

# George Bridgetower

'The young African Prince...the boy wonder'

There are many fascinating things about George Bridgetower, and one of them is that we barely remember him at all.

This would be a great surprise to music lovers in 1800. At that time, Bridgetower was a superstar, selling out concert halls across Europe due to his astonishing talents on the violin. He counted Beethoven and the Prince Regent among his fans, and looked set to become a famous composer in his own right. Even more incredibly, Bridgetower achieved all of this before his 25th birthday.

Perhaps fame came too early for George. By the time he was 30 his star had waned, and he lived out the second half of his life in obscurity, forgotten by the public and making a living by teaching music from his home in Peckham. This is his story.

## The Rise to Fame

There are no clear historical records to prove it, but many historians think it is likely that George Bridgetower's father was a freed African slave. His mother was a Polish servant. Despite being poor, John Bridgetower was an ambitious and charismatic man, who was determined to make something of his life.

Soon after George was born in 1778, John realised that he was a gifted child, with a special talent for music. By luck, when he was working as a servant in the palace of Prince Esterházy of Hungary, John found that he was living under the same roof as the great composer Haydn. It is believed he persuaded Haydn to give George music lessons. George was only seven years old.

At the age of nine, George gave his first public performance in Paris. The audience were astounded by his talents; one member commented, 'his playing is perfect, with a clear good tone, spirit, pathos and good taste.' Soon, George was playing all over Europe, attracting the attention of the rich and famous and selling out venues as audiences crowded to see this amazing

boy. After he played in Bath in 1789, the *Bath Morning Post* wrote, 'The young African Prince, whose musical talents have been so much celebrated, had a more crowded and splendid concert on Sunday morning than has ever been known in this place. There were upwards of 550 persons present, and they were gratified by such skills on the violin as created general astonishment, as well as pleasure from the boy wonder. The father was in the gallery, and so affected by the applause bestowed on his son, that tears of pleasure and gratitude flowed in profusion.'

As you can see from this quote, one of the things that fascinated audiences was the fact that George was black. White Europeans of the time were more used to seeing black people in the role of slaves or servants, and so would have been surprised to see George playing with such skill and refinement.

Never one to miss an opportunity, John Bridgetower played up to this, drumming up interest before George's concerts by dressing up in strange and exotic clothes, and parading through the streets. He told anyone who asked that he was an African Prince.

## The Prince of Wales

As George's fame spread far and wide, he attracted the attention of some very powerful people.

In 1791, when George was 12, John Bridgetower was approached by the Prince of Wales, who wanted George to come and live in his Pavilion in Brighton. The Prince of Wales was a spoilt and extravagant man, who enjoyed parties, drinking and gambling, and ran up enormous debts by doing exactly as he pleased. He offered John Bridgetower £25 to become George's guardian, which would mean removing George from his family. John agreed.

We can only guess at the sadness that George felt at being separated from his mother, brother and father like this. However, it is likely that John



saw too good an opportunity to miss. Not only was George set up for life, but £25 was an enormous sum of money at the time, enough to make the Bridgetowers comfortable for the rest of their lives.

## George Becomes a Superstar

Under the patronage of the Prince of Wales, George became even more successful. We know few details of his life, but it is clear that he played regularly for the Prince in Brighton and London, enjoying audiences made up of the most rich and powerful people in Europe.

He was not reunited with his mother until 1802 – a gap of 11 years – and even then, he barely got to see her due to his heavy performing commitments.

By now, George was a young man of 24, and was a very accomplished performer. Around this time, he attracted the attention of Beethoven, who was so impressed by George's skills on the violin that he began to compose some music that would showcase them.

Bridgetower and Beethoven gave the first performance of the Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin in A in 1803. After the performance, the Maestro dedicated the music to Bridgetower. This is the act that should have made Bridgetower's name in history; however, just a few days later, Bridgetower made a terrible mistake. We can't be sure but it is thought that Bridgetower made some rude comments about a woman with whom Beethoven was in love, which caused a huge row between the two men.

Beethoven never spoke to Bridgetower again. Later, he changed the dedication of the Sonata to another violinist, Rudolphe Kreutzer, and it continues to be known as the Kreutzer Sonata to this day.

## The Fading Star

After this point, Bridgetower continued to be thought of very highly in musical circles. He impressed his tutors a great deal when he studied at Cambridge, and was later given permanent membership of the prestigious Philharmonic Society.

However, he became gradually less famous, and after this point, history records very little of his life. We know that he died in 1860, at the age of 81, and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. He was thought to be poor by then, although he left £1000 in a will to the sister of his wife.

It is only now that the story of George Bridgetower is being told again. We will never know for sure, but if perhaps his life had been slightly different, he could still have been one of the most famous names in musical history.

## Glossary

<b>Pavilion</b>	The Prince of Wales had a very luxurious second home built in Brighton, where he kept a band of the most talented musicians to entertain his guests.
<b>Pianoforte</b>	The full name for a piano, meaning 'soft-loud' in Italian.
<b>Maestro</b>	'Master': the title given to a great composer or musician.
<b>Sonata</b>	A piece of music composed for the piano, sometimes accompanied by another instrument.

# • • • George Bridgetower Activity Sheet

## George Bridgetower Timeline



You can use the set of sorting-cards included in this pack as a starter activity to explore the life of George Bridgetower. Each card is based on a contemporary source, although may not be a direct quote. Put together, the cards offer an impression of how Bridgetower was seen by the outside world. Download spare copies of the sorting-cards at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org).

1. Shuffle the cards, divide the class into pairs, and give out a card to each pair.
2. The pairs should briefly discuss what clues they can pick up about Bridgetower from their card.
3. Appoint a class 'scribe', and hold a whole-group discussion about Bridgetower's identity, with the scribe building up a profile on the board.
4. Students should now lay their cards out in date order, to form a time-line. This can be done across desks, on the floor, on a peg-line or pinned to the wall. Make sure the time-line is to scale.

