

Know your enemy!

Clarkson's work was difficult, even dangerous. Powerful people made lots of money from the slave trade and were out to stop him. Clarkson needed to know the arguments they used to defend the slave trade before he could challenge them.

CLARKSON CHALLENGE 2

Look at Clarkson's notes on the right to see the arguments put forward to defend the slave trade.

- 1 Match each of the sources below to an argument put forward to defend the slave trade.
- 2 How could Clarkson challenge the reliability of Sources 1–3?
- 3 What do you think was the main factor that motivated people to support the slave trade? Was it greed, ignorance or racism?

SOURCE 1 Robert Norris, captain of a slave ship, describes conditions on the slave ships (1788).

[The slaves] had sufficient room, sufficient air, and sufficient provisions. When upon deck, they made merry and amused themselves with dancing ... In short, the voyage from Africa to the West Indies was one of the happiest periods of a Negro's life.

SOURCE 2 From a manual for plantation owners.

How pleasing, how gratifying it is to see a swarm of healthy, active, cheerful, obedient boys and girls going to and returning from their puerile [childish and silly] work in the field.

► **SOURCE 3** This painting was done by an artist paid by a plantation owner who wanted to hang the picture on the wall of his home in England.



Clarkson's notes

Arguments put forward to defend the slave trade

- 1 *The racist argument:*
Africans are less skilled than Europeans, proving that white people are superior, so they have a right to do as they wish with black people.
- 2 *The economic arguments:*
The slave trade makes lots of money for Britain. It has to continue. Africa is undeveloped – no other type of trade is possible.
- 3 *Slaves are not captured cruelly. Most slaves are already prisoners of war. They would be killed anyway.*
- 4 *Conditions on the slave ships are good.*
- 5 *Enslaved Africans are well treated on the plantations.*

Collect your evidence carefully

Clarkson's travels would take him 35,000 miles around Britain and make him one of the best known men in the country. He spent the summer and autumn months touring the slave ports.

The rest of his time was spent in Wisbech or London doing further research, writing up his findings and keeping in touch with local anti-slavery groups.

CLARKSON CHALLENGE 3

- 1 Draw up an evidence collection grid with four columns:

Argument put forward to defend the slave trade	Your counter argument	Supporting evidence	Witness
1 Africans were less skilled than Europeans – white people were superior	African kingdoms before the arrival of Europeans were just as advanced as those in Europe	The kingdom of Ghana... The kingdom of Benin...	
2			
3			
4			
5			

- 2 Fill in the first column using Clarkson's notes on page 74.
- 3 Use Clarkson's notes below to help you challenge the first argument.

Clarkson's notes

Mali

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries the kingdom of Mali spread across much of West and North-East Africa. At its largest the kingdom was 2000 kilometres wide and there was organised trade with gold dust and agricultural produce being exported North. Mali reached its peak in the fourteenth century. Cowrie shells were used as a form of currency and gold, salt and copper were traded.

Songhay

Between 1450 and 1550, the Songhay kingdom grew very powerful and prosperous. It had a well-organised system of government, the kingdom imported fabrics from Europe and it had a developed currency. Timbuktu became one of the most important places in the world. Libraries and universities were built and it became the meeting place for poets, scholars and artists from other parts of Africa and the Middle East.

Ghana

In the west of Africa, the kingdom of Ghana was a vast empire that spread across an area the size of Western Europe. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries it traded in gold, salt and copper. It was like a medieval European empire, with a collection of powerful local rulers, controlled by one king or emperor. Ghana was highly advanced and prosperous. It is said that the Ghanaian ruler had an army of 200,000 men.

Benin

The kingdoms of Benin and Ife were led by the Yoruba people and sprang up between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Studies of the Benin kingdom show that the people were highly skilled in ivory carving, pottery, rope and gum production.

Clarkson's journey 1787-1788

London, early 1787

Clarkson's notes

My journey started in London. The first African trading ship I boarded was not a slave ship. The 'Lively' had arrived from Africa with a cargo of ivory, beeswax, palm oil, pepper and beautifully woven and dyed cloth. I soon realised that many of the goods had been produced by skilled craftsmen and was horrified to think that these people might be made slaves. I bought samples of everything and added to this collection over the following years. I kept these products in a small chest and used the contents to challenge the negative views about the African way of life held by many British people at the time. My aim was also to show that Britain could carry on a profitable trade with Africa in goods other than human beings.

