**From Slavery to Freedom**

**Kidnapped and sold into bondage at age 11, a West African boy struggles to survive—and break free.**

By Mary Harvey and Kathy Wilmore

**CAST OF CHARACTERS (13)**

* Narrator A
* Narrator B
* Narrator C
* \*Kwasi, an African slave trader
* Olaudah Equtano
* \*Jack Davis, slave-ship crew member
* \*Folami, African woman held captive
* \*Auctioneer, at a slave market
* Merchants in Barbados, West Indies: \*Charles Ford; \*Edward Kana
* Dick Baker, a white teenage sailor
* Michael Pascal, captain of a British trading ship
* Robert King, a merchant from Philadelphia
* Captain Thomas Farmer, commander of one of King's trading ships

**PROLOGUE**

**Narrator A:**

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the slave trade thrived. Merchants in Europe and the Americas became wealthy by selling kidnapped Africans into slavery. In the American colonies, most slaves went to Southern plantations. But until Northern states began to ban the trade in 1777, Northerners also owned slaves.

**Narrator B:**

For the 12 million African men, women, and children sold into bondage, the slave trade brought unimaginable suffering. Olaudah (oh-lah-OO-day) Equiano was one of those slaves. He was taken by force from his home in West Africa (probably modern-day Nigeria). Here is his story.

**----------------------------------SCENE 1----------------------------------**

**Narrator C:**

One day in 1755, while Olaudah is playing with his sister, a band of raiders kidnaps them. The children are soon separated and sold to different tribes. For several months, Olaudah, about 11, is enslaved to other Africans. But one day, a stranger grabs him.

**Kwasi:**

Come with me, boy. Don't make a sound or I will hurt you.

**Olaudah:**

I don't belong to you!

**Kwasi:**

I don't care who you belong to. You will make me rich.

**Olaudah:**

Where are we going?

**Kwasi:**

To the ocean. People there will pay me well for you.

**Narrator A:**

When they reach the coast, Kwasi takes Olaudah onto a huge ship and sells him to European slave traders. Olaudah, seeing white people for the first time, is terrified of them.

**Jack Davis:**

Come on, boy! You're going in with all the others.

**Narrator B:**

The ship is crammed with hundreds of Africans, many chained together and moaning with fear or pain. One is a woman who speaks Olaudah's language.

**Folami:**

Where are you from?

**Olaudah:**

A village many months' travel from here. My father is an important man, a chief with servants and slaves of his own. But I was stolen, and now I'm a slave.

**Folami:**

I was kidnapped too and traded to those pale people.

**Olaudah:**

Are they ghosts? Will they eat us?

**Folami:**

No. They just keep bringing more of us. We're packed in so close, we can hardly move!

**Olaudah:**

Help! Let me out!

**Davis:**

Cry all you want, boy. This ship is setting sail.

**----------------------------------SCENE 2----------------------------------**

**Narrator C:**

For two months, the captives suffer in the filthy cargo hold. Many are beaten. Many die.

**Olaudah:**

The slave owners in my country were never this brutal.

**Folami:**

I fear what will come next.

**Olaudah:**

It can't get worse!

**Narrator A:**

But it does. When the ship arrives at Barbados, Olaudah and the others are put up for sale at a public auction.

**Auctioneer:**

Who will buy this strong woman and her two kids?

**Charles Ford:**

I'll take her. She'll make a good field hand. But I don't need useless young mouths to feed.

**Edward Kane:**

I'll buy the children. They're a good size for housework.

**Folami:**

No! Don't take my babies!

**Olaudah:**

Men are being torn from their wives, children from their parents. What will become of us?

**Narrator B:**

Olaudah is shipped off to the colony of Virginia. A plantation owner buys him and puts him to work clearing rocks from a field.

**----------------------------------SCENE 3----------------------------------**

**Narrator C:**

Olaudah is soon sold to Michael Pascal, captain of a trading ship. A white crew member soon befriends the frightened boy.

**Dick Baker:**

Your English isn't bad!

**Olaudah:**

Thanks. What are you doing?

**Dick:**

Reading a story.

**Olaudah:**

What do you mean? How do books tell you stories?

**Dick:**

This writing stands for the words we speak. Do you want to learn how to read and write?

**Olaudah:**

Yes, please teach me!

**Narrator A:**

Olaudah works hard and Pascal treats him well. Olaudah begins to feel safe. Then, in December 1762, while the ship is docked in England . . .

**Michael Pascal:**

Come with me!

**Olaudah:**

To stock up on supplies?

**Pascal:**

No. I'm selling you.

**Olaudah:**

Haven't I served you well, Captain?

**Pascal:**

You have. In fact, your new skills have made you even more valuable. That's why I'm selling you. Your new master is setting sail to the West Indies.

**Olaudah:**

Please, no! Slaves are treated so cruelly there!

**Narrator B:**

But Olaudah is soon on a ship bound for Montserrat.

**Olaudah:**

My friends and all my hopes are gone once again!

**----------------------------------SCENE 4----------------------------------**

**Narrator C:**

In the West Indies, Olaudah, now about 17, watches as a British plantation owner beats his slaves until their bones crack. He fears for his life. But in May 1763 he is sold to Robert King. King imports sugar and rum from the West Indies and exports various American goods to the islands.

**Robert King:**

You cost me a lot of money, Olaudah, but you have been worth every bit of it and more. Your hard work is saving me more than 100 pounds a year!

**Olaudah:**

Mr. King, may I ask what you paid for me?

**King:**

Your slave price? It was \*£40.

*(\*Roughly $2,000 in today's money.)*

**Olaudah:**

If I can earn that much, will you let me buy my freedom?

**King:**

One of my ships' captains, Thomas Farmer, likes having you work with him. See what you can earn for yourself along the way.

**Olaudah:**

I will serve you well, sir!

**Narrator A:**

Off and on for several years, Olaudah sails with Captain Farmer. They trade Mr. King's goods between the American colonies and the West Indies. During their journeys, Olaudah finds ways to earn his own money on the side, once his regular tasks are done.

**----------------------------------SCENE 5----------------------------------**

**Narrator B:**

One day at sea . . .

**Captain Thomas Farmer:**

How are you faring, lad?

**Olaudah:**

I use money I get cutting crewmen's hair to buy small items. At the next port, I sell them for a higher price. I've saved up £47.

**Captain:**

Mr. King is in for a surprise! I'll take you to see him when we get back to Philadelphia.

**Narrator C:**

When the ship docks in 1766, the Captain keeps his word.

**Olaudah:**

Mr. King, I'm ready to buy my freedom. I have the £40.

**King:**

How did you get the money?

**Olaudah:**

I earned it, sir.

**Captain:**

It's true, Mr. King. He's a very smart and careful trader.

**King:**

But he's valuable property!

**Captain:**

You must keep your word. Olaudah has worked hard.

**King:**

Very well. Olaudah, take this note to the office. The secretary will draw up your manumission.

**Olaudah:**

Thank you, thank you!

**Narrator A:**

On July 11, 1766, Olaudah, now 22, is finally free.

**Olaudah:**

This morning, I was a slave. Now I am my own master!

**EPILOGUE**

**Narrator B:**

In 1767, Equiano settled in England and continued his education. He became an abolitionist, giving eloquent speeches against slavery. In 1789 he published his life story, describing the horrors of slavery.

**Narrator C:**

In 1808, 11 years after Equiano's death, the United States made it illegal to import slaves. But owning slaves was not banned throughout the entire country until 1865, after the Civil War.

Source: *Junior Scholastic,* October 11, 2010.