## Bridgetower Tableaux

Create tableaux of the key moments in Bridgetower's life.

You can introduce the idea of making tableaux by asking individual pupils to portray an emotion using just their faces. Other pupils can guess the emotion, or everyone could portray the same emotion at once, so that the class can compare their ideas.

Then put pupils into groups of 4-6, allocate each group a moment from Bridgetower's life (see below), and ask them to make a tableau to represent that moment.

- Discovering his musical talent
- Playing his first concert, aged 9
- Being separated from his father, aged 12
- Performing the Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin in A with Beethoven
- Falling out with Beethoven

Pupils should then present their tableau to the class. It may help if the class can close their eyes as the performers get into position. What title could you give for each tableau? If you like, you can photograph the tableaux and display them.

Note: Tableux is plural. Tableau is singular.

## Why don't we remember George Bridgetower?



It seems incredible now that someone as famous as George Bridgetower could be forgotten. What reasons can we find for this?

1. Photocopy the cue-cards included on the back of this lesson card. Each card suggests a reason why George Bridgetower might have been forgotten.
2. Give them out to groups of 2-3.
3. The groups should discuss the ideas on the cards and decide whether they think they are correct. They must be able to give a reason for their decision.
4. The blank cards are for groups to use to fill in their own ideas. Try to think of three reasons.
5. Get together as a class and discuss your reasons for and against each view. What other ideas did groups come up with?
6. After the discussion return to your groups and decide on a conclusion to the group discussion. What do you think is the reason we don't remember Bridgetower?

## Any Questions?

Sometimes, when we are dealing with historical figures we end up with questions we cannot answer. Write a postcard to George Bridgetower, which contains one question that you would most like to ask him. You could make a display of these. Who knows, perhaps one day your question will be answered!

**Cue-cards:**  
**Why don't we remember  
George Bridgetower?**

**He was a child prodigy.  
When he got older, people  
weren't interested in  
him anymore.**

**He should never have  
argued with Beethoven.  
The 'Bridgetower Sonata' was  
his last chance at  
lasting fame.**

**He probably suffered from  
prejudice. People weren't  
interested in remembering  
a black man.**

**Maybe we don't remember  
performing musicians as much  
as we remember composers.**





# Beethoven and Bridgetower

'Once more, my dear fellow!'



Ludwig van Beethoven ©The British Library

George Bridgetower, the young violin prodigy, began performing in public in 1787 at the age of nine. He quickly captured the hearts and minds of music-lovers across Europe, and was adopted by the Prince Regent in 1791, when he was only twelve years old.

In 1803, Bridgetower attracted the attention of the great composer, Beethoven. After seeing Bridgetower play in a concert, Beethoven was very impressed by his performance, calling him 'a very able virtuoso and an absolute master of his instrument.' He decided to dedicate his next composition, the Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin in A, to Bridgetower.

Beethoven didn't finish the sonata until the very last moment and he was still making changes to the music during the first performance. At one point in the concert, Bridgetower even improvised a section of the music, which impressed Beethoven so greatly that he got up from his piano and embraced Bridgetower on stage, saying 'Noch einmal, mein lieber Bursch!' ('Once

more, my dear fellow!'). As a token of his gratitude, Beethoven presented Bridgetower with the gift of a tuning fork after the concert.

Despite the rush to finish, the sonata was widely acclaimed. It is hard to imagine now, but at the time, the violin was seen as a folk instrument, suitable only for playing simple, popular tunes. Beethoven's use of this instrument in a more formal piece of music may show that Bridgetower influenced him. It was certainly a radical step, which surprised and excited many people.

Nowadays, we know Bridgetower's sonata as the *Kreutzer Sonata*. This is because shortly after the first performance Beethoven and Bridgetower had a spectacular row. It is not quite known what it was about – although it is thought that Bridgetower insulted a woman with whom Beethoven was in love – but we know the result: Beethoven never spoke to Bridgetower again and renamed the sonata after another prominent violinist of the time, Rudolphe Kreutzer.

Although Kreutzer never played the Sonata, declaring that he found it 'impossible', the name stuck. George Bridgetower is barely remembered today and this is perhaps one of the major reasons.

## Glossary

<b>Virtuoso</b>	A musician who has an exceptional grasp of their instrument.
<b>Sonata</b>	A piece of music composed for the piano, sometimes accompanied by another instrument.
<b>Improvised</b>	Continued playing without the written music, making up the tune as he went along.

# SONATA

per il Piano-forte ed un Violino obbligato,

*scritta in uno stile molto concertante,*  
quasi come d'un concerto.

*Composta e dedicata al suo amico*

**R. KREUZER.**

*Membro del Conservatorio di Musica in Parigi*

Primo Violino dell'Academia delle Arti, e della Camera imperiale.

per  
**L. van BEETHOVEN.**

Opera 47.

Prezzo 6 Fr:

*Josephine Geyser!*

À BONN CHEZ N. SIMROCK.

À PARIS chez H. Simrock, professeur, marchand de musique et d'instruments, rue du Mont Blanc N<sup>o</sup> 373, Chaussée d'Antin prez le Boulevard.

Propriété de l'éditeur.

Deposée à la Bibliothèque nationale.

Title page of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* ©The British Library

When I accompanied him in this Sonata-Concertante at the Weir, at the repetition of the first part of the Presto, I imitated the flight at the 18th bar of the Pianoforte part of this moment thus:

He jumped up, embraced me saying:

"Noch einmal, mein lieber Bursch!"

Then he held the open pedal during this flight, the chord of six at the ninth bar.

Beethoven's expression in the Andante was so chaste, which always characterised the performance of all his slow movements that it was unanimously hailed to be repeated twice.