► **SOURCE 4** This painting of Thomas Clarkson was produced by A E Chalon. On the table is a map of Africa. At Clarkson's feet is his box, containing a collection he made of the products of Africa – woods, ivory, pepper, gum, cinnamon, tobacco, cotton, and an African loom and spindle.

Clarkson's notes

I also read a great deal. I soon realised that other people had similar views to my own. One of the few people to write positively about Africa was John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. His pamphlet 'Thoughts upon Slavery' was published in 1774. Here are some of the things he wrote.

Thoughts On SLAVERY.

By John Wesley.

THE GOLD-COAST and Slave-Coast, all who have seen it agree, is fruitful and pleasant. It produces vast amounts of rice and other grain, plenty of fruit, oil, and fish in great abundance, with much tame and wild cattle. The same is true of the kingdoms of Benin, Congo and Angola.

These three nations practise several trades; they have smiths, saddlers, potters and weavers. And they are very ingenious at their several occupations. Their smiths not only make all the instruments of iron, but also work many things neatly in gold and silver. It is chiefly the women and children who weave fine cloth, which they dye blue and black.

CLARKSON CHALLENGE 3 continued

Use the material on pages 76-79 to fill in your evidence collection table (page 75).



I also met **Olaudah Equiano**. He had been kidnapped from his home in Africa and enslaved when still very young.

My brother, **John Clarkson**, was another important source of information. He had served in the Royal Navy from the age of twelve and had met sailors who had served on slave ships. When he left the navy, John became an active member of the abolition movement.

In London I met three people who gave me lots of information about what the slave trade was really like. **Granville Sharp** was a lawyer who helped to form the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade with me. Sharp was one of the few people in England at the time already campaigning against slavery. A few years earlier he had tried to prosecute the captain of one slave ship for murder.

In 1782 Collingwood, the captain of the slave ship *Zong*, ordered that over 130 slaves be thrown overboard. The ship had left Africa in September. By November 60 slaves had died and many were seriously ill. Collingwood knew that when he reached Jamaica he would not be able to sell the sick slaves and that the ship's owners would lose money. Collingwood thought that if they threw the sick slaves overboard the owners would be able to claim money back from the insurance company. Those slaves who put up a fight were chained before they were thrown overboard.

The owners claimed insurance money for the value of the dead slaves. I tried to prosecute the ship's captain for murder but failed. The judge said that murder was not the issue and that it was 'just as if horses were killed'.

One day, when all our people were gone out to their work as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both. My sister and I were separated and I ended up in the hands of a slave dealer who supplied the Atlantic slave ships.

Six months later I found myself on board a slave ship. The heat, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. The air soon became unfit for breathing, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. This wretched situation was made worse by the chains and the filth of the toilet buckets into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of women, and the groaning of the dying, created a scene of horror almost unbelievable. Three desperate slaves tried to kill themselves by jumping overboard. Two drowned, the other was captured and beaten unmercifully. When I refused to eat, I too was beaten.

African slave dealers capture men, women and children and march them to the coast where they are traded for goods. The prisoners are forced to march long distances, sometimes hundreds of miles, with their hands tied behind their backs. The prisoners are connected by chains or wooden neck yokes.

Their journey to the coast can take months and sometimes nearly half can die on the journey.



Granville Sharp



Olaudah Equiano



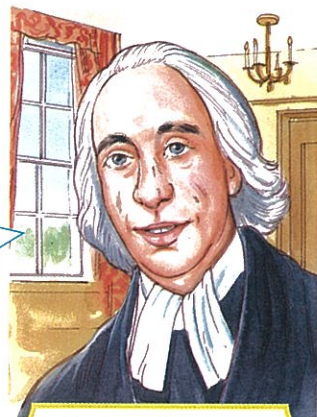
John Clarkson

Kent



Another important witness was **James Ramsay**, an Anglican minister who had recently returned from the West Indies. Ramsay was able to give me a powerful eyewitness account. I spent a month with him at his rectory in Kent.

I was a navy doctor and minister on the West Indian island of St Christopher's, where I saw for myself what conditions were like on the plantations. I often saw beatings and weary slaves still carrying cane to the mill by moonlight. New mothers had to bring their babies to the fields, leaving them exposed to the sun and rain whilst they worked.



