

### Activity 9. Slave Trade Poem - O Navio Negreiro

**Instructions:** Antonio de Castro Alves (1847-1871) was a 19th century Brazilian abolitionist and poet. His poem, “O Navio Negreiro “ or “The Slave Ship,” was published in 1869. Slavery in Brazil did not officially end until 1888. Marlene Carvalho, a student in the Hofstra University teacher education program, translated the poem into English. Read the excerpts from the poem and answer the questions that follow it. As a follow-up, read a description of the Middle Passage by a survivor such as Equiano Olaudah (<http://www.brycchancarey.com/equiano/extract3.htm>, accessed May 19, 2010) and write a poem or rap expressing your views on slavery and the slave trade.

1. What a picture of bitter suffering!

It is a funeral song! . . . What grim figures! . . .

What a shameful and vile spectacle . . . My God! My God! What a horror!

2. Bathed in blood

The ring of metals . . . crack of the whip . . .

Legions of men black as night,

Dreadful dancing . . .

3. Black women, suspended by their breasts

Skinny children, whose black mouths

Are watered by their mother’s blood:

Other young women, but naked and startled,

In the whirlwind of dragging ghosts

In vain anxiety and sorrow!

4. If an old man arcs, if on the floor he slips and falls,

Screams are heard . . . the whip cracks

And they fly more and more . . .

Screams, painful cries, curses, prayers resound!

And Satan laughs!

5. The sea, why don’t you erase it

With the sponge of your waves

From your robe this stain? . . .

Cosmos! Nights! Tempests!

Roll down from the immensities!

Sweep the seas, typhoon!

#### Questions

1. What scene is being depicted in this poem?

2. What does the poet ask the sea to do?

3. In your opinion, how might a poem like this contribute to the anti-slavery cause?