

RESOURCE LIBRARY

ACTIVITY : 1 HR 40 MINS

Meet Cudjo Lewis

Students learn about one of the last survivors of the slave ship *Clotilda*, Oluale Kossola (or Kossula), also known as Cudjo(e) Lewis. Students consider why knowing the story of their past can be important to their present, generating their own questions as they investigate the experience of kidnapped Africans forced into slavery.

GRADES

6 - 8

SUBJECTS

Anthropology, Archaeology, English Language Arts, Geography, Human Geography, Social Studies, U.S. History, World History, Storytelling

CONTENTS

3 Links, 4 PDFs

OVERVIEW

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For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/meet-cudjo-lewis/>

In collaboration with

DIRECTIONS

Sunken Slave Ship Unit Driving Question: *How do artifacts and their preservation impact communities?*

Uncovering the Past Lesson Driving Question: *How are artifacts and stories of past lives uncovered?*

1. Invite student teams to interact with images related to the subjects of Cudjo Lewis and slavery to practice and experience storytelling with “artifacts.”

- In groups of three or four, have students look at the collection of artifacts pictured on the *Images from a Past Life* handout.
- Have students cut out the images and arrange them from beginning to end to tell the life story they imagine the pictures represent.
- On an index card, have students write a short paragraph (two to three sentences) for each image that helps to tell the story the group imagined.
- Ask students to glue the image to the top of the index card and string the images along with a piece of yarn or rope with paperclips or clothespins.
- Explain to students that they just created an exhibit memorializing this man’s life.
- Ask: *What story did you tell about his life?* Have student groups share the stories they’ve created.

2. Have students develop questions they would like to ask Cudjo Lewis to better understand the importance of the “artifacts” they have arranged.

- Explain that the stories they told through their exhibits were created without having met or spoken to this man, without knowing how the images related to his life. His name was Cudjo Lewis. His village was raided while he was sleeping, and he was kidnapped from his home in Africa, loaded aboard the *Clotilda* and sold into slavery in Alabama after the transport of enslaved people had already been prohibited.
- Ask: *To tell his story more accurately, what questions might you ask him if you could speak to him now?* List students’ questions in a visible location.

3. Introduce students to Cudjo Lewis and the *Clotilda* through images and video.

- Share with students this picture of Cudjo Lewis. As a class, read the first paragraph of the Background Information section.

- In 1927, author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston took the train from Penn Station, New York, to Mobile, Alabama, to conduct and record a series of interviews with the last known surviving African of the last American slave ship, the *Clotilda*, that traveled from Benin to Mobile with 110 enslaved persons in 1860. Hurston transcribes the story of Oluale Kossola, also known as Kossula or Cudjo(e) Lewis. The interviews and her additional research were put together to form the book, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo."* In 1931, the life of Cudjo Lewis was ready to present to publishers, but they wanted to publish it in standard English rather than Lewis' dialect. Hurston refused to submit to that type of revision, feeling it was a "vital and authenticating feature of the narrative" and, therefore, it was not published until 2018.
- Students view the segment from *What the Discovery of the Last American Slave Ship Means to Descendants* (0:00-3:16).
 - Ask: *Why is Cudjo Lewis and the discovery of the sunken slave ship Clotilda important to the descendants?*
 - Ask: *Why do you think Africatown has so much meaning to its residents?*
- Guide students in making connections to their own lives. Ask: *If you could ask any of your ancestors a question, what might you ask? How would knowing the answer impact your life now?*
- Explain to students that thanks to Zora Neale Hurston's interviewing and writing, we actually have Cudjo Lewis' story in his own words, so his descendants have a better idea of the struggles he went through and how he survived in spite of them.

4. Students discuss a quote from *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* by Zora Neal Hurston.

- Remind students that *Barracoon* was written in a way that would capture Cudjo's voice, and we call that dialect. When we hear it, we can hear his authentic voice and it reflects his regional history.
- Display the following quote from the book: *"Where is de house where de mouse is de leader? In de Affica soil I cain tellee you 'bout de son before I tellee you 'bout de father; and derefore, you unnerstand me, I cain talk about de man who is father (et te) til I tellee you bout de man who he father to him, now, dass right ain' it?"* (*Barracoon*, pp. 20-21)
- Ask students:
 - *What do you notice about this quote?*

- *How do you think this person feels about his ancestors? Why?*

5. Discuss dialect with students, translating the quote into standard English.

- As a class, translate each line of the quote from Step 4 into standard English. An example of the final translation might read like: *Where is the house where the mouse is the leader? In Africa, I can't tell you about the son before I tell you about the father, and therefore, I can't talk about the man who is the father until I tell you about the man who is his father. That's right, isn't it?*
- Ask: *What power does writing in dialect have for the reader and for the story? Do you feel Zora Neale Hurston was right in refusing to adapt the dialect for the book's publishers?*

6. Students analyze a quote from the Quotes from Barracoon handout to better understand the experiences of Cudjo Lewis and consider how his story might be important for his descendants.

- Divide the class into three groups and distribute one of the three parts of *Quotes from Barracoon* or the modified *Quotes from Barracoon Translated* to each group.
- Distribute a copy of *Quotes from Barracoon Guiding Questions* to each student.
- Have each group member select one quote from the set and analyze it using the guiding questions.
- Have group members share their analysis with one another and together they will select one of the quotes they believe to be the most important to understanding Cudjo Lewis' experience.
- Have one member of the group present the group's selected quote and its analysis to the class.