James Ramsay

Punishment

- If a slave runs away for 30 days or more the punishment is death, yet an owner who kills a slave is only fined £15.
- Twelve lashes of the whip can be given for bad work.
- Slaves who run away can be given over a hundred lashes. They are sometimes branded on the face or have an ear nailed to a post.

Clarkson's notes

Notes on conversation with James Ramsay

Life on the Plantations

- The slaves are often underfed. Their rations are so small that they are left with nothing during the second half of the week.
- Slaves suffer from tropical diseases such as leprosy, dysentery and yaws (a skin disease causing large red swellings).
- These diseases together with the slaves' bad diet and poor living and working conditions mean that life expectancy is only 26. Forty per cent of the Africans who arrive to work on the plantations die in the first year.

Work on the Plantations

- Children are put to work from the age of seven or eight. They have to weed, plant corn or shovel manure into cane holes.
- Adults start work in the fields between five and seven a.m., and continue, with meal breaks, until seven p.m., usually six days a week.

Clarkson's notes

This is what Alexander Falconbridge told me, word for word: "The surgeon, upon going between decks in the morning to examine the situation, frequently finds several dead. These dead slaves are thrown to the sharks."

It often happens that those who are placed at a distance from the latrine buckets, in trying to get to them, tumble over their companions, as a result of being shackled. Unable to carry on, and prevented from getting to the tubs, they have to ease themselves where they lie. This situation is added to by the tubs being too small and only emptied once every day.

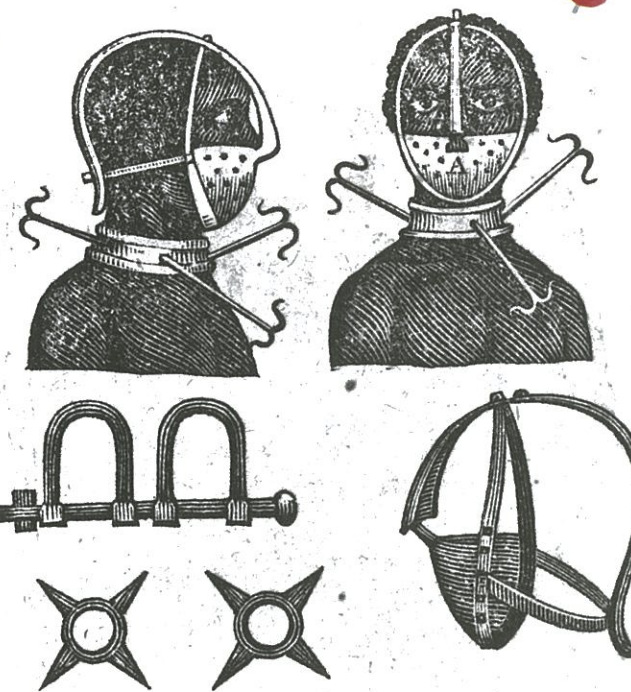
The deck, that is the floor of their rooms, was so covered with blood and mucus from slaves suffering from the flux [dysentery], that it resembled a slaughterhouse. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful. At a slave market in the West Indies, one Liverpool captain disguised his slaves' dysentery by ordering the ship's doctor to plug up their anuses with rope fibre."

Liverpool

From Bristol I went on to Liverpool. Liverpool, with its six miles [9.6 km] of docks, was the slaving capital of the world. This year these docks would be sending a total of 81 slave ships to Africa. Liverpool's shipyards built many of these ships, some of which could hold up to a thousand slaves each. I knew it was a dangerous place for me. And it was not long before I received death threats and a gang of sailors tried to throw me from the pier.

For the first time, I saw the 'tools of the trade' displayed in a shop window. I bought iron handcuffs, leg shackles, a hideous thumb screw and a surgical instrument with a screw device, called a speculum oris, used by doctors in cases of lockjaw. I asked why it was there and the shopkeeper told me it was for wrenching open the mouths of any slaves who tried to commit suicide by not eating. These items provided important evidence of how slaves were treated on the journey from Africa to the West Indies.

