

**JACOB V JOYCE &  
RUDY LOEWE**

**SWEET  
REBELLION**

MOBILE FRIENDLY VERSION

**CRACKS IN THE  
CURRICULUM**

**RESOURCE 4**

*Cracks in the Curriculum* is a workshop series and publishing platform that brings artists, activists and educators together to think about how to address pressing social issues in the classroom. The series explores key questions and themes that run through the Serpentine Education, Exhibition and Live programmes. The fourth edition, *Sweet Rebellion*, responds to the histories of British slave plantations and the black activism that contributed to their abolition. The content was developed during workshops with teachers, artists, activists and students in early 2020.

This resource offers a series of activities, which look at the histories of rebellion on British Caribbean plantations through drawing, discussion, group investigations and further study. Towards the end of the resource is an illustration by Rudy Loewe and Jacob V Joyce, which depicts people who have resisted British colonial rule and injustice.

*Sweet Rebellion* is an invitation for History and Art teachers in Years 7–9 to rethink the ways we talk about colonialism and its legacy in schools. The activities included in this resource could be completed over a number of lessons or a whole term, and can also be adapted for Year 5, 6, 10 and 11 classrooms.

## WHAT IS COLONIALISM?

Colonialism happens when a group of people take political control over another country that is already populated by people, stealing their resources and exploiting their labour. Historically this has involved forcing the inhabitants of these countries to adopt the coloniser's religion, culture, language and laws.

The colonisation of Africa and the Caribbean began with the transatlantic slave trade in the 1400s. The slave trade lasted for over 400 years and involved the capturing, enslavement and forced transportation of African people to the Americas to work on plantations. Britain, France, Portugal, The Netherlands and Spain were some of the biggest slave traders, but all of Europe benefited financially from colonisation. The horrors faced by enslaved people on plantations were so depraved that it's hard to read through the many historical records kept by plantation owners and overseers.

## WHAT IS COLONIALISM?

[Please note: some of the descriptions and imagery included in the next paragraph are graphically violent.]

England's love for sugar first grew from the blood-soaked soil of the Caribbean, where millions of enslaved African adults and children were tortured and forced to grow sugar cane on British-owned plantations. The working conditions were brutal, and millions of slaves died from illnesses related to exhaustion, torture and poor sanitation. The slaves were often expected to work up to 48 hours without rest, and as punishment British slave owners would carry out whippings, cut off ears and tongues, force people to drink boiling water, or even make people ingest gunpowder to be blown to pieces.

During the British Empire, there were people who at times put their lives on the line to resist British colonial rule and injustice. Many of these people were enslaved by Britain, while others lived in Britain and fought against slavery.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- How can we resist colonial ideas within the National Curriculum and reinsert Britain's accountability?
- How did Britain build its wealth and how does Britain continue to profit from colonialism?
- How can drawing and storytelling be used as tools to make visible the people in history who fought for liberation from the slave plantations of the British Empire?
- What are the ways we can highlight colonialism as an ongoing issue that impacts people's lives today?
- How can we collectively imagine a future beyond slavery and colonisation?

**Jacob and Rudy are London-based visual artists working with drawing, mural painting, printmaking and self-publication. Afrofuturism, black histories, gender and sexuality are some of the key themes which connect their practices and reflect their experiences of being black, queer and non-binary in the UK.**

**Both artists have a pedagogical and community focus in their work, and regularly lead workshops inside and outside of art institutions that are open to the public, as well as sessions for specific community groups. Their practices routinely amplify histories of resistance and nourish new queer and anti-colonial narratives.**

When we hear about colonialism it is often framed as something that happened in the past, in another place, that was carried out by unidentified people. There are many ways in which colonialism is ongoing, and even within the UK there are visible repercussions.

Today there are British companies that continue to profit from the lands taken during colonisation. Indigenous people are still displaced and exploited for cheap labour in mines, factories and plantations. Colonialism continues as we speak.

In our day-to-day lives we use many materials that rely on the exploitation of people living in countries once colonised by Europe: clothes that are made using sweatshop labour in Asia; technology built with materials mined by children in Central Africa; cocoa from farms in West Africa that rely on very cheap labour and in particular on child workers. In this resource we have chosen to focus on the history of sugar plantations in the Caribbean. This was a particularly brutal chapter in the story of the British Empire and it is important that it isn't forgotten.