7. Connect the story of Cudjo Lewis to the power of being part of a team of youth who dive for lost slave ships, and complete an exit ticket.

- Introduce the video by explaining that there is a group called Diving With Purpose that dives in search of sunken slave ships. Many in the group are youth who get great value from searching for evidence of their ancestors' past. The video explains why they do it.
- Play a portion of the video (12:01-18:21) *These Divers Search for Slave Shipwrecks and Discover Their Ancestors.*
- Ask:

- *How did taking part in these dives impact the lives of the divers? Why is the work worth it to them?*
- *What did it mean when the divers mentioned how the dive “humanized their stories”?*
- Have students reflect on the activity by responding to an exit ticket question: *Based on what we’ve seen and learned so far, how does evidence, such as recorded conversations, images, and artifacts, of our ancestors’ lives bring meaning into our present lives?*

Modification

Steps 4 and 5: For English-language learners or struggling readers, first provide [Quotes from *Barracoon Translated*](#), an alternative version of the *Barracoon* quotes, to help them understand the message expressed. Then, the original text can be provided and the dialect could be discussed further.

Informal Assessment

***Barracoon* Guiding Questions:** Look for evidence in students' responses that students recognize the difference between primary and secondary sources, as well as a basic understanding of how the transatlantic slave trade was orchestrated and how it impacted the lives of those involved.

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Anthropology

- [Archaeology](#)
- English Language Arts

Geography

- [Human Geography](#)

Social Studies

- U.S. History
- World History

Storytelling

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Evaluate information provided in images, videos, and text to explain how it contributes to the lives of enslaved persons in the past and people today.

Teaching Approach

- Project-based learning

Teaching Methods

- Discussions
- Guided listening
- Multimedia instruction

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Information, Media, and Technology Skills
 - Information Literacy
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- 21st Century Themes
 - Civic Literacy
 - Global Awareness
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Remembering
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Acquiring Geographic Information
 - Answering Geographic Questions
 - Asking Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & LITERACY

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1:

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on Grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2:

Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9:

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6-12:

Range of Writing, WHST.6-8.10

THE COLLEGE, CAREER & CIVIC LIFE (C3) FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL STUDIES STATE STANDARDS

- D2.Geo.6.6-8:

Explain how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions are connected to human identities and cultures.

- D2.His.6.6-8:

Analyze how people’s perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.

Preparation

What You’ll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Chart paper
- Paper clips
- Rope (6-8')
- String

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, 1 computer per learner, Monitor/screen, Projector, Speakers

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Heterogeneous grouping
- Large-group instruction
- Large-group learning

ACCESSIBILITY NOTES

Steps 3 and 7: Provide students with hearing impairments with a copy of the transcript for the video.

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

In 1927, author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston took the train from Penn Station, New York, to Mobile, Alabama, to conduct and record a series of interviews with the last known survivor of the last American slave ship, the *Clotilda*, that traveled from Benin to Mobile, Alabama, with 110 enslaved persons in 1860. Hurston transcribes the story of Oluale Kossola, also known as Kossula or Cudjo(e) Lewis. The interviews and her additional research were put together to form the book, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo."* In 1931, the life of Kossula, or Cudjo Lewis, was ready to present to publishers, but they wanted to publish it in language rather than dialect. Hurston refused to submit to that type of revision, feeling it was a "vital and authenticating feature of the narrative" and, therefore, it was not published until 2018.

Now, through the words of the last survivor himself, others can learn about the experience of a 19-year-old African preparing for the rites of marriage, whose life took an abrupt turn after tribal secrets of the Takkoi were given away to the Dahomians, a rival tribe, by a disgruntled traitor. These unsuspecting people were ripped from their beds while they were sleeping, forced to watch loved ones murdered with a swipe of a machete, and taken from their homeland. They were herded like cattle in barracoons until the ships were full enough to be monetarily worth the effort, and sold as exported goods to slave runners, even after the slave trade had been outlawed in the United States in 1808.

Prior Knowledge

["Stories have meaning embedded in the language of different cultural groups and regions. Dialects reflect language diversity and the idea that languages change over time. So, the ways in which people spoke or shared stories in their dialect reflect the geography or region from which they came. Though dialects and languages often get translated to be more easily understood, preserving them is also important."]

Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
African slave trade	<i>noun</i>	(1500-1888) exchange of goods and services from Europe and the Americas in exchange for human beings from Africa. Also called the transatlantic slave trade.
ancestor	<i>noun</i>	organism from whom one is descended.
anthropologist	<i>noun</i>	person who studies cultures and characteristics of communities and civilizations.
captive	<i>adjective</i>	captured or enslaved.
descendant	<i>noun</i>	children, grandchildren, and other offspring.
dialect	<i>noun</i>	distinct variation of a language, usually marked by accents and grammar.
enslaved person	<i>noun</i>	person who is owned by another person or group of people.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
human trafficking	<i>noun</i>	trade of people for forced labor or sexual exploitation.
legacy	<i>noun</i>	material, ideas, or history passed down or communicated by a person or community from the past.
slavery	<i>noun</i>	process and condition of owning another human being or being owned by another human being.

For Further Exploration

Books

- [Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"](#)

Websites

- [Teaching Tolerance: Teaching Hard History: Grades 6-12](#)



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