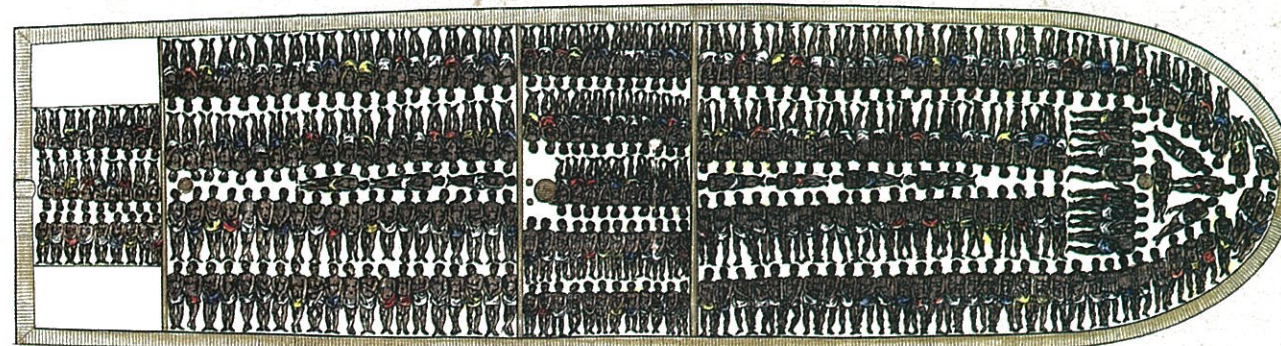
Clarkson's notes



Plymouth

My last stop was in Plymouth where I uncovered a key piece of evidence, the plan of a loaded slave ship. I reworked this when I got back to London, applying the idea to the Brookes [a slave ship from Liverpool]. The Brookes is currently allowed to carry 454 Africans by law. The Brookes used to carry as many as 609 Africans on earlier voyages. On a slave ship an adult is given a space of 6 feet (1.8 m) by 1 foot 4 inches (0.4 m).

Clarkson's notes



I realised it was time for me to get closer to the slave trade by visiting the great slaving ports of Bristol and Liverpool. Bristol first – a three-day journey on horseback.

The city had warehouses full of slave-grown products just arrived from the Americas. Each evening I searched for witnesses. Many captains and sailors were unwilling to talk to me, fearing that they would lose their jobs. However, I managed to find a doctor who worked on slave ships, called Alexander Falconbridge.

Using the evidence to win support

By the time Clarkson returned from Plymouth in 1788 he had collected a great deal of evidence. However, to run a successful

campaign requires more than just collecting evidence. You have to use the evidence to win support and influence people. This is the final part of your challenge.

CLARKSON CHALLENGE 4

Members of Parliament had to be persuaded to introduce a law to ban the slave trade. Imagine you are helping Thomas Clarkson to write the parliamentary speech. You need to use the evidence you have collected to persuade Members of Parliament to abolish the slave trade. You need the MPs to do more than simply listen and agree with what you are saying. You need to persuade them to take action!

Tips from a master!

Before you start planning your speech, look at the advice below and study the techniques used by Prime Minister William Pitt to produce a powerful speech.

1 Make sure you **structure** your speech carefully.

- You need a powerful opening paragraph and a strong conclusion.
- You also need to make sure that you defeat as many of the arguments put forward to defend slavery as possible. Use your evidence collection grid (page 75). Start a different paragraph for each argument you challenge.
- Remember to support your counter-arguments with specific examples and to quote from key witnesses.

- a) Study Extract 1. How does Pitt **provide a powerful opening** to his speech?
- b) Study Extract 4. What does Pitt say is the main argument people in Britain use for keeping the slave trade? How does Pitt **destroy his opponent's arguments**?
- c) Study Extract 5. What is the **main reason** Pitt gives for ending the slave trade in his **last paragraph**?

2 Make sure you include **emotive words and phrases** to make your speech more powerful.

- a) What impact does the word 'tearing' have on the last sentence of Extract 1. Imagine that Pitt had used the word 'moving' instead. Why would this be less powerful?
- b) Can you find three other examples of emotive words or phrases in Pitt's speech? Explain the impact they would have on a person listening to the speech.

3 Use **clever techniques** to win over your audience and make your arguments more persuasive. Pitt uses all the techniques listed below. Can you spot them?