George Polgreen Bridgetower



Larger images from this lesson card available at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org)

These are the words Bridgetower reportedly used to describe the occasion when he played with Beethoven in Vienna.



# • • • Beethoven and Bridgetower Activity Sheet



## Hot-Seating (in the style of *Question Time*)



Can you resolve Beethoven and Bridgetower's problems? Or perhaps you'll just make them worse!

1. Watch the clip of *Question Time*. Note carefully how the Chair (David Dimbleby), the panelists and audience behave.
2. Nominate members of the class to play David Dimbleby and your own discussion panel. Personalities for the panelists may include current or historical characters, such as a well known radio DJ, the Minister for the Arts, a music journalist, or a representative of the Royal Society of Musicians during Bridgetower's time.
3. Everyone else is the audience, who must ask questions of the panelists about Beethoven and Bridgetower, while the Chair tries to keep order. For example, was Beethoven wrong to change the name of the Sonata? Should people be able to own music? Why? If you were Bridgetower, what would you have done?

## Drawing to Music



1. Listen to the *Kreutzer Sonata* with a soft pencil and some paper in front of you. While the music is playing, allow your hand to move in time, using pattern, line, shade and tone to interpret it. Do your marks change at different

parts of the Sonata? You may need to use several pieces of paper.

2. Try altering this exercise to explore different ways of responding to it:
  - Have different colours available
  - Draw with your eyes closed
  - Make a collage to the music, using a range of materials of different textures
3. Discuss as a class what images, ideas and emotions were suggested by the music. Did everyone have the same impression?

## Use your Talents!



Are you inspired by the *Kreutzer Sonata*?

The composer, Julian Joseph, was so inspired by the story of Bridgetower, Beethoven and the *Kreutzer Sonata*, that he wrote a new opera about it. You can watch his interview at the website.

Listen to the *Kreutzer Sonata* a couple of times and decide what art-form you would most like to use to respond to it. For example, you could:

- Write a poem or story
- Choreograph a dance
- Create a painting or sculpture
- Make a film
- Produce a piece of drama
- Write lyrics to the music

Think about whether you would like to work alone, in a pair or in a group. Why not hold a group exhibition or performance to showcase your work. Look carefully at how other people chose to represent the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Did they see it differently to you?

## Beethoven Web Treasure Trail



Use the sheet on the back of this lesson card *The Beethoven Web Treasure Trail* to find out more about Beethoven's life. Don't forget there are many answers to some of the questions, so share your findings with the class at the end of the lesson.

# Beethoven Web Treasure Trail

There are many websites dedicated to Beethoven. Here are some interesting ones to look at:

- <http://www.madaboutbeethoven.com>
- <http://www.dsokids.com/2001/dso.asp?PageID=57>
- <http://www.lucare.com/immortal/>
- <http://www.classicsforkids.com/shows/showview.asp?ID=20>

You can listen to radio shows about Beethoven here, as well as reading about him.

Can you use them to find answers to these questions about Beethoven's life? To answer some fully, you may need to use information from more than one site.

1. What is Beethoven's full name? \_\_\_\_\_

2. When was he born? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What evidence can you find that Beethoven was a child prodigy (someone who has a great deal of talent at a very young age)?

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4. Beethoven suffered from a condition that made it very difficult for him to compose music. What was it, and how did it affect his life as a musician?

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5. How would you describe Beethoven's personality?

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6. How many symphonies did Beethoven compose?

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## Discussion point:

We often find conflicting information on different websites.

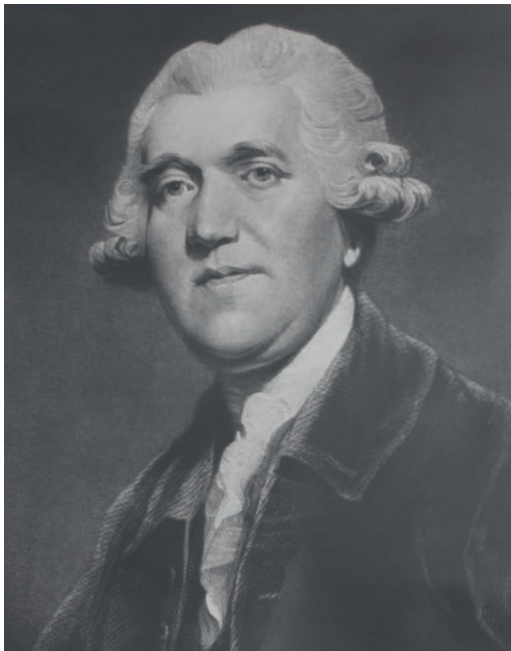
Why do you think this is? How can we check to make sure the information we find is accurate?



# Josiah Wedgwood

'Am I not a man and a brother?'

Josiah Wedgwood was born into a family of potters in 1730. During his childhood he caught smallpox and suffered from a range of disabilities throughout his life. Despite this, he began to work in the family business at the age of 9.



Josiah Wedgwood ©The Wedgwood Museum

When he was 29 he decided to set up his own business making a wide range of products, including vases, dinner services, jugs, bowls and trinket boxes. He was curious about how new scientific techniques could improve his pottery, and his work soon became famous. During his career, he made items for Queen Charlotte and Catherine the Great of Russia.



Jasper Portland Vase, late 18th Century ©The Wedgwood Museum

He is probably best known for developing a type of pottery called 'Jasper', which was strongly coloured, perhaps green, black or yellow, but most famously blue, with white scenes applied to the surface. This proved incredibly popular and is still on sale today.

Wedgwood is known for making much more than pottery. He was curious about all areas of life, and his projects included developing a pyrometer, a device that measured the high temperatures in his kilns, and working out how to run the most efficient factory possible.

