



## OLAUDAH EQUIANO AKA GUSTAVUS VASSA

### From slavery to pioneering writer

Equiano was an African writer whose experiences as a slave prompted him to become involved in the British abolition movement. He was born in the Eboe province of Nigeria and was kidnapped along with his sister at the age of 11 by local slave traders and shipped across the Atlantic to Barbados and then Virginia.

He was sold to a Royal Naval officer and renamed Gustavus Vassa after a 16th century Swedish King and sailed with him for 8 years, being baptised in the process and learning to read and write. He was then sold to a ship captain in London who took him to Monserrat and sold him to a merchant. There he became a Deckhand, Barber and Valet for the merchant whilst trading on the side. In three years, he was able to buy his freedom and later became a prominent member of the 'Sons of Africa', a group of 12 black men who campaigned for abolition.

In 1789 he published an Autobiography called 'The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African'. The book became immensely popular and helped the abolitionists cause and also made Equiano a wealthy man. It is one of the earliest books published by a black African writer.

## FURTHER READING

- Image source: NDLA, [British Slave Trade](#)
- [The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: or, Gustavus Vassa, the African](#) by Olaudah Equiano

## WHY WERE THEY IMPORTANT?

A strong voice with a big impact

I am choosing to champion Equiano because he was an instrumental voice in the abolition movement. In an era before television or the internet and when atrocities were only painted or whispered about, he gave a voice for the millions of Africans still enslaved around the world.

The public began to boycott products like sugar and I feel his work was instrumental in turning the tide of public opinion and raising awareness about what slaves were going through. There were other factors that also contributed to this, but in my opinion Equiano shaved years off the abolition of slavery.

*"I believe there are few events in my life which have not happened to many; it is true the incidents of it are numerous, and, did I consider myself an European, I might say my sufferings were great; but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a particular favorite of heaven, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life."*

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, 1789