



# Enslaved People's Accounts

Resource

## Source A

**Ottobah Cugoano- enslaved off the coast of present day Ghana in the mid-18th century.**

“a plan was concerted amongst us, that we might burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames; but we were betrayed by one of our own countrywomen, who slept with some of the head men of the ship, for it was common for the dirty filthy sailors to take the African women and lie upon their bodies; but the men were chained and pent up in holes. It was the women and boys which were to burn the ship, though that was prevented, the discovery was likewise a cruel and bloody scene.”

### Questions to consider:

1. How were the men and women treated differently on board this ship?
2. What did the enslaved people plan to do as a form of resistance during the middle passage?
3. Why did the plan not work?  
Why might this have happened?

## Source B

**Oulaudah Equiano- enslaved at the age of 10 in the area that is now Southwest Nigeria.**

“I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before”

### Questions to consider:

1. What was the first thing that Equiano noticed once he was put on board the ship?
2. Why do you think enslaved people were forced to eat?
3. What did Equiano hope would happen to him on board the ship?



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## Source C

**Abdulrahman Ibrahim Ibn Sori**  
(also known as Prince) - **an enslaved man from what is now Guinea who was heir to a powerful Muslim kingdom in West Africa** (Fouta Djallon)

"I have known ships arrive from Africa, in which 750 slaves had been embarked; but owing to cruel usage, scanty and unwholesome provisions, impure air, and absolute filth which prevailed on board, not more than 400 lived to reach Charleston; and of these, only one half were in a most weakly and miserable condition, and the remainder could by no means be classed as sound and healthy... I have seen a slave ship arrive from Africa, in such a condition as to its freight of flesh and blood, that no mortal or ordinary nerves could put his head below the hatch"

### Questions to consider:

1. What might Sori have felt when he was first enslaved due to his position in West African society?
2. What did he witness occurring on many of the slave ships he saw arrive in America?
  - a. What were some of the reasons he describes that caused this to happen?

## Source D

**Alexander Falconbridge - a surgeon on board a British slave ship, 1788**  
(first hand account from a free person)

Exercise being deemed necessary for the preservation of their health they are sometimes obliged to dance when the weather will permit their coming on deck. If they go about it reluctantly or do not move with agility, they are flogged; a person standing by them all the time with a cat-o'-nine-tails in his hands for the purpose. Their music, upon these occasions, consists of a drum, sometimes with only one head; and when that is worn out they make use of the bottom of one of the tubs before described. The poor wretches are frequently compelled to sing also; but when they do so, their songs are generally, as may naturally be expected, melancholy lamentations of their exile from their native country.

### Questions to consider:

1. Why might this account be less reliable as a source of information on what it was like for enslaved people during the middle passage?
2. What types of activities does he recall enslaved people on board being required to do?
  - a. What do you think was the purpose of these activities?



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1. Treatment	2. Conditions	3. Punishments	3. Resistance