



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS

Literary Analysis

Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.2 Use information from the text to answer questions or to state the main idea or provide relevant details.

Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.4 Identify and analyze the characteristics of a variety of types of text (e.g., primary source historical documents).

NOTABLE QUOTE

“Every new thing that I observed I treasured up in my memory.”

FYI

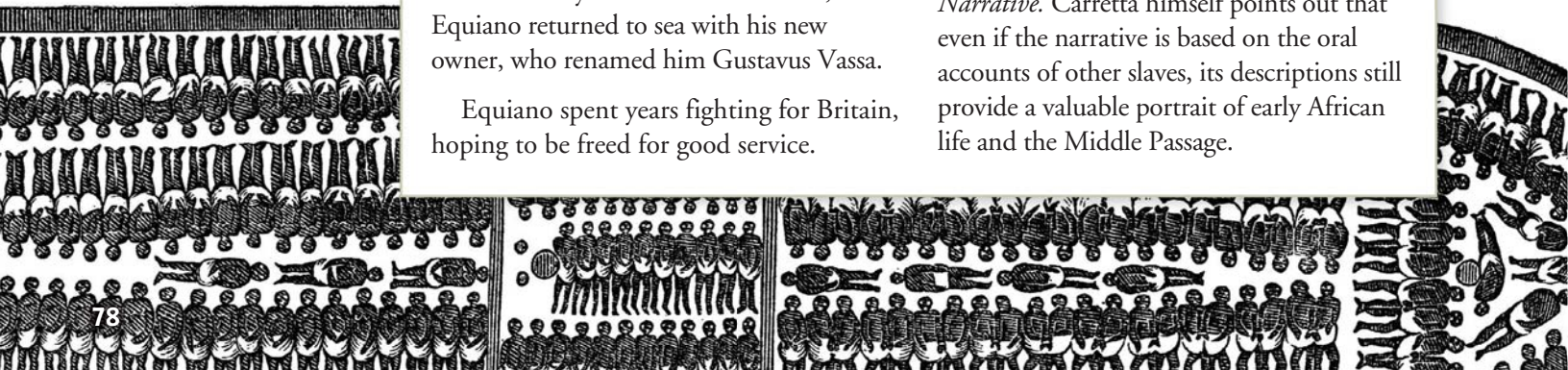
Did you know that Olaudah Equiano . . .

- was a best-selling author in Britain?
- owned slaves in Central America?
- married an English woman and raised two daughters?
- died a wealthy man?

Author Online

For more on Olaudah Equiano, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

Diagram of the cargo hold of a fully loaded slave ship



from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*

Slave Narrative by Olaudah Equiano



Olaudah Equiano

c. 1745–1797

Soldier, sailor, North Pole explorer—Olaudah Equiano led a remarkable life by the standards of any age. Writing as a former slave in the 1700s, Equiano left powerful testimony on the brutality of enslavement that became the model for a new genre, the slave narrative.

Ocean Crossings According to his autobiography, Equiano was born a chief's son in the Ibo (or Igbo) culture of present-day Nigeria. When he was 11, he was captured and sold as a slave to a series of African masters before making the miserable journey to the Americas known as the Middle Passage. Sold in the West Indies to British navy officer Michael Pascal, Equiano returned to sea with his new owner, who renamed him Gustavus Vassa.

Equiano spent years fighting for Britain, hoping to be freed for good service.

Instead, in 1762 he was sold again, to Quaker merchant Robert King, who trained him in business. In 1766, after 21 years as a slave, Equiano bought back his freedom, moved to London, and promptly launched his business career. But by 1773, he was at sea again, first on an expedition to find a northwest passage, and later traveling to Central America and Turkey.

Turning Points In the late 1770s, Equiano returned to London where he got involved in antislavery efforts and converted to Christianity. In 1789, as public debate over abolishing the slave trade began in Britain, Equiano wrote, self-published, and promoted his narrative. Equiano's life story exposed the cruelty of the slave trade and made him an important public figure. He died in 1797, just ten years before Britain abolished the slave trade.

Historians Look More Closely Equiano's narrative includes a wealth of specific details, most of which check out against other sources. But, in 1999, English professor Vincent Carretta uncovered two documents that suggested Equiano was not born in Africa: his baptismal record from England and a ship's passenger list, both of which identify Equiano's birthplace as South Carolina. Historians continue to debate the evidence and how, if at all, it changes the value of *The Interesting Narrative*. Carretta himself points out that even if the narrative is based on the oral accounts of other slaves, its descriptions still provide a valuable portrait of early African life and the Middle Passage.