

## **EXPANSION AND IMPERIALISM**

*Comparison of African slave, indentured servant, and modern-day immigrant experiences.  
Framing question; Who is or should be protected by contracts?*

### **OPENING ACTIVITY:**

Write down one feature or a defining characteristic of a contract.

### **SETUP OF THREE GROUPS:**

- Break into 3 groups
- Describe 3 scenarios briefly to entire class. Students may be selected to read/role play each scenario if reading levels permit.

#1) slave who came to this country during transatlantic slave trade (see description attached)

#2) indentured servant who came here from Germany (see script attached)

#3) modern day immigrant from a poor country injured during workplace accident (see description attached)

### **GROUP DISCUSSION:**

- Is there a need for cheap labor? Is cheap labor justified?
- Compare and contrast the 3 scenarios. How are they alike? How are they different? How did their arrival in this country differ? Did one suffer more than the other?
- Should the individual in your scenario be allowed to enter into an agreement that we view as bad for them? Should other people be allowed to determine that person's destiny (e.g. slavery, conditions of work - lead to a discussion of paternalism)?
- How should laws protect the person in your scenario, if at all?
- Write a law regarding how legally or socially the person should be treated with respect to his or her rights, citizenship, ability to work, and/or ability to enter into contracts [*careful; some students suggested anti-immigrant laws that would have affected parents of students, but a respectful discussion did ensue*]

### **RECONVENE ENTIRE CLASS:**

- a representative from the group will explain the law and defend why it is necessary

**SCENARIO #1: Olaudah Equiano, The Middle Passage (1789) (one of the first abolitionists)(can be shortened if time requires)**

This account of the "middle passage" comes from one of the first writings by an ex-slave, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African. Written by Himself* (1789). Equiano was born in Nigeria and was kidnapped into slavery at the age of eleven. Years later he was able to buy his freedom and became an abolitionist.

EXCERPT FROM HIS BOOK:

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believe were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not; and one of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass; but, being afraid of him, I would not take it out of his hand. One of the blacks therefore took it from him and gave it to me, and I took a little down my palate, which, instead of reviving me, as they thought it would, threw me into the greatest consternation at the strange feeling it produced, having never tasted any such liquor before. Soon after this the blacks who brought me on board went off, and left me abandoned to despair. I now saw myself deprived of all chance or returning to my native country or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before; and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element

the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water: and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself. In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men, I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought, if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate: but still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves. One white man in particular I saw when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner. I could not help expressing my fears and apprehensions to some of my countrymen: I asked them if these people had no country, but lived in this hollow place (the ship): they told me they did not, but came from a distant one. "Then," said I, "how comes it in all our country we never heard of them?" They told me because they lived so very far off. I then asked where were their women? had they any like themselves? "and why," said I, "do we not see them?" they answered, because they were left behind.

The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. Happily perhaps for myself I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from my extreme youth I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself. I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs. Every circumstance I met with served only to render my state more painful, and heighten my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites. One day they had taken a number of fishes; and when they had killed and satisfied themselves with as many as they thought fit, to our

astonishment who were on the deck, rather than give any of them to us to eat as we expected, they tossed the remaining fish into the sea again, although we begged and prayed for some as well as we could, but in vain; and some of my countrymen, being pressed by hunger, took an opportunity, when they thought no one saw them, of trying to get a little privately; but they were discovered, and the attempt procured them some very severe floggings. ...

...I and some few more slaves, that were not saleable amongst the rest, from very much fretting, were shipped off in a sloop for North America.... While I was in this plantation [in Virginia] the gentleman, to whom I suppose the estate belonged, being unwell, I was one day sent for to his dwelling house to fan him; when I came into the room where he was I was very much affrighted at some things I saw, and the more so as I had seen a black woman slave as I came through the house, who was cooking the dinner, and the poor creature was cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines; she had one particularly on her head, which locked her mouth so fast that she could scarcely speak; and could not eat nor drink. I was much astonished and shocked at this contrivance, which I afterwards learned was called the iron muzzle.

## **SCENARIO #2: (based on a true story) - INDENTURED SERVANT**

My name is Gottlieb Mittleberger. I was born in Dusseldorf, Germany in 1725. My father was a stablehand and my mother took care of me and my five younger brothers and sisters. When I was fourteen years old, a horse crushed my father's foot and he could work no more. Very soon, my parents could no longer feed all of the children. About that time, a British ship sailed to Dusseldorf on the Rhine River. The captain was offering to take people to the British colonies in America for free, and to feed and shelter them once they got there, if they promised to work to pay off the cost of transportation, food and shelter. Without any income, and with five other children to feed, my parents signed an indenture with the captain and sent me on my way.

The journey to America was horrible. I had a space barely larger than my body, and was packed like a sardine with 300 others. It took us ten weeks to get there. I had only three biscuits to eat every day and was always deeply hungry. Many people on the ship were afflicted by seasickness, fever, dysentery, headache, constipation, boils, scurvy and lice. Those who died were thrown over the side to be eaten by the fish. On top of this, violent storms and waves often tossed the ship from side to side, making me fear for my life.

When we finally arrived in Philadelphia, we were not allowed to leave the ship. Wealthy businessmen from the area came on board and paid the captain the cost of our transport, so we then had to work to pay off the debt to them. I went with a farmer from the colony of Virginia to work in his fields cultivating tobacco. Now I am 18 and I still work in the tobacco fields. When the master is displeased with the speed or quality of my work, he beats me. I sleep in a small unheated room with ten other workers and eat scraps of food left over from the Master's meals. I

have to work from before dawn until dark. I never have a day off. I tried to run away, but the night watchmen caught me and brought me right back to the master. I told them he beats me, but they didn't care – he is allowed to treat me however he wants. Because I was only fourteen when I entered the indenture, I now have to work until I am 21 years old to pay off my debt for the miserable journey to America. If my parents had known what I would go through, they would never have sent me away.

### **SCENARIO #3: (based on a true story) - MODERN DAY IMMIGRANT**

My name is Erica Santiago [change to non-Latino name if would create a sensitive issue in the classroom.] I came to this country at the age of 13 because I had no food to eat at home. At first, I could not work here because I was not old enough to be hired. As an undocumented worker, I was able to get a job at the age of 15 working in a hotel laundry filled with large, old machinery that dries and irons sheets. I was paid less than minimum wage in the unheated factory, but I was glad for the chance to work, even at a lower rate than some of my co-workers.

One day in early February, I was doing the same repetitive work that I always do: feeding sheets into a large ironer. My hand was caught and pulled into the machine, which was over 350 degrees Fahrenheit, where my arm was entrapped for more than 45 minutes. My arm had to be amputated, and now I cannot work. The laundry did not carry workers' compensation insurance on its workers, so no one covered my medical bills.

#### Possible discussion items:

-Workers compensation is a no-fault scheme in which the employer and the employee are protected somewhat, but not completely. In Pennsylvania, generally speaking, if you are injured on the job, you cannot sue your employer, even if they were negligent, for example, in maintaining machinery. Also, as an injured employee, you can get some of your wages paid and medical bills through workers compensation (non-jury) even if you were not acting responsibly at the time of the accident (for example, if she had reached into the machine.)

-Should the worker be able to work for less than minimum wage if she wants to do so and she and the employer agree upon an hourly rate? What kind of effect does this have on the economy?

-Does the Constitution apply to all people, or just citizens? (Obviously must be approached with sensitivity.)