He had huge interest in politics, and was an active member of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery from 1787. He also produced a famous medallion that was given by him to supporters of the Abolition of Slavery campaign. It featured a kneeling slave, and had the words, 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?' around the edge. Many supporters of the anti-slavery movement wore these medallions to publicly show their support.



Wedgwood Slave Medallion  
circa 1787 ©The Wedgwood Museum

Josiah Wedgwood died in 1795 and is best remembered as a great innovator who used his talents to create ceramics that were both beautiful and timeless.

## Glossary

- Smallpox** A viral infection that killed many Europeans during the 18th century.
- Medallion** A circular piece of pottery, which may have been attached to clothing or displayed.
- Ceramics** The art of making products from clay or similar materials.

# CAMPAIGN!

This pressure group is being set up by:  
(Your names)

Name of pressure group:

Our logo will be:

We will protest about:

Our aims are:  
(e.g. 'To abolish all human trafficking within five years')

The people who most need to hear our message are:

We will use these methods to get publicity:

We will get our funding by:

# • • • Josiah Wedgwood Activity Sheet

## Slogans



Josiah Wedgwood's anti-slavery medallion contained an early example of a catchy slogan, 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?'

1. Make a class list of effective slogans that we hear today, e.g. Make Poverty History. Discuss what makes a good slogan.
2. Use the *Have your say!* sheet on the back of this lesson card to design slogan badges and t-shirts. A PDF of this sheet is also available to download at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org).

## Form a campaign group

Josiah Wedgwood believed that he should speak out about issues that concerned him. One example of this is his work to support the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

1. Look at contemporary pressure groups. Some good examples are Oxfam ([oxfam.org](http://oxfam.org)), Amnesty International ([amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org)) and Greenpeace ([greenpeace.org.uk](http://greenpeace.org.uk)). There is still even a campaign against slavery ([antislavery.org](http://antislavery.org)).

- How do these groups get their message across?
- What do they actually do?
- How are they funded?
- What sort of image do they have?
- Whose attention are they trying to get?

2. Get into groups of 4-5 and discuss what issues you think are the most important in current society. Select one that your group would like to focus on.
3. Use the CAMPAIGN! sheet on this lesson card to develop a campaign group.
4. Make posters, leaflets or even short films and websites to publicise your campaign.
5. The sky's the limit: why not get involved in a real campaign, or see how far you can take your own pressure group?

## Make a Bill of Rights for Britain



The USA has a constitution that guarantees certain rights (e.g. freedom of speech) to its citizens. The UK has never had a formal constitu-

tion, but many politicians think we should draw one up. Josiah Wedgwood was certainly keen that we should be given more rights. Gordon Brown has indicated that he may do this during his time as Prime Minister.

1. Investigate the US constitution through the web link at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org).
2. Draw up a model constitution that lists ten rights that you think all people should have.
3. When you have decided, compare your list to a partner's. What are the similarities and differences? Think about the effects your rights may have on the whole of society. How can we create rights that don't make other people's lives more difficult?
4. Discuss your choices as a class. Can you all agree on a final list of ten items? Why not have a formal debate, in which class members argue for and against different issues that they think should be included. Don't forget to vote at the end – assuming that your constitution agrees with democracy!