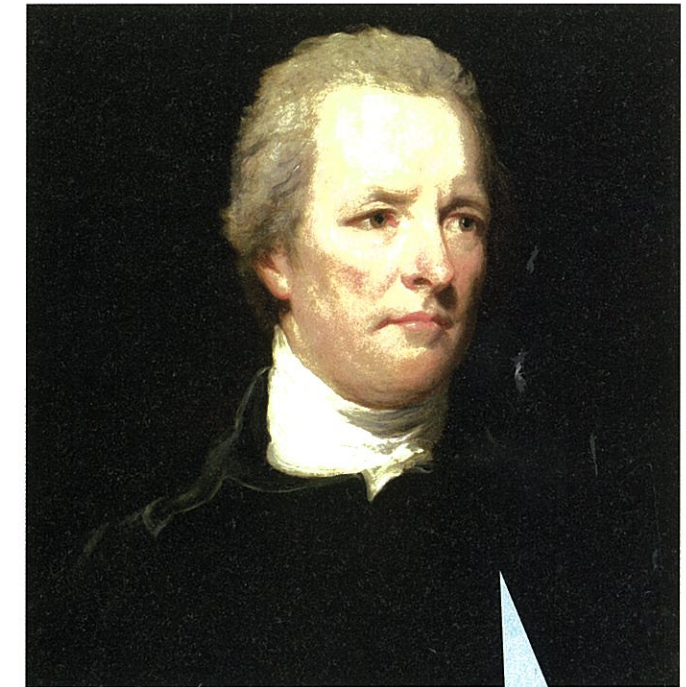
- Playing on the audience's guilt – making them feel bad about something.
- Making key points easy to follow by using short, sharp sentences.
- Creating thought-provoking images or pictures in the audience's mind.
- Clusters of three – three phrases or words used to emphasise a point.
- Raising rhetorical questions – questions that don't require an answer but make the audience think about a key issue.
- Using words like 'we', 'us' and 'you' to make the audience feel involved or responsible.
- Using repetition – saying the same word or phrase more than once for emphasis.

4 Think carefully about how to **perform** your speech. How would you perform Pitt's speech?

- a) Where would you **add emphasis** or **change your tone**?
- b) Where would you **pause** so that a key point really sinks in?

Pitt's speech

On 2 April 1792, the prime minister, William Pitt (right), stood up in the House of Commons ready to keep his promise to his close friend William Wilberforce that he would do everything in his power to abolish the slave trade. Pitt was ill and exhausted and had to take medicine before he could begin. Somehow he managed to find enough strength to deliver one of the most powerful speeches ever delivered by a prime minister. Here are some extracts:



Extract 1

Now, sir, I come to Africa. Why ought the slave trade to be abolished? I know of no evil that ever existed, nor can imagine any evil to exist, worse than the tearing of seventy or eighty thousand persons every year from their own land.

Extract 2

We ourselves tempt them to sell their fellow creatures to us. It was our arms in the river Cameroon, put into the hands of the slave trader, that gave him the means to push his trade. Can we pretend that we have a right to carry away to distant regions men of whom we know nothing? Those that sell slaves to us have no right to do so.

Extract 3

But the evil does not stop here. Do you think nothing of the ruin and the miseries in which so many individuals, still remaining in Africa, are involved as a consequence of carrying off so many people? Do you think nothing of their families left behind? Of the connections broken? Of the friendships, attachments, and relationships that are burst asunder? Do you think nothing of the miseries in consequence that are felt from generation to generation?

Extract 4

I am sure the immediate abolition of the slave trade is the first, the principal, the most indispensable act of policy, of duty, and of justice that this country has to take. There are, however, arguments set up to [defend the slave trade]. The slave trade system, it is supposed, has taken such deep root in Africa that it is absurd to think of it being eradicated. 'We are friends,' say they, 'to humanity. We are second to none of you in our zeal for the good of Africa – but the French will not abolish – the Dutch will not abolish. We wait, therefore, till they join us or set us an example.' How, sir, is this enormous evil ever to be eradicated, if every nation waits?

Extract 5

The great and happy change to be expected in the state of her [Africa's] inhabitants is, of all the various and important benefits of the abolition, the most important. I shall oppose to the utmost any attempt to postpone, even for an hour, the total abolition of the slave trade; a measure which we are bound, by the most pressing duty, to adopt.