

Who was Toussaint L'Ouverture and why do you think William Wordsworth was inspired to write about him?

Toussaint L'Ouverture was a military genius and great leader in Haitian history. Haiti was a slave colony and Toussaint masterminded the slave's revolt in Haiti 1795. This was an extremely courageous and exceptional feat to achieve at this time, because slavery was firmly entrenched in the 18th century.

Thomas Clarkson would have known about Toussaint L'Ouverture because in the circles of politicians and philosophers that supported the abolition of slavery he was a hero, and stories about his valour, courage and high intellectual powers travelled across the world.

William Wordsworth's poem is dedicated to this great leader, and the strength of spirit and mind he had to achieve what he did, and also the impact he had on the rest of the world at that time.

Legends of Toussaint L'Ouverture's courage and power grew and he became associated in many paintings, myths and stories with the African Orixá Ogun.

Orixas (pronounced Orishas) are a number of different gods or deities that form part of ancient African religious tradition and can still be found today in countries such as Nigeria in West Africa, Haiti, Brazil and North America.

There are many Orixas, Shango is the Orixá for Thunder, Ogun is the god of strength and war, Exu (pronounced Eshu) the Orixá of the crossroads between this world and the 'otherworld' of Orixas.

Many of the slaves in Haiti kept faith in their religious tradition in the hope that they would gain freedom one day. During religious ceremonies drums were played to invite the Orixas to visit the earthly world and give them strength and courage. The most popular was Orixá for them to call on for help was Ogun.

Sometimes military leaders were likened to Ogun. Toussaint L'Ouverture was one such leader that was likened to Ogun for his restless energy and strength.