## Become Wedgwood pottery

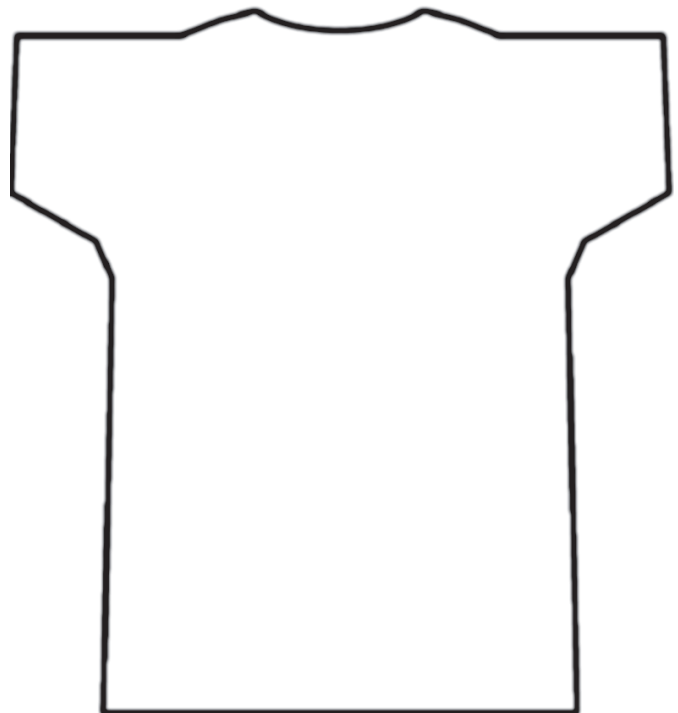
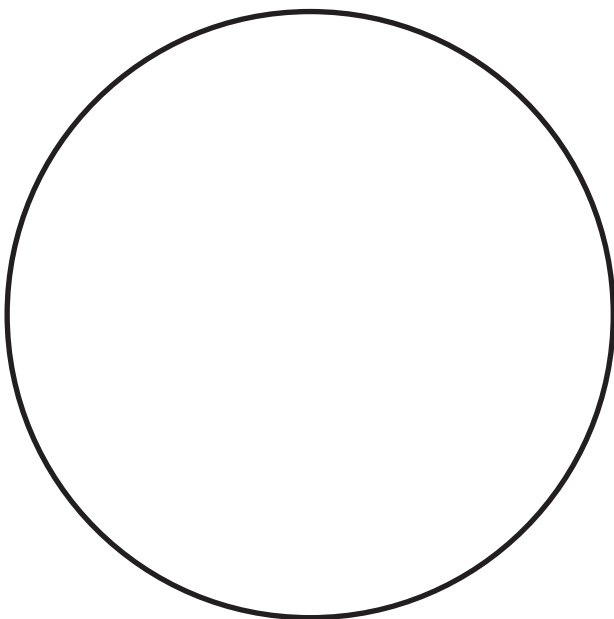
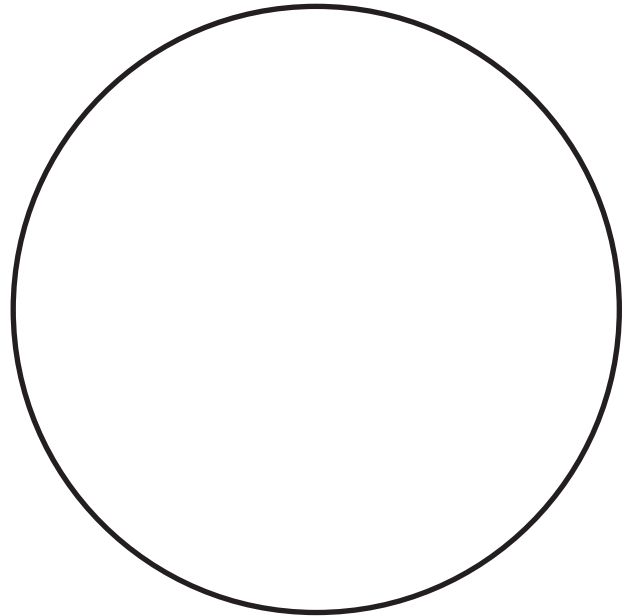
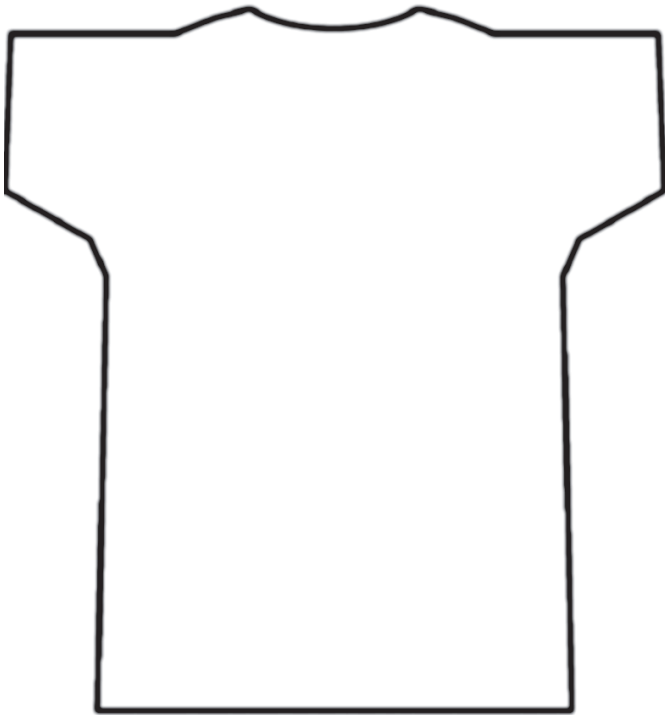


Josiah Wedgwood's Jasper was famous for being decorated with figures representing well known stories.

1. Look at the pictures of Wedgwood Jasper pottery at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org)
2. Can you make tableaux (groups of people posing together, like living photos) to match the stories on the pots?
3. Choose a famous story and in groups, create a tableau that represents it. Think about fairy stories, myths, historical events, or even current news items.
4. Share your tableaux with other people by photographing them. You could display them by sticking them onto vase shapes. If you really want to look like Wedgwood pottery, you could consider dressing in white clothes and posing against a blue background.
5. Could you perform your tableaux in front of the school in assembly? Perhaps you could make a series of tableaux to show different stages of a story.

# *Have your say!*

Design your own slogans for t-shirts and badges. What message would you send out to the world?





# Slave Songs

'A band of angels coming after me!'

Before Britain's parliamentary Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807, an endless succession of Africans passed through British ports; many more lived permanently in London and other areas of the UK, working as house-slaves, servants or tradesmen. They brought with them a vibrant culture, which, although often scorned or feared by the people they met, had a lasting effect on the creative life of both Britain and the United States.

Songs are a good example of this. Enslaved Africans adapted their traditional songs to pass the time and give them hope whilst they were packed into the ships that transported them across the world. They also developed rhythmic songs that helped them to maintain spirit and pace while they worked. There is some evidence that American slaves used songs to help guide those who escaped to freedom.

Listen to the audio recording of *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. You can follow the lyrics below.



Chorus:

**Swing low, sweet chariot  
Coming for to carry me home  
Swing low, sweet chariot  
Coming for to carry me home**

*I looked over Jordan and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home  
A band of angels coming after me  
Coming for to carry me home*

(Chorus)

*If you get there before I do  
Coming for to carry me home  
Tell all my friends I'm coming too  
Coming for to carry me home*

(Chorus)

*If I get there before you do  
Coming for to carry me home  
I'll cut a hole and pull you through  
Coming for to carry me home*

(Chorus)

*Sometimes I'm up and sometimes  
I'm down  
Coming for to carry me home  
But still my soul feels heavenly bound  
Coming for to carry me home*

*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* is a 'spiritual': a song deeply rooted in Christianity, to which many slaves had converted.

The song refers to the Biblical story of Elijah being taken away to heaven by a chariot. It also contains the mixture of sadness ('Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down') and joy ('Still my soul feels heavenly bound') that is found in many spirituals. As with a great deal of slave songs, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* suggests that a better life will be found in heaven.

If you have heard the song before, though, it is most likely that you heard it sung at a rugby match. Nobody is sure how the song became associated with rugby, although many people think that it was due to Welsh fans, who wanted to sing a rousing song to encourage their team.

