



# BLACK HISTORY MONTH CAN MAKE US ALL BETTER CANADIANS

## SECONDARY RESOURCES



Muhtadi Thomas teaches during a drum lesson at Harbourfront Centre at the Kuumba festival as part of Black History Month activities. Photo source: Carlos Osorio/Toronto Star, Getty Images.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- According to the 2016 census, there are just under one million black people in Canada, or roughly 3 percent of the total population. ([Statistics Canada](#))
- Black people have lived in Canada since the very beginning of transatlantic settlement, contributing to our history from the outset. ([Canadian Encyclopedia](#))
- Slavery existed in Canada (then British North America) until its abolition in 1834. ([Historica Canada](#))
- Following the abolition of slavery in