

Lesson 13, Worksheet 3

Life on a Sugar Plantation

Born in present-day Ghana, Ottobah Cugoano was kidnapped and taken to the Caribbean island of Grenada in the West Indies, where he worked for nine months on a sugar plantation. Here, he recalls the harsh treatment he and others received:

“Being in this dreadful capacity and horrible slavery, without any hope of deliverance, for about eight or nine months, beholding the most dreadful scenes of misery and cruelty, and seeing my miserable companions often cruelly lashed, and as it were, cut into pieces, for the most trifling faults; this made me often tremble and weep, but I escaped better than many of them. For eating a piece of sugar-cane, some were cruelly lashed, or struck over the face, to knock their teeth out. Some of the stouter ones, I suppose, often reprov’d, and grown hardened and stupid with many cruel beatings and lashings, or perhaps faint and pressed with hunger and hard labour, were often committing trespasses of this kind, and when detected, they met with exemplary punishment. Some told me they had their teeth pulled out, to deter others, and to prevent them from eating any cane in future. Thus seeing my miserable companions and countrymen in this pitiful, distressed, and horrible situation, with all the brutish baseness and barbarity attending it, could not but fill my little mind with horror and indignation.”

Source: *Narrative of the Enslavement of Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa, published by himself, in the year 1787*. Chapel Hill: Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999.