It was adopted as an anthem by England fans in 1988, after Chris Oti, a black player, turned round a difficult match against Ireland with three tries. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* had sometimes been sung by racist crowd members before this time, to draw attention to black players on the pitch. However, after Oti helped the team go from 0 - 3 at half time to 35 - 3 at full time, the crowd started to sing this favourite hymn in celebration. The song caught on so much, that the England team flew home from their 2003 World Cup victory in a plane called the *Sweet Chariot*.

# Wade in the Water

“Tell all my friends that I’m comin’ too”

At face value, the famous spiritual, *Wade in the Water*, seems to encourage people to be baptised in order to find hope for the future. However, many historians now believe the song is actually a very clever code that gave advice to slaves from the American south on how to escape to Canada, where slavery was illegal.

Have a close look at the lyrics. What do you think?

Slaves who were caught trying to escape would be punished by death, as an example to other slaves. This meant that the song had to be disguised as a religious song to avoid suspicion.

The song needed to offer hope to anyone who tried to escape. It suggests that God is on their side, but also that they can be ‘redeemed’ (saved) by following the instructions.

The song suggests the safest way of getting to Canada: follow the river. This meant that slaves could easily navigate at night to avoid being caught.

Wade in the water,  
Wade in the water,  
Wade in the water,  
God's gonna trouble the water.

If you don't believe I've been redeemed,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
I want you to follow him on down to Jordan stream,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
You know chilly water is dark and cold,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
You know it chills my body but not my soul.  
God's gonna trouble the water

Jordan is the Promised Land in the Bible. Here, it may have represented the other ‘promised land’ of Canada.

The journey was long (usually taking a year) and uncomfortable, so the song offered moral support along the way.

Wade in the water,  
Wade in the water,  
Wade in the water,  
God's gonna trouble the water.

It is thought the slaves were encouraged to literally wade in the water rather than just walking along the banks of the river. This would prevent them being sniffed out by the bloodhounds sent by slave-owners.

Even though hiding an escaped slave was punishable by death, people throughout the United States agreed to take in escapees. This network was highly organised, and became known as the Underground Railroad.

Now if you should get there before I do,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Tell all my friends that I'm comin' too,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Sometimes I'm up lord and sometimes I'm down,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Sometimes I'm level to the ground,  
God's gonna trouble the water  
God's gonna trouble the water.

The song contains many repeated lines and a memorable tune, so that it would be easy for escapees to remember.

Another way of avoiding detection: keep low to the ground.

# • • • Slave Songs Activity Sheet



## Wade in the Water



Listen to the traditional recording of *Wade in the Water*. Now read the *Wade in the Water* song lyrics sheet, which contains a kind of code. The meaning of the words would have been understood by the slaves but not their masters.

The lyrics sheet is for the same song as the traditional recording, but the words are different in some parts. This is because there are many versions of this song, as slave songs were rarely written down and the tradition was passed on verbally.

1. Decide on something that you would like to talk about in code: it might be something you would like to tell your friends in secret, or something that you would like help with remembering.
2. Now write a song that hides the information in its lyrics. To make it easier, you could use a tune you already know.
3. Perform your song. Can the class decode what you're trying to say?

## Become a gospel choir



Modern gospel music grew out of the spirituals sung by slaves. It can be joyous or sorrowful, but is always performed with great enthusiasm by the singers.

1. Watch the video clips of the Soweto Gospel Choir.
2. Could your class form a gospel choir to perform one of the slave songs you have looked at? Think about costumes, dance moves, soloists and how to put across the mood of the song.

## A new national anthem



The slave songs were so good that many of them have been re-used by modern singers. 'Wade in the Water' is one example, as it was covered by Marlena Shaw in the 1960s, with its meaning slightly changed to make it into a love song. A recording is included at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org).

Songs are often re-used. A recent example is the hymn *Jerusalem*, written by William Blake, which some people have suggested should replace our current national anthem, *God Save the Queen*. Can you think of an alternative?

1. In groups of 3, list all the songs you think would make good national anthems. You should take factors into account such as:
  - It needs to be memorable
  - It needs to send out a positive message
  - It needs to be easy for many people to sing together
2. Now choose one of the songs on your list.
3. Put together a short talk that persuades the rest of the class to make use of your song.
4. When all the talks are ready, hold a class debate in which each group makes a short presentation, and then the issue is discussed by the whole class. It may help to write your proposed songs up on the board.
5. Hold a vote to choose your favoured national anthem.
6. Why not write to the Prime Minister to suggest he takes up your idea?





# William Blake

## 'Mind-forg'd manacles'

Have you ever felt that you are different to everyone else? That no-one understands you? That you see the world in a different way? That people are always trying to restrict your freedom?

If you have, then you have a lot in common with William Blake.

William Blake was more than just a poet and artist, although he did both of those things exceptionally well. He is important because of the ideas behind his work. Unlike George Bridgetower, he never found fame during his lifetime, and his talent was only recognised after he died.

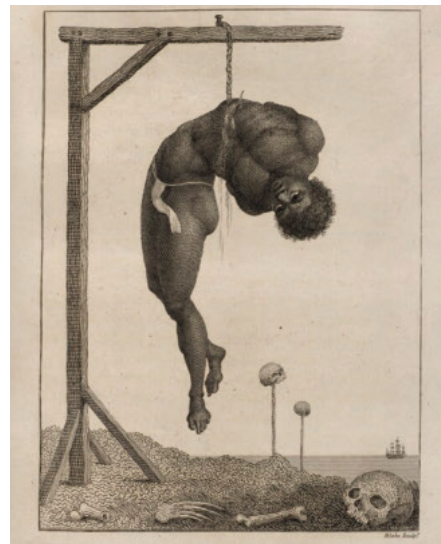
Born in 1757, he became interested in art at an early age and later studied it at the Royal Academy in London. However, Blake wasn't impressed by the famous artists he met there and spent his time working out his own methods of drawing and printing.

