1717

Real Pirates

The Untold Story of The Whydah
from slave ship to pirate ship

EDUCATOR’S GUIDE

An exhibition from NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
An informative video introduces the themes of the exhibit: pirates and their ships, the Caribbean as an economic center, slave trade, and life on-board ships and on plantations.

**Gallery 2: The Bell Gallery**
The *Whydah*’s bell was a significant find, definitive proof that Barry Clifford had located the shipwreck.

**Gallery 3: The Caribbean**
We enter a tavern and meet the pirates, hear their music, and read their Articles of conduct. A map shows the trade routes centered in the Caribbean.

**Gallery 4: The Slave Ship Whydah**
The *Whydah* is shown loading captives and then traveling the Middle Passage from Africa to the Caribbean. A video describes the slave trade.

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**BACKGROUND**

### THE CARIBBEAN IN THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY

The Caribbean was once the economic powerhouse of the Atlantic world. Ships laden with rich cargo traveled the high seas on trade routes that linked Europe, Africa, and North and South America in the complex webs of an economy fundamentally driven by slavery.

Let’s trace one common trade route. A ship on the first leg of its journey, from Europe to Africa, would be loaded with manufactured goods such as firearms, cloth, liquor, iron, beads, and tools. It would work its way down the west coast of Africa, trading manufactured goods for human captives and also for gold and ivory.

When fully loaded with human cargo, the ship would set out on the next leg of its journey, the infamous Middle Passage, sailing across the Atlantic from Africa to the Caribbean slave markets. Crammed into the stinking hold for two to three months, the captives endured heat, malnutrition, disease, and emotional trauma. Those that survived were sold as slaves, and the ship took on new cargo, products from the plantations in the Caribbean and South America destined for European markets. With the use of unpaid slave labor, these vast plantations were able to produce huge quantities of sugar, tobacco, and coffee for export at enormous profits.

There was other trade too. Gold and silver mined by Indians under slave conditions was shipped from South America to Spain. Rum from the North American colonies was smuggled illegally into the Caribbean.

With all this treasure on the open seas, is it any wonder that pirates took advantage?

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**THE WHYDAH**

**From Slave Ship to Pirate Ship**

The *Whydah Galley* was launched in London in 1715. She was designed as a slave ship, and represented the latest technology of the day. Equipped with the most up-to-date weapons, she was fast and easy to maneuver, essential qualities if she were to cross the Middle Passage as quickly as possible to minimize the loss of human cargo. She had a three-masted sailing rig, but was also fitted out for rowing. The lower decks could hold hundreds of captives and had large galleys with provisions to feed them. All of these features — size, speed, weaponry — made slave ships very attractive to pirates.

In time, pirates would turn their attention to the lucrative slave trade, attacking slaving ships off the West African coast. It was this that eventually led to the pirates’ downfall. The navies of the European powers sought to exterminate them. But we are getting ahead of our story.

After leaving London, the *Whydah* sailed to the west coast of Africa, trading goods for a total of 367 captives. Of these, 312 survived the Middle Passage and were sold at the slave market in Jamaica. Weighted down now with valuable cargo, the ship made sail for England. But she was never to reach her home port.

**CAPTURED BY PIRATES**

In February of 1717, Sam Bellamy, captain of the pirate ship *Sultana*, spied the *Whydah* while she was still in Bahamian waters. Hoisting the Jolly Roger, he gave chase for
three days nonstop. When Captain Lawrence Prince realized capture was inevitable, he lowered his colors and his sails, and surrendered the Whydah without a fight.

The pirates lost no time in transferring their loot from the Sultana onto their new prize. They quickly repositioned more weaponry, placing cannons both on the upper deck and below. To make the ship less top heavy, the pirates probably leveled the upper deck by clearing off cabins and other structures. Thus was a slave ship transformed into a pirate ship.

As was their custom, the pirates invited the crew of the Whydah to join them. A few did, but those who declined were freed with Captain Prince to sail away, unharmed, on the Sultana. This may seem surprising, but there is much about the pirate way of life that runs counter to the modern stereotype, as we will soon see.

Bellamy’s Voyage
On a spectacular looting voyage through the Caribbean, Bellamy captured more than 50 prizes. Laden with booty—perhaps as much as 4.5 tons of treasure—the Whydah set course for New England, where legend says Bellamy intended to pick up his lady-love, Maria Hallett. But on April 26, 1717, a violent nor’easter off the coast of Cape Cod sent the pirate ship to a watery grave where its treasures remained undiscovered for nearly 300 years.

LIFE AT SEA
Sailors, Seamen, and Pirates
This was the so-called “Golden Age of Piracy,” from about 1660 to 1730, a brief but action-packed period of history. Pirates were outlaws who pledged allegiance to no country and ravaged ships of all nations indiscriminately. They were ruthless opportunists with nothing to lose—except their lives. The penalty for piracy was hanging.

