



**Mrs Kate Webster**  
**Headteacher**  
**Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School**  
**High Street**  
**Barnet**  
**Herts**  
**EN5 5RR**

25 October 2012

Dear Mrs Webster,

### **Slave Trade Learning Resource**

We have recently received a serious complaint from [a mother] about the manner in which the history of African enslavement is taught at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School. This includes but is not limited to the use of inappropriate learning resources to teach the subject to Year 9 students.

It may be helpful if we outline our interest in this matter. The Ligali Organisation is a Pan African human rights based organisation. The remit of our Media Affairs Division is, amongst other things, to accept complaints and challenge any misrepresentation of African people, history and culture in all forms of media.

The first grievance in this matter concerns the level of distress caused to [a mother's] daughter, [Intentionally deleted], a 13 year old student on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012, following her exposure to offensive material in a 'slave trade' history lesson taught by Miss Madden, a history teacher at your school.

The second grievance involves the offensive content of a PowerPoint presentation entitled "*What made slavery possible?*"

In the first instance we have been informed that the [mother] contacted your school and participated in a meeting attended by Miss Madden and Miss Horne, Head of Year. During this meeting the parent expressed how the method used to teach 'the slave trade' in this particular lesson had left her child, a pupil of African heritage, feeling both offended and humiliated.

We are told that during this meeting both teachers failed to acknowledge the harm caused to [the child] and instead attempted to justify the use of the offensive teaching material. It was also revealed that the school had been using this resource and delivery approach to the subject for three years without objection. At this point we would like to point out that the absence of formal complaints on lessons by pupils does not exclude the possibility that a teaching approach has been offensive or indeed, racist.

[The mother] then received a follow-up phone call from Mr Clarkson, Head of History on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2012, during which he basically reiterated the same views of his colleague.

Our specific concern here thus regards the collective responses of Miss Madden, Miss Horne and Mr Clarkson which we feel indicates an abject failure of the schools senior management team to recognise its duty of care to protect the wellbeing of *all* its students.

Unless the fact that the [the child] felt humiliated and distressed by the lesson is being contested by the school, it is both unreasonable and inappropriate for teaching staff to arbitrarily dismiss an incident which could legitimately be categorised as a racist incident as an acceptable, normal educative practice.

The second element of the complaint is focused around the actual content and style of the lesson in question. As you are aware, since 2008 the teaching of African enslavement and the history of Empire is a compulsory part of the secondary school curriculum in England.

The Department for Education guidelines on this clearly state;

“The study of the slave trade should include resistance, the abolition of slavery and the work of people such as Olaudah Equiano and William Wilberforce. Links could be made to emancipation, segregation and the twentieth century civil rights movement in the USA.”

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199545/history/programme/range>

Having reviewed the PowerPoint presentation entitled “What made slavery possible?” it is clear to us that the resource concerned not only depicts an inaccurate and grossly unethical interpretation of African enslavement, but also trivialises the issue, thus promoting a racist, anti-African interpretation of the history.

It is not our intent at this stage to give a full critique of the resource and lesson plan, but below we outline a few of our concerns.

1. The numerous use of the comical caricatures (and comical sound effects) masks the fact that those engaged in slavery were capitalists, sailors and colluders. These enslavers were not ‘pirates’ or ‘African chieftains’ in the traditional being sense asserted but morally bankrupt individuals from all over the world. The images used fail to reflect the truth that those engaged in Maafa (transatlantic slavery) held a serious immoral desire for profit and power with devastating consequences that still reverberate around the world, even today.
2. The content of the slide with the heading ‘Best of all.....’ is morally repugnant. When delivering a lesson on African enslavement there is no place for language that characterises the rape and abuse of adolescent females as ‘an affair with a beautiful African girl’. It is also wholly inappropriate to suggest that this was a positive outcome for the slavers who were engaged in torture

and murder as well as kidnap, rape and enslavement.

3. Setting an objective where pupils must explain how they would organise a 'slave raid' to capture Africans is inappropriate. Likewise the insistence that "Every person in the group must have a business proposal" devising a plan to enslave African people for the 'Dragon's Den' is an unacceptable demand.

These tasks are similar to asking a girl to plan a 'gang rape' where the perpetrators attack her own family members or a Jewish pupil to design a profitable oven for sale to Nazi Germany for use during the Shoah (holocaust). It is not only insensitive, it is disrespectful.

There are numerous ways in which a teacher can sensitively approach this topic in order to achieve an effective learning outcome, none which require any pupil to devise theoretical schemes that violate the victims of this heinous injustice.

In your current equality plan we note that you recognise your duty to eliminate ethnic discrimination and promote good relations between differing groups however this does not seem to have been adhered to in this instance. For the reasons outlined above, the learning resource that has been used to teach African enslavement in Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School clearly promotes both racist and sexist ideology. It is wholly inappropriate material for use with Year 9 or any other students and should be withdrawn from use immediately.

As Head Teacher we believe you have a legal responsibility not only to identify and report on all racist incidents, but also to ensure teaching staff are aware of them and where appropriate, respond adequately. That was clearly not done in this case and has led to a situation where both parent and pupil are unsatisfied with the outcome.

Ofsted defines a qualifying complaint as one with justified concerns over;

- the quality of the leadership in and management of the school
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils at the school
- the contribution made by the school to the well-being of those pupils
- the contribution made by the school to community cohesion.

The [mother] has indicated that she requires the school to acknowledge the fact that her daughter suffered distress and desires that in the future, the topic is taught using learning resources that are sensitive to the horrors of African enslavement and do not include tasks seeking children to recreate or reimagine the horrific events.

She has also requested that;

"It would be beneficial if such sensitive issues had some kind of parental involvement. Whether it be an Open Evening or a newsletter which gives an insight into what methods would be used to teach slavery, giving parents the opportunity to comment/approve."



The Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School complaints policy states that the outcome of a complaint could involve an apology and an explanation. We are of the firm belief that in this instance a written version of both is warranted and a copy of our complaint forwarded to the governing body.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

**Yours sincerely**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'TA', written over a light grey rectangular background.

**Toyin Agbetu**  
**The Ligali Organisation**

cc. [Intentionally deleted]