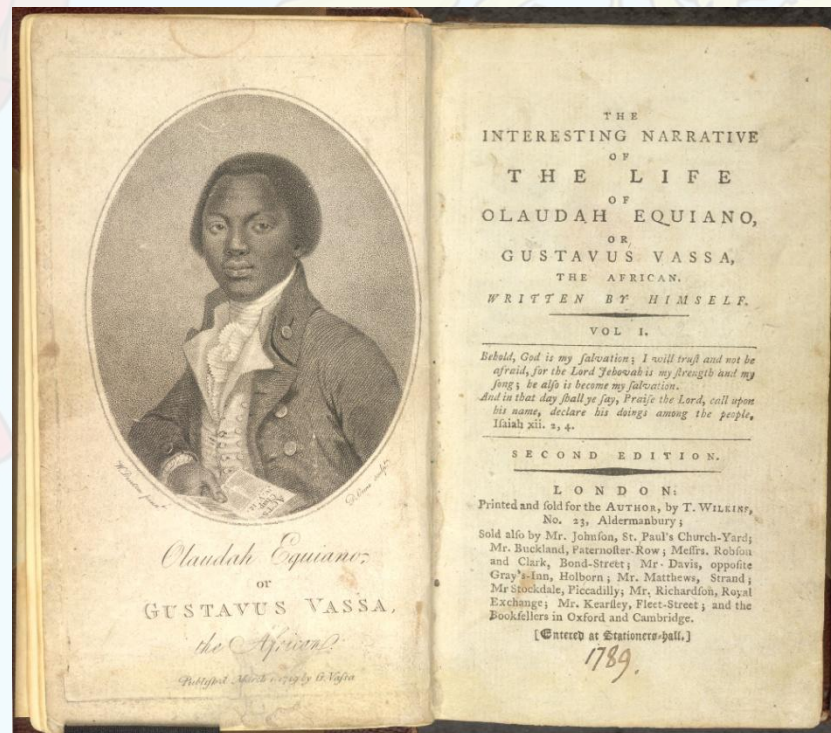


In 1786 in London, he became involved in the movement to abolish slavery. He was a prominent member of the 'Sons of Africa', a group of 12 black men who campaigned for abolition.



In 1789 he published his autobiography, 'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African'. He travelled widely promoting the book, which became immensely popular, helped the abolitionist cause, and made Equiano a wealthy man. It is one of the earliest books published by a black African writer.

In 1792, Equiano married an Englishwoman, Susanna Cullen, and they had two daughters. Equiano died on 31 March 1797.



Your Task:

Discussing with a partner, write down 5 key facts that you have learnt about Olaudah Equiano. Try to list them in order of importance. Consider the impact his life has had for others; how he demonstrated British Values and how other people's intolerance may have affected him.

Olaudah Equiano

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