Onboard Democracy
Yet these outlaws evolved a kind of seagoing democracy at a time when it was unknown in Europe and the colonies. Upon joining a pirate crew, new recruits signed the Ship’s Articles. They swore an oath of loyalty and agreed to a code of conduct. In return, they were given an equal vote in electing...
the ship’s officers, an almost equal share of the loot (the captain and quartermaster got a larger share), and compensation for injuries or loss of limbs. By contrast, on merchant and naval vessels, there was a strict hierarchical order and pitifully low wages.

To an international crew consisting of blacks, whites, and Indians, these were the rights and privileges unheard of at sea or on land. It is no wonder that many willingly signed on.

The pirates also created onboard living conditions far superior to those on merchant or naval ships. Because they had crews of as many as a couple of hundred, the workload was lighter than on merchant ships which typically were worked by only 12–15 men. On a merchant ship, food and clean water were in short supply and diseases caused by malnutrition were rampant. The officers fared much better than the crew, however. On a pirate ship, everyone ate and drank equally. With frequent raids to restock supplies and with more leisure time to catch fresh food, the pirates ate (and drank) well.

THE RECOVERY OF THE WRECK OF THE WHYDAH

Pounded by 40-foot waves, the Whydah ran aground, and was battered to bits. This kind of “exploded” wreck is very difficult to recover. In addition, the sea floor off of Cape Cod has a shifting sandy bottom, so the ship and its contents were not only scattered but also buried under 10 to 30 feet of sand. The area is treacherous and over 3,000 ships have gone down there in a 400-year period. The site was also used as a firing range during World War II, adding even more debris to the seabed.

Barry Clifford is not put off by challenges. He had been fascinated by the tale of the Whydah since childhood, and in 1983 began searching for the wreck. It was not until 1985 that he brought up incontrovertible evidence that the wreck was indeed the Whydah—her bell.

Technology and Conservation

The recovery process has required the use of some high-tech equipment, such as lasers, CT scans, x-rays, a proton precision magnetometer, and diving gear. The work is painstaking, and like an archaeological dig, the area is divided into grids. Clifford and his crew investigate one square at a time and carefully record their findings.

They have also been careful to conserve what they recover. Metal objects such as cannons and coins, for example, are encrusted in concretions, formations that occur over time when metal disintegrates and combines with sea salts to make a concretemass. Concretions preserve the artifacts as long as they are kept wet. Further conservation requires a long process called electrolytic reduction to break down the salts without damaging the artifacts.

The Whydah is the first authenticated pirate shipwreck ever found. Barry Clifford and his team continue making new discoveries. Their dedication has provided us with a window into the past, a glimpse of the little known life aboard ship in the “Golden Age of Piracy.” As Clifford said, “It’s not what you find, it’s what you find out.”
COMEPREPARED

Be ready for a rich and exciting experience that engages visitors from their very first step into the exhibit. Young visitors are especially enthralled, drawn to the authentic artifacts presented in a range of media. Try to build some flexibility into your planning to allow students to follow their own interests for at least part of the visit.

The exhibit may be viewed from many different perspectives and thus lends itself naturally to interdisciplinary studies. You may want to decide on several focus points for your class, or you may prefer to let them range widely and absorb the concepts more broadly. Some of the content areas you will discover embedded in the exhibit include: geography, history, and social studies; science and technology; art and music; language arts; math and measurement.

Students always get more out of a museum visit when they are prepared and know what to expect. You can generate enthusiasm by previewing some of the galleries using the map and illustrations provided, discussing major concepts, or examining some of the pictured artifacts with the class. Please see Pre-Visit Activities for suggestions.

ACTIVITIES

PRE-VISIT

1. Discuss the commodities traded between Europe, West Africa, the Caribbean, and North America in the early 1700s. Distribute copies of the insert map, Map of the World 1719. Ask students to draw these trade routes on the map.

2. Examine the artifacts pictured on the insert.
   - Speculate on what they are, how they were used, the stories they might tell, and why there were important enough to be included in the exhibit.
   - Set up a Treasure Hunt Activity to take place during the visit. Ask students to try to find all the artifacts and also to answer some of the questions about their usage, historical importance, and personal stories.

3. (Optional) Use the descriptions of the exhibition galleries to preview highlights of what the class will see. Show the students the website http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/real-pirates/ and encourage them to explore the "Pirate and Slave Ship Features" section.

4. On the way into the exhibit, you will receive a copy of the Ship's Articles (a code of conduct for pirates). If time, read and discuss the Articles before entering the exhibit.

