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English Composition
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Summary of
“Slave Ship”
Revision

In this narrative, told in the first person by Charles Ball, we find out how he was brought—against his will—from his native country, Africa, to Charleston, then sold to a slave owner.

The story starts to unfold when Charles was forcibly brought on a ship “full of black people.” The conditions were unbearable. They were all in chains and the place that they were held in was “dark and low” (75).

In the second paragraph, we find out that there were around twenty people taken by force from their home village. Three of them were children, and their mothers carried them all the way from the village to the ship. The children couldn’t walk or eat adult food, making the situation even more difficult.

The next paragraph continues with heartbreaking details about the people onboard and what happened to them. All of them were put in chains and the children were thrown overboard. Two of the mothers jumped overboard and the third one, already in chains, broke her arm in the struggle to escape, dying later on. The other two mothers didn’t fare much better. One of them drowned immediately from the weight of her chains; and the second one, even though she was rescued and brought on board, would jump overboard a few days later. Due to the heat and the conditions they had onboard, lots of them died. Even so, the place was getting very crowded

because “the number [of people] brought on board greatly exceeded those who died” (76). Two weeks later, when the “prison could hold no more, the ship sailed down to the river” and to the ocean (76).

While at sea, the conditions onboard seemed to lessen a little bit for some of the prisoners. Women had their chains taken off and were allowed to go on the upper deck, but only when the weather was nice.

The concluding paragraph leaves the reader with a bitter taste. The people onboard had food “enough to support life” (76). A third of the people died on the crossing. When the narrator got to his final destination he wasn’t able to stand up for a week. Even though he had survived the ordeal, the story doesn’t have a happy ending. He was sold to a slave owner, and the final words of his story seem more like a long agony: “I have been here five years” (76).

Works Cited

Ball, Charles. "Slave Ship." *Connections: A Multicultural Reader for Writers*. Editor Judith A. Stanford. California: Mayfield, 1997. 75-76.