

## Olaudah Equiano (c.1745 – 1797)

Olaudah Equiano was a key player in the campaign to end slavery. He made the British public see slavery through the eyes of a former slave.

When he was about 11 years old, he was kidnapped with his sister in West Africa and sold into slavery. He was sold several times. One of his masters was a lieutenant in the British navy and Equiano became a sailor on a warship. Eventually he was sold to Robert King, a Quaker, who recognised his abilities and encouraged his education. He became skilled at mathematics and an accomplished writer. By 1776, at the age of 21, he had made enough money to buy his freedom. After several years at sea, he came to England to live.

### Campaigning

Equiano threw himself into the campaign to abolish the slave trade:

- He wrote his autobiography '**The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano**'. The book had a huge impact on people in Britain. The hero was shown to be a **courageous, cultured man and a Christian**. He showed his readers that **Africans had a rich and ancient culture and deserved respect as fellow human beings**. He also described the **horrors of the slave trade**. This book is still in print, published by Penguin Books.
- He toured the country from 1789 - 94 making **speeches and promoting his book**. He challenged the **prejudices and views of those who supported slavery**. He revealed the **barbarities of slavery** from his own personal experience and those of other ex-slaves. The **personal testimony of ex-slaves** brought the **horrors and inhumanity of the slave trade home to British people** who were not aware of the way in which it was carried out.
- He lobbied MPs in Parliament, writing letters to them and taking members of the black community to see them.
- He wrote letters to the newspapers and engaged in public debates about slavery.
- He worked closely with white abolitionists to expose the evils of the trade. It was Equiano who took the case of the slave ship Zong (where slaves had been thrown overboard so that the captain could claim insurance on them) to Granville Sharp the lawyer who took it to court in a famous trial (see Slavery Information Sheet 9 'The Story of the Zong').