DURING VISIT

1. Carry out the Treasure Hunt Activity.

2. Observe, critique, and appreciate the murals, photos, videos, music, and artifacts throughout the visit.

3. Focus on trade in the Caribbean. Trace the flow of goods, money, and human captives. Find out:
   - What kinds of raw materials were shipped, from where to where? What kinds of manufactured goods were shipped?
   - What were they traded for? Who were the slaves?
   - What were the conditions on board a slave ship?
   - What was the Middle Passage?

4. Four pirates are featured at different points throughout the exhibition. Who are they and what can you find out about each of them?

5. Who were the pirates? Find out more about:
   - Their ethnicity. Their code of conduct. Their life on board ship as compared with life on a merchant or naval vessel. Compare and contrast their food, drink, clothing, quarters, amusements, hours, and pay.
   - The roles, duties, and rights of different crew members such as the captain, quartermaster, surgeon, and carpenter
   - How the “Golden Age of Piracy” ended

6. How was the Whydah recovered?
   - The technology involved in recovering the wreck: the magnetometer, the mailbox, x-rays, and CT scans
   - The importance of concretions, and the science involved in their formation and removal
POST-VISIT

1. Summarize some of the main themes of the exhibit by discussing or by writing and illustrating (perhaps with a mural in the style of the exhibit):
   - What was the legacy of the “Golden Age of Piracy”?
   - What was the importance of the Caribbean in the 18th century?
   - What does the Whydah tell us about life at that time?

2. Write a profile of:
   - A pirate.
   - A naval or merchant seaman.
   - A human captive

3. Tell the story of your favorite artifact.
   - Why is it important?
   - What evidence does it give of the history of the time?

4. Do further research on the science and technology of the recovery and conservation of historical artifacts.
   Find out about other underwater archaeological sites.

5. Search the web for information on Olaudah Equiano who wrote a first hand account of his experiences as a slave.

6. Measure out the dimensions of space typically allotted to human captives on a slave ship. For men, 6 feet by 1 foot 4 inches. For women, 5 feet 10 inches by 1 foot 4 inches. Then lie down in the space. Describe what it must have felt like to be shackled in that space for months while crossing the ocean.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

The content of the exhibition covers many curriculum subjects. Please visit the following websites for links to topic-specific national standards.

Science
National Science Education Standards
http://www.nap.edu/readingsroom/books/nses/

Mathematics
Principles and Standards for School Mathematics
http://standards.nctm.org/

Social Studies
Expectations of Excellence
www.socialstudies.org/standards/

History
National Standards for History in the Schools
http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards

Geography
The National Council for Geographic Education: Standards
www.ncge.org/standards/

The Arts
ARTSEdge: Standards
artedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm

Language Arts
The National Council of Teachers of English: Standards
www.ncte.org/about/over/standards

RESOURCES

Websites
National Geographic Society. Real Pirates: The Untold Story of The Whydah from slave ship to pirate ship:
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/real-pirates/

New York Public Library, Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture. Lest We Forget: The Triumph Over Slavery:
http://digital.nypl.org/lwf/flash.html

Books


CREDITS

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Draw the trade routes that carried goods and people between Europe, West Africa, the Caribbean, and North America in the early 1700s.
How many of these artifacts can you find as you go through the exhibition?

When you find an object, think about these questions:

- What was it used for?
- How was it made?
- What materials were used?
- Where did they come from?
- Why was it made?

What other questions can you come up with?
ye ARTICLES of ye GENTLEMEN of FORTUNE

Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment; has equal Title to the fresh Provisions, or strong Liquors, at any Time seized, and may use them at Pleasure, unless a Scarcity make it necessary, for the Good of all, to vote a Restriction.

Any Man who defrauds the Company to the Value of a Dollar in Plate, Jewels, or Money, Marooning is the punishment.

No person to Game at Cards or Dice for Money.

The Lights and Candles to be put out at eight a-Clock at Night: If any of the Crew, after that Hour, still remain enclined for Drinking, they must to it on the open Deck.

Every Man to keep their Piece, Pistols, and Cutlass clean, and fit for Service.

To Desert the Ship, or Quarters in Battle, is punished with Death or Marooning.

No striking one another on board, but every Man’s Quarrels to be ended on Shore, at Sword and Pistol.

No Man to talk of breaking up our Way of Living until Each has Shared a Thousand Pounds.

If any Man should lose a Limb, or become a Cripple, he is to have 800 Dollars out of the publick Stock, & for lesser Hurts, proportionably.

The Captain & Quarter-Master to receive two Shares of a Prize; the Sailing Master, Boatswain, & Gunner, One Share & a half and other Officers one & a Quarter.

One & All One & All

Adapted from Captain Bart Roberts’ Articles. *A General History of the Pyrates* by Captain Charles Johnson, 1724.