After he left he set up an engraving shop and began to work on his own books. Blake was very interested in religion, but hated the established church. He believed that normal people could have visions and holy experiences and not just priests. Blake claimed to have seen visions of angels all through his life.

In order to put his message across, he produced books of 'Illuminated Poetry', which meant that he carefully illustrated all his poems so that they were works of art in their own right. He was so slow at making these that he only ever produced a few copies, and found it difficult to sell them as they were very expensive. Blake was always poor and only survived because he had a rich benefactor: someone who admired his work and so paid him to draw portraits of his family.

This must have been very difficult for Blake, who hated authority of all kinds. He thought that the government stopped people thinking for themselves, and accused human beings of wearing 'mind-forg'd manacles' (handcuffs created by their own minds). These feelings led him to take an interest in the anti-slavery movement.

He used his artistic skills to create some of the most shocking and famous engravings of the slave trade, *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* and *A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*. He also explored the idea of slavery in his writing.



*A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*  
engraved by William Blake ©The British Museum



*Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*  
engraved by William Blake ©The British Museum

## Glossary

- Engraving** A method of printing that involves carving an image into wood or metal.
- Flagellation** Whipping or removing the skin.
- Gallows** The structure used for hangings.

## Songs of Innocence and Experience

In 1789, William Blake wrote *Songs of Innocence*, a book of poetry that could be enjoyed by both children and adults. It was designed to show what was good in the world.

A few years later, he released a second book, *Songs of Experience*. These poems explored the sadder, more dangerous side of life. By putting the two books together, he seemed imply that we are happier when we are children ('innocent') than when we are adults ('experienced').

In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the 'innocent' poems are echoed by poems telling the other side of the story. For example, each part of the book has a poem called *Nurse's Song*, but in *Innocence*, the poem celebrates the joys of childhood, while in *Experience*, the nurse is sad about getting old.

The following two poems are the most famous pairing in the book. Note the old-fashioned spelling of *tiger*.

### The Lamb

*Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,  
By the stream and o'er the mead;  
Gave thee clothing of delight,  
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice?  
Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee.  
He is called by thy name,  
For He calls Himself a Lamb.  
He is meek, and He is mild;  
He became a little child.  
I a child, and thou a lamb,  
We are called by His name.  
Little Lamb, God bless thee!  
Little Lamb, God bless thee!*

### The Tyger

*Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

*In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?  
And what shoulder, and what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? and what dread feet?  
What the hammer? what the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?  
When the stars threw down their spears,  
And watered heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the  
lamb make thee?  
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*



*The Tyger* by William Blake ©The British Museum

## Discussion Points

Both of the poems contain questions. What does the poet ask?

- Do you think he wants us to answer these questions?
- If so, what is the answer?
- Is the answer the same in both poems?

# • • • William Blake Activity Sheet



Portrait of William Blake by Thomas Phillips ©The National Portrait Gallery

## Innocence and Experience



1. Look at the sheet *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and think about the discussion points.

2. In the poems on the sheet Blake uses a lamb as a symbol of innocence and a tiger as a symbol of experience. What two symbols would you choose?

3. Now write a poem to show innocence and experience. Think about:

- how you will show what innocence is
- how you will show what experience is
- whether experience is always bad
- whether innocence is always good

## Illuminated Poems



After you have written this poem, or any other, why not illuminate it like William Blake?

Look carefully at some examples of Blake's illuminated poems. A selection of images can be found at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org). Another good

source is the Blake Archive online at [www.blakearchive.org](http://www.blakearchive.org). Click on *Works in the Archive* and then find *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

Note the colours that Blake uses, and the way he writes all his poems by hand. When he illuminated a poem he tried to make the whole page beautiful.

Once you have illuminated your poem, why not put all the class's poems together into your own *Songs of Innocence and Experience*?

## Propaganda!



William Blake knew how powerful pictures can be. When he was asked to make prints of the life of slaves, he chose the most controversial images possible. They were designed to shock people in order to let them know how brutal slavery was.

A more recent example of this is the government's anti drink-driving campaign, which showed horrific images of people dying in road accidents.

Make your own propaganda posters (posters that try to influence the way people think about issues) to campaign for the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, or for a more recent issue that is important. How can you strike a balance between shocking people enough to make them think again, and stopping them from being so upset that they don't want to look?

## The Little Black Boy



As part of his book, *Songs of Innocence*, William Blake wrote the poem on the back of this lesson card, *The Little Black Boy*. Blake was part of the anti-slavery movement, and wanted to help children to understand that slavery was wrong.

However, readers today may be uncomfortable with the way that Blake uses language in this poem. Reading it can help us to see how our ideas have changed.



## The Little Black Boy

by William Blake

*My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but oh my soul is white!  
White as an angel is the English child,  
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.*

*My mother taught me underneath a tree,  
And, sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissed me,  
And, pointed to the east, began to say:*

*"Look on the rising sun: there God does live,  
And gives His light, and gives His heat away,  
And flowers and trees and beasts and men  
receive Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday.*

*"And we are put on earth a little space,  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love  
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face  
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove."*



The Little Black Boy by William Blake ©The British Museum

## Discussion Points

1. In this poem, Blake is thinking about the contrast between black and white. Underline the parts in which he talks about these colours.
2. How does he talk about these colours? Is black a good colour? What about white?
3. Why would modern readers be uncomfortable with the way that Blake talks about the Little Black Boy?
4. What is the message of this poem? Did Blake mean to be prejudiced?



# Satire and Slavery

'O delicious! Delicious!'



