

HOMEWORK HELPSHEET / REVISION FILE

THE TRIANGULAR TRADE

KP2

BACKGROUND

The Triangular Trade was the name given to the trading route used by British merchants involved in the slave trade during the eighteenth century. It was called the triangular trade because the ships made three journeys, which formed the three sides of a triangle. The first stage of the journey was from Britain to West Africa where goods made in British workshops were exchanged for slaves. The second stage was the transport of slaves from Africa to the West Indies where they were sold for a large profit. The third and final stage was the transport of produce from the West Indies back to Britain. Merchants who traded in this way became very rich as they made a profit at each stage of the journey and West Indian produce sold for a very high price in Britain. In 1767 the Liverpool slave ship 'Thomas' is reported to have made a profit of £24,000 on a single voyage round the triangle. At this time worker's wages were about 25 pence a week. Slave trading with Africa was a risky but highly profitable business.



The three stages of the triangular trade were known as: -

The Outward Passage	The Middle Passage	The Home Passage
Britain to West Africa	West Africa to the West Indies	West Indies to Britain

- The Outward Passage** - Ships would load goods in Britain and sail to West Africa to trade for slaves. African rulers provided the slaves in exchange for British goods guns, metal, cloth brandy and cheap trinkets such as glass beads.
 - The Middle Passage** - Slaves would be loaded and then be shipped to the West Indies and sold. Slaves endured terrible conditions on the voyage to the West Indies and on average 12% of them died.
 - The Home Passage** - The ship would load West Indian produce to sell when it returned to Britain. In the West Indies, slaves were exchanged for sugar/coffee/ tobacco and cotton, which sold for high prices in Britain. West Indian produce was often exported to Europe where prices were even higher
 - Ships would aim to complete the voyage around the triangular route in about eight or nine months but depending on the weather and trading conditions it could take a year or more.
 - The voyage from Britain to West Africa would take on average around 40 days.
 - On reaching West Africa the ship might have to stay for 4-8 months trading for slaves with local African rulers and traders.
 - The voyage from West Africa to the West Indies would take on average 38 days. The ship would remain for 1-2 months selling slaves and buying local produce.
 - The Voyage from the West Indies back to Britain would take on average 50-60 days. It was important to get a cargo of sugar, coffee, tobacco or cotton at a good price. This would gain the biggest profit in Britain and pay for the next voyage.
- Bristol, Liverpool and London were the main ports involved in the slave trade. In 1755 there were 237 licensed slave traders in Bristol, 147 in London and 89 in Liverpool. There were also slave traders operating from Glasgow, Chester, Exeter, and Whitehaven. By 1770 Liverpool was the leading slave trade port with 40% of all slave ships.