## C O N T E X T

**Art and storytelling are effective ways to fill in the blanks and build on the narratives of resistance that have been hidden or erased. History often ignores people who fought for their own freedom and instead focuses on the idea of a saviour or hero who comes to the rescue. This takes away the importance and power of key figures, some of whom this resource aims to celebrate. For this reason we invite you to use comic book exercises and poster-making activities to reimagine these histories.**



## REBELLIOUS CHARACTERS: NANNY OF THE MAROONS

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Born in Ghana in 1686 as a member of the Ashanti people, Nanny was kidnapped to Jamaica to work on sugar plantations as a slave. After escaping, she formed Maroon communities, which intermarried with the indigenous Arawak people. Leading and supporting slave revolts, Nanny liberated more enslaved people and strengthened the Maroons' troops. She was able to call on the spirits of her ancestors, as she was what Jamaicans refer to as an Obeah woman: someone with knowledge of plant medicines and other traditional practices rooted in Africa. Nanny of the Maroons is one of many countless individuals whose tireless and courageous battles against British plantation slavery led to its eventual downfall.

REBELLIOUS CHARACTERS:  
OLAUDAH EQUIANO

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*'Is it not enough that we are torn  
from our country and friends, to  
toil for your luxury and lust of gain?  
Must every tender feeling be likewise  
sacrificed to your avarice?'*

The slavery abolitionist Olaudah Equiano witnessed the horrors of plantation slavery during his time as a child slave owned by the Royal British Navy between 1750 and 1759. As a young adult Olaudah was sold to a man who told him that for £40 (the equivalent of £5,400 in those days) he could buy his freedom. By selling fruits and glass to ships crossing the Caribbean he was able to pay for his release. When he gained his freedom from the slave trade and moved to England he became a pioneering voice in the movement to abolish slavery and end the transatlantic slave trade. Equiano wrote a best-selling book that made many white Europeans ashamed of their ignorance towards the horrors of slave trading and plantation life.

REBELLIOUS CHARACTERS:  
MARY PRINCE

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*'I have been a slave myself — I know what slaves feel — I can tell by myself what other slaves feel, and by what they have told me. The man that says slaves be quite happy in slavery — that they don't want to be free — that man is either ignorant or a lying person. I never heard a slave say so.'*

Mary Prince was born into slavery in 1788 in Bermuda. During her life she was sold to many different people, which eventually brought her to London in the 1820s. In Britain she tried to gain her freedom by petitioning Parliament. In 1831, before the slave trade was abolished, Mary wrote an autobiography. It documented her experiences of slavery, highlighting the violence that enslaved people experienced. Her book was hugely important in the abolitionist campaign against slavery. It is the first known publication documenting the experience of an enslaved woman.

Sam Sharpe was born into slavery in 1804 in Jamaica. He was a Baptist deacon, leading a peaceful strike in 1831 for better treatment and the possibility of liberation, which would mean freedom for all enslaved people. The news of the strike spread and during Christmas 1831, a rebellion took place, in which a number of plantations were set on fire. This is sometimes known as the 'Baptist War', or the 'Christmas Rebellion'. The retribution against enslaved people was severe. Over 500 enslaved people were executed for their involvement in the Baptist War. Identified as the leader, Sam Sharpe was executed. But before his death Sam said, *'I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery.'*

A well-documented punishment on British and French sugar plantations was for slaves to be covered in boiling hot sticky syrup called molasses. This form of barbaric torture/execution is part of the folkloric history behind the much-loved Caribbean carnival characters called Jab Jabs or Jab Molasses. Some oral historians say that at the first Caribbean carnivals slaves would cover themselves in cooled down molasses and pretend to be devils getting their revenge on the plantation owners and their families. Others say that the Jab Jab costume is a reimagining of the pain suffered by slaves who were thrown into the boiling sugar syrup. Today at Caribbean carnival celebrations across the world people cover themselves in black, blue or green paint and embody rage, madness and a parody of screaming discomfort. Like many traditional carnival costumes this one is a way for black people to take control over a disturbing historical narrative and turn it into a place of agency, mischief and fun.