*Barbarities in The West Indies* by James Gillray © The National Portrait Gallery

We often think that cartoons are a modern invention, but they have been entertaining the public for many years. In fact, it is only recently that we have thought of cartoons as something that children read. In the past, cartoons were aimed at adults and often poked fun at the issues of the day.

James Gillray was a cartoonist at the end of the 18th century. His cartoons dealt with a wide range of issues, from the French Revolution to the arthritis that he suffered in his feet. Here are two of his cartoons that tackle the campaign for the abolition of slavery.

This is a very simple cartoon, with a very simple message. It was published in 1791, and depicted a true story told by politician William Wilberforce when he spoke in Parliament against slavery. In the cartoon we see a slave-owner punishing a young slave because he was too sick to work. He threw the slave into a vat of boiling sugar-water, held him there with a pole for 45 minutes, and then whipped him severely. It took the slave many months to recover from his terrible scalds and wounds.

If you look closely on the wall in the background, you can see the body-parts of slaves nailed to the wall. At the time, people often nailed rats and mice to the wall if they caught them; the cartoon suggests that slaves are treated no better than vermin.

## Discussion points

- What do you think Gillray was trying to do with his cartoon?
- Who do you think were his audience?
- Does the cartoon succeed in its aim?

Our second Gillray cartoon, *The Anti-Saccharrites*, is a good example of satire. It was drawn in 1792, when the anti-slavery movement was encouraging everyone to boycott sugar. This was because most sugar was produced using slave labour. The picture shows King George III, who was notoriously mean, enthusiastically joining in with the boycott of sugar. Note how he and his wife are raving about tea without sugar, while the rest of the family look rather disgusted. Gillray is suggesting that George III is only keen on the sugar





The Anti-Saccharites by James Gillray ©The National Portrait Gallery

boycott because it saves him money!

The cartoon uses caricature to portray the king and queen. Cartoonists often do this to emphasise the weak points of the people they are mocking.

## Discussion Points:

- Can you tell what side of the debate Gillray was on? Why?
- Why do you think Gillray used the King and Queen in his cartoon, rather than an ordinary family?
- Notice how the King is plump and the Queen is ugly. Why do you think Gillray showed them like this?
- Why are all the Princesses allowed to be pretty by Gillray?

Satirical cartoons are still popular today. Most newspapers have several cartoons that comment on issues in the news. One famous cartoonist is Martin Rowson, whose cartoons appear in several newspapers, including the *Guardian* and the *Independent*. Here is a cartoon of his that shows how slavery is still an important issue today. Rowson's cartoon doesn't show anyone specific;



Cartoon by Martin Rowson 2007

instead, he draws a portrait of an unknown man, but makes him grotesque so that we know that he is being mocked. The cartoon was published on the day that the Archbishop of York urged the Prime Minister to apologise for slavery. Rowson seems to be suggesting that saying sorry is not enough.

## Discussion Points

- Look closely at the obese man in the centre of the cartoon. What country is he from? What clues does Rowson offer to suggest this?
- Look at the mirror he is looking into. Behind the smiley face, what can you see? What is Rowson implying here?
- What famous logo do you recognise in the picture? Why is it there?
- What is the obese man sitting on? What is Rowson saying here?
- Look at the baby on the right hand side of the picture. Which stars are being mocked?
- The cartoon points to the many problems that Africa is suffering from, such as poverty, debt and starvation. It also suggests that the western world is making the problem worse. Do you agree? What steps could you take to know more about these issues?

## Glossary

- Satire** Using sarcasm to make fun of people, especially politicians.
- Boycott** When a large group of people refuse to use or buy something. This is usually a political protest, designed to draw attention to a cause, or to avoid giving money to groups that are behaving badly.
- Caricature** A portrait of someone that exaggerates their features.
- Grotesque** Exaggeratedly odd, unnatural or ugly.



Larger images from this lesson card available at [www.bridgetowerproject.org](http://www.bridgetowerproject.org)

# • • • Satire and Slavery Activity Sheet



## Make your own cartoons

Why not have a go at drawing your own satirical cartoon? You could show your view on a topic such as:

- The effects of our lifestyles on the environment
- Fairtrade
- Healthy eating
- The proposed new powers of schools to give Saturday detentions
- An issue from your school or community

Don't forget to use all the tools demonstrated by Gillray and Rowson:

- Caricature
- The grotesque
- Captions that explain what's happening
- Speech bubbles
- Lots of detail, even in the background

How can you publish your cartoons so that others can read them? Perhaps you could print a satirical magazine that can be distributed around school?

## Make a satirical TV show



TV shows like *Have I Got News for You* and *Mock the Week* use satire in a different way to cartoons, using comedians to pick over the week's news, and make fun of it. Visit [www.mocktheweek.tv](http://www.mocktheweek.tv) or [www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/haveigotnewsforyou](http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/haveigotnewsforyou)

Could you make a satirical show of your own?

1. In groups of 3-4, pick three current news stories, and list all the things you find amusing or ridiculous about them.
2. Write a short script that tries to see the funny side of these stories. Your aim should be to make the people in them look as silly as possible.
3. Film or perform your satirical show.

## Make a caricature collage

You can make a simple caricature of a famous person, even if you're not so confident at drawing.

1. Get your class to bring in old magazines and newspapers.
2. Choose a celebrity or politician to caricature – it helps if you pick someone who is photographed often.
3. Cut out the largest picture of them you can find.
4. Now look closely at it: what are their most distinctive features? Do they, for example, have a large mouth or a strange haircut?
5. Use other magazine cuttings to over-emphasise their key features, e.g. cut out an even bigger mouth and stick it over the real one. You could also add other items to your caricature, e.g. you might give Paris Hilton lots of shopping bags and a small dog. How silly and grotesque can you make your celebrity look?

