

London, Sugar & Slavery

Visiting the gallery with your class

Assessing the potential impact on your students' wellbeing

What is this document for?

The subjects discussed in the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery will challenge and connect with your group in lots of different ways and you will encounter some upsetting content. This includes information about brutality and enslavement, and historical artefacts containing racist and derogatory depictions and language.

This document will help you to consider the impact the gallery might have on your students, emotionally and psychologically, and suggests actions you can take before, during and after your visit to support your students and accompanying adults.

This is not a comprehensive list and every class and individual will respond differently to the gallery's content and atmosphere. Our possible actions are suggestions only, and may not work for every group. We therefore strongly recommend that you make a planning visit before bringing your group to this gallery.

Before you visit

Some students may not have visited a museum before, or may not have visited a gallery on a topic as challenging as the British trade in enslaved Africans.

- Explain why you are taking your students on a trip to the London Museum Docklands' London, Sugar & Slavery gallery, including an explanation of the historical significance of the museum building and its links to the British trade in enslaved Africans.
- Explain that the gallery you are visiting contains difficult content about how enslaved people were treated, which they may find upsetting and distressing.
- In consultation with your students, create a list of agreed appropriate behaviour in the museum. You may want to include agreed behaviour for supporting adults on the trip too.

When approaching the museum building, you will see iron bars on the curved warehouse windows. Some students may mistakenly identify this as a sign that people were historically imprisoned inside the building, which is not the case. The bars on the windows were to prevent people breaking into the warehouse to steal goods.

This misconception may cause distress for students or accompanying adults.

- Show your students a photograph of the museum façade and explain the historical significance of the building.
- We recommend preparing your students by asking them to write down as many questions as they can think of about the building from this image. Or you could structure a lesson starter around the statements 'I see, I think, I wonder,' giving your students two minutes to write down thoughts inspired by each of these statements.



Outside London Museum Docklands

On your way to the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery

On your way to London, Sugar & Slavery, you will pass through the Trade Expansion gallery. This includes an immersive area called 'The Legal Quay'. Here, you will come across an interactive treadwheel, which visitors can operate by walking inside a large wooden wheel.

Your students might be eager to try this out. This may mean they are very excitable when they first enter the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery.

- Ensure all teachers and accompanying adults are aware of the location of the interactive wheel and that students may become exuberant using it. If you do let them use it be aware of the need for a change in tone before entering the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery.
- It is your choice whether or not you encourage your students to interact with the wheel. Make the decision before you arrive and share the decision with your accompanying adults.
- Brief your students at the entrance to the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery. You may want to encourage them to do some breathing exercises, or use methods you are familiar with to calm them. This will give them time to re-centre their focus.

Immediately before entering the gallery, you will encounter an image of an 18th-century gibbet cage.

Students may become distracted or distressed by this object.

Students may mistakenly associate the gibbet cage with the enslavement of African men, women and children.

- If students ask about the object, be honest with them. Gibbet cages like this one were used to display the bodies of executed pirates and criminals to act as a warning against piracy and mutiny in 18th-century London.
- Ensure all teachers and accompanying adults are aware of the location of the image.
- Ensure all teachers and accompanying adults are aware that this object is not directly related to the history of the British trade in enslaved Africans.



The treadwheel being used by a child



The gibbet that used to be on display near the entrance of the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery. This has been replaced by an image of the object.

In the gallery

The first display board you encounter will be a large, black board with white writing. This shows the names, captains, owners and destinations of the ships that sailed from London to West Africa to transport enslaved Africans. It shows the number of enslaved Africans transported on the ship, but does not humanise them with names as we don't have that information.

- We recommend looking at this display at the end of your visit to the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery. This is easy to do as the quickest way to leave the gallery is to retrace your steps.
- Consider asking your students to identify what this primary data does and does not tell us about the British trade in enslaved Africans. You could ask them to compare it to the first-hand testimonies of Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho and Mary Prince which highlight the human impact.

This gallery has a different atmosphere to other areas of the museum. The lighting is dark, and the displays are in muted tones (primarily black, brown and orange) to reflect the nature of the gallery content.

- In preparing your students for what they will encounter in the gallery, you might want to address how the atmosphere feels different.

There may be other members of the public visiting the gallery at the same time as your class. We often find visitors walk around the space alone and reflect quietly on the content.

- In preparing your students for what they will encounter in the gallery, make them aware that there will be other visitors in the space. You could use this idea to reinforce why the appropriate behaviour list is important.



The display at the entrance of the gallery that shows the names, captains, owners and destinations of the ships that sailed from London to West Africa to transport enslaved Africans.

Your students might behave in a different way to how you expect; sometimes students giggle or laugh at the objects and information in the gallery, as they are reading or contemplating information they do not know how to respond to.

This could be because your students will encounter objects related to the brutal treatment of enslaved people, including a punishment collar and whip, and images that are difficult to understand.

One of these images is shown here on the right.

- Supporting adults should be prepared for this type of behaviour, and encouraged to support students rather than assuming it is bad behaviour. We recommend asking students what information or objects made them laugh or feel uncomfortable and talking through these emotions together one to one, or with a small group.
- You could explain to your students that some of these images were created by abolitionists who were attempting to shock people in Britain into acknowledging the cruelty of the trade in enslaved Africans. These images are around the corner from the section about the brutal treatment of enslaved people.

In the historical quotes and objects on display in the gallery, you will come across some offensive language, both direct and inferred.

- In preparing your students for the gallery we suggest discussing the changing use of language and terminology around this topic. There is a display panel on terminology in the gallery they can read. We recommend ensuring your students understand that terminology is transient, and it was different in the past, and it might be different in the future.

For example, since the creation of this gallery, London Museum Docklands has moved away from using the term 'transatlantic slavery.' Instead, we are now referring to the British trade in enslaved Africans. This is because it is important to acknowledge the role the British (and where appropriate other European countries) had in this trade.

Use of the generic term 'Transatlantic slave trade' (and other variations) hide this involvement.



An area of the gallery containing an image and object that could potentially be harmful for your students. The image is from the book 'West India Scenery, with Illustrations of Negro Character: the process of making sugar, etc.' by Richard Bridgens. We do not know what caused Bridgens to show aspects of African culture alongside depictions of the punishment enforced onto enslaved people. Bridgens lived in Trinidad with his wife, who inherited a plantation from her father.

Supporting adults who are unfamiliar with this topic might not have the confidence to engage your students in the gallery.

- We strongly recommend bringing your supporting adults on your planning visit with you. If this is not possible, make sure you brief them about the content of the gallery and share the materials we have created to support them on their visit.

There is a lot to see and absorb in the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery. On a short visit, you are unlikely to be able to cover everything. The visit may leave you, your students and accompanying adults feeling overwhelmed or with unanswered questions.

- At the time of making your booking, we recommend requesting a slot in the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery for between 45 minutes and 1 hour.
- Provide focus to your visit by using our self-guided gallery resources for schools to generate enquiry-based discussion, or create your own task for your students.
- If your students need to leave the gallery at any point to take a moment of reflection they can do this accompanied by an adult. The nearest seating is either down the stairs or you can retrace your steps and go back to the No.1 Warehouse gallery on the same level.
- We recommend building at least 10 minutes of quiet reflection time into your visit in addition to a reflection activity when you arrive back at school or in the next lesson.
- Your students and supporting adults might choose to write a comment card as part of their reflection time in the gallery.
- After your visit, check in with your supporting adults to see if they have any reflections which you can use back in the classroom.