*Abolition | British Empire | Rebellion | Colonialism |  
Indigenous people | Injustice | Liberation |  
Transatlantic slave trade | Uprising*

- **Split the class into small groups of 4 or 5 people and ask them to discuss and decide on a definition for each of the words included in the list above. Encourage students to read through *What is Colonialism?* and *Rebellious Characters* if they are struggling.**
- **Ask each group to nominate one person to write down the definitions on a sheet of paper to create a short glossary.**
- **Invite the groups to share their definitions with the class. Try to hear at least two definitions of each word. These words are often used in very fluid ways so it's fine if the definitions do not match.**

**Make a three-panel comic that tells the story of one character from the past into the future.**

- **Ask each person to choose the *Rebellious Character* they most connect with.**
- **On sheets of A3 paper ask students to create three equal sized panels.**
- **In the first panel, draw a scene capturing a moment of their story. What do the character's surroundings look like? What kind of action are they doing?**
- **In the second panel, draw this rebellious character in our present time. What kind of issues might they be fighting against if they were alive today? What kind of issues are important to you?**

## EXERCISE 2

### REBELLIONS PAST TO THE FUTURE

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- In the final panel, draw a future world where this character no longer needs to fight. What would that future look like? What would this character be doing?
- Invite students to sketch out their initial ideas in pencil then go over in a bolder material like felt tip pen or marker.
- Remind students that drawing is a language. So as long as you are communicating in your own visual language there is no such thing as 'bad drawing'.
- For inspiration look at the graphic novel *Freedom Bound* by Warren Pleece. How has he told the stories of runaway enslaved people?



**EXERCISE 3**  
**HIGHLIGHTING HEROES**

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Ask students to create an A3 film poster that imagines their rebellious character's story as a movie. This could feature different events in their life, or one crucial moment. Include the title of your film and the name of the main character.

- What kind of film would this story be?  
Action, horror, comedy, science fiction or something else?
- What kind of images are used to advertise some of your favourite films?
- What does the character's pose or facial expression tell us about them?
- What does the surrounding scene tell us about their story?

**EXERCISE 4**  
**FUTURE WORLD BUILDING**

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**Look at the panels envisioning rebellious characters in the future from the previous activity. As a class share your comics and discuss the following points:**

- What kind of world are we building in our visions of the future?**
- How could these futures become a reality?**

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**You could also adapt the activities to include other rebellious characters in history. For example, Toussaint L'Ouverture from Haiti or Mary Seacole from Jamaica or other people from black history who you find from your own investigations.**



**OLAUDAH  
EQUIANO**

**SAM  
SHARPE**

**NANNY OF THE  
MAROONS**

**BLUE  
JAB  
JABS**

**MARY  
PRINCE**

Jacob V Joyce and Rudy Loewe,  
*Sweet Rebellion*, 2020

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- [\*Britain and the Caribbean\*](#) – BBC Bitesize
- [\*Britain's involvement with New World slavery and the transatlantic slave trade\*](#) – British Library
- [\*The History of Mary Prince\*](#) – British Library
- [\*Legacies of British Slave-ownership\*](#) – UCL
- [\*The Life of Olaudah Equiano\*](#) – British Library
- [\*Queen Nanny: Jamaica's Female Hero\*](#) – BBC
- [\*Slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade\*](#) – The National Archives
- [\*Slavery Timeline\*](#) – British Library
- Warren Pleece, [\*Freedom Bound\*](#) (2018)

## PLACES TO VISIT

- [\*International Slavery Museum\*](#)
- [\*Museum of London Docklands\*](#)  
[\*London, Sugar & Slavery: 1600–today\*](#)
- [\*Black Cultural Archives\*](#)

## YOUTUBE PLAYLIST

- [\*The Caribbean Tradition of Jab Jab\*](#)
- [\*Grenada Spicemas Carnival Jouvert 2017\*](#)
- [\*London Sugar and Slavery Short Film\*](#)
- [\*The Atlantic slave trade: What too few textbooks told you\*](#)

## ADVOCACY, CAMPAIGNS AND PROJECTS

- [\*The Black Curriculum\*](#) is a campaign to embed Black British history in the National Curriculum
- [\*Decolonising the Archive\*](#) is a Black heritage project highlighting narratives of radical Black history
- [\*Fill in the Blanks\*](#) is led by former students and aims to make teaching colonial history mandatory in schools
- [\*Our Migration Story\*](#) is a project highlighting the stories of migrants who came to Britain throughout history
- [\*Runnymede Trust\*](#) is a think tank that develops research and projects looking at race and racism in Britain

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