

Database Scavenger Hunt

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO LESSON

This is an introduction to the database that can also serve as an introduction to the topic. It exposes students to the vast amount and variability of material in the database.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Develop the technological skills necessary to exploring the content of the database, creating search queries, and assess and interpret search results.
- Gain an understanding of the regional, demographic, and maritime contours of the slave trade
- Analyze historical data as a means of learning how to form compelling research questions

SUGGESTED GRADE AND COURSE

7-12th grade

World History; US History

STANDARDS

NCHS Standards: World History (Grades 5-12): Standard 4B

NCSS Themes: II, III, VII, VIII, IX

Geography: 1-6, 9-13, 17

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Students will use the database directly, either in class or outside of class in the library, computer lab, or at home (if these are options).

ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES

1. Set up students with a computer logged on to the database. They can work individually or in pairs or small groups.
2. Assign the first scavenger hunt question. (e.g., “Of the three vessels that disembarked the most slaves during the slave trade, how many flew the English flag?”). In response, students search for the answer, designing search queries without advice.
3. After an allotted time, take answers from each group. Then discuss how, technically, the groups found the answer. This discussion should be aimed at helping those who struggled become more comfortable with the website.

4. Ask three or four more questions, having a discussion about search techniques after each. Some suggested questions: In which year did the most slaves arrive in Barbados? On how many voyages did all the slaves die during the Middle Passage? In which region of Africa did the most ships purchase slaves? Which nation sailed the most voyages in the 18th century?
5. Once students are getting the hang of the exercise, make each student write up his or her own question (this can be done for homework). Those questions are collected, shuffled, passed out, and pursued. Afterwards, let students confer with the author of the question they answered, and then share the questions and their search methods with the class.

Wrap-Up/Assignment

After this introductory exercise, have students form small groups and talk about the patterns or interesting anomalies they found. Together they should write research questions that could serve as a paper assignment (e.g., “Why did four of the ten ships that carried the most slaves sail in 1859?”).

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

By measuring the success students are having in finding answers to the questions and the appropriateness of the questions they create, their facility with and understanding of the database’s offerings can be assessed.

VOCABULARY

Maritime jargon used on the website (e.g., *rig*, *sterling cash*, *places of call*). See “Glossary” section of the website.

FURTHER READINGS & DISCUSSION

Eltis, David, et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. CD-ROM.

Eltis, David. “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 58 (January 2001): 17-46.

What different types of information does the database contain? What kinds of questions can the database answer? What kinds of questions is it unable to answer? What other resources do we need to answer the questions we have about the database numbers?