

## Unit 4, Lesson 5: Hidden History - Olaudah Equiano

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### Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will learn that an accounting of enslavement should not be limited to descriptions of victimization. Olaudah Equiano's story that any accounting of enslavement should include attention to the agency and resistance exercised by many of those who were enslaved - brave actions that merit both attention and admiration.

### Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard 1a, 4-5 [Chronology]:** Students will study historical events and persons within a given time frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-effect factors.
- **History Standard 2a, 4-5 [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials
- **History Standard 2b, 4-5 [Analysis]:** Students will examine historical materials relating to a particular region, society, or theme; chronologically arrange them; and analyze change over time.

### Big Ideas

- agency, resistance, victimization

### Essential Questions

- What were some of the experiences of enslaved people and how did they respond?

### Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that, although victimization is an extremely important part of the story of enslavement and one frequently told, a fuller and richer account requires us to recognize and appreciate the agency and resistance exhibited by enslaved people

### Resources

- [Resource 1: Excerpts from Olaudah Equiano's Autobiography](#)
- [Resource 2: Graphic Organizer](#)
- [Resource 3: Create and Analyze a Chronology](#)
- [Resource 4: Complete an Account](#)

### Procedures

1. **Warm-Up:** Present the following scenario to students.

Billie the bully walks up to Breck who's a wreck and demands Breck's lunch money. Billie is the biggest and strongest person in school.

***What are some different ways that Breck might respond to Billie?***

2. **Introduce the Lesson:** Tell students that they are going to learn about a very famous African man named Olaudah Equiano who was enslaved, brought to America, became free, and wrote one the first accounts of enslavement written by an enslaved person. As you learn about Equiano, I also want to draw your attention to some words that are important for understanding experiences and reactions to enslavement.
3. **Building Academic Vocabulary:** Project the following terms with the definitions for students to see:
  - a. Victimization - being treated cruelly or unkindly.
  - b. Agency - the actions that people take to achieve a desired goal or produce a good effect.
  - c. Resistance - the attempt to prevent something by action or argument.

Ask students to return to the warm-up and identify examples of victimization, agency, and resistance that were among their responses to the Billie the bully scenario.

4. **First Reading:** Distribute copies of [Resource 1: Excerpts from Olaudah Equiano's Autobiography](#). Read aloud as students follow along.
5. **Second Reading of Resource 1 - Jigsaw:** Ask students to form triads (groups of 3) and assume a number 1, 2, or 3. Distribute 3 different colored markers to the triads. Students are to re-read Resource 1 with the following purposes in mind:
  - a. **Student 1** - highlights examples of individuals being victimized in the account.
  - b. **Student 2** - highlights examples of agency on the part of individuals in the account.
  - c. **Student 3** - highlights examples of resistance on the part of individuals in the account.

*Sponge activity* - if 1-2 students finish early, they are to go back and find examples of the other two phenomena.

After sufficient time has elapsed, ask students to share examples of what they found. The other students should add any that might have been overlooked.

Invite volunteers to share what they found with the rest of the class.

6. **Mini-Lecture I:** explain and discuss the following with students.

#### **Victimization versus Agency**

People who were enslaved were victims of very mean treatment - a process known as victimization. But in the face of the meanness, enslaved people also engaged in remarkable acts of agency. **Agency** can be described as the actions that people take to achieve a desired goal or produce a good effect. Often, agency took the form of resistance.

Many times, when students are taught about enslavement, they only learn about how enslaved people were victims. One of the most important and inspiring things to learn from

enslavement in America is how enslaved people frequently resisted efforts by others to treat them as less than human. Despite the possibility of being punished, severely at times, enslaved people exercised their own agency and took steps to show that they intended to keep some control over their own lives.

Taking actions to ensure that a person is treated fairly and equally are ways to demonstrate agency.

7. **Demonstrating Understanding Through Examples:** Invite students to work in small groups to generate examples of victimization, agency, and resistance that were not described in Resource 1. You may want to specify that the examples should not be personal (in other words, ask them to make-up examples or give examples from movies, television, or the news).
8. **Mini Lecture II:** Share the following with the students.

Equiano used the name Gustavus Vassa for the remainder of his life. He was named after a former King of Sweden who his enslaver admired. The only time he used Olaudah Equiano was for his memoir account, part of which you just read. Equiano, now Gustavus, was eventually bought by a man in Virginia then sold several times.

Equiano spent much of this time working on ships and traveling with his enslavers. His last enslaver was a Quaker man named Robert King from Philadelphia who traveled around buying and selling goods. King taught Equiano the trading business, how to read and write well, allowed him to buy and sell goods to earn money, and agreed to let Equiano purchase his own freedom.

In 1766 Equiano paid King approximately \$7,000 in today's dollars for his freedom. King asked Equiano to stay with him as a business partner, but Equiano chose to move to England.

While in England, Equiano worked to help the poor and joined organizations that wanted to end slavery. Equiano's memoir was the first account of slavery by an enslaved person. It became a bestseller and helped people understand the evils and experiences of slavery. It remains an important source of information for historians.

When Equiano died in 1797, he was able to leave his family approximately \$97,000 in today's money!

**Ask Students** - can you identify any examples of victimization, agency, or resistance in the information I just provided.

9. **Understanding the Experiences of the Enslaved:** victimization, resistance, and agency.
  - a. Distribute copies of [Resource 2: Graphic Organizer](#).
  - b. Read the text on the paper aloud as students follow along.
  - c. Have them complete the chart at the bottom of the page and describe an example of agency that they have exercised or might in the future.
10. **Create and Analyze a Chronology:** Distribute copies of [Resource 3: Create and Analyze a Chronology](#). Read the directions as students follow along.
11. **Complete an Account:** Distribute copies of [Resource 4: Complete an Account](#) - a partially completed account of enslavement and Olaudah's experiences and responses. Go over the directions on the page and have students complete the account by filling in the blank spaces with information learned during the lesson.

**For the Teacher**

**Resource 3 Answer Key**

**Resource 3: Complete an Account**

**Directions:** read the incomplete account of enslavement and Olaudah Equiano below and fill in the blanks with information that you learned in this lesson.

The story of American slavery is not a story just about [victimization](#). It is also a story about [agency](#) and [resistance](#). The life of Olaudah Equiano supports this conclusion.

Equiano wrote, "When I turned the age of eleven, my happiness was brought to an end." The reason his happiness was brought to an end was because [he was enslaved](#). This is an example of how the life as an enslaved person was one of [victimization](#).

But enslaved people often exercised their own [agency](#). When the man who enslaved Olaudah tried to change his name, Olaudah told him that he "wanted [my name to be Jacob](#)." This is an example of how enslaved people exercised their own [agency](#).

Olaudah's experience as an enslaved person also illustrates how some enslaved people [resisted](#) the cruel ways that they were treated. For example, when Olaudah was on the slave ship heading to America, two of the enslavers offered him food. Like others on board the ship, Olaudah [refused to eat the food](#).

It is important for people to learn that the people who were enslaved did not just sit back and have things done to them. Despite the threats of punishment, they exercised their own [agency](#) as human beings and often [resisted](#) having to do things that enslavers wanted them to do.

In the end, we need to recognize that the enslaved people were both victims and heroes.

12. **Checking for Understanding:** Students' responses to Resources 2, 3, and 4 are checks for understanding.

**Optional Extension** 3 minute, 20 second video [here](#). Use the video to reinforce some of what students learned about Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vasa).