

Sugar Coated Tears – Saturday 15 September – Saturday 27 October 2007

On March 25 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed through parliament. It was made illegal for British ships to be involved in the trade, marking the beginning of the end for the transatlantic traffic in human beings.

Sugar Coated Tears shows the extraordinary collaboration between photographer, Vanley Burke, and blacksmith, Lofty Wright. They have reproduced some of the instruments used in the slave trade; forked wooden yokes that controlled captives, irons that bit into wrists and ankles, muzzles and braces that were used as punishments. All these show the shocking reality of this barbaric trade as well as the psychological and physical impact of items produced in the West Midlands.

Background to the exhibition and the transatlantic slave trade

- What does the *Sugar Coated Tears* exhibition explore?
- Which industry rose sharply in the West Midlands in the mid 1700s? Why?

Africa, the Europeans and slavery

- Who was the first English slave trader? How did he become a slave trader?
- When and how did the Europeans change their views on African people?

Europe, the Black presence, literature and the abolitionists

- Is the Black presence in Britain a recent phenomenon? If no, when did black people come to Britain?
- Give some example of literature that have mentioned black people.

The Caribbean, the Portuguese arrival and British involvement

- Who began plantation slavery in the Americas and how?
- Why do you think that the transatlantic slave trade lasted so long?

Writing task back at school

You are an abolitionist, write a letter to your MP stating why you are against the slave trade.

Or

Imagine you are a slave in the Caribbean. You are keeping a secret diary. Write about your day to day life.

Statement from Vanley Burke

When Lofty and I were researching the old designs for these horrific restraints, we thought about our ancestors. My grandfather was probably a slave on the plantations in Jamaica, whereas his ancestors may have known people that made the restraints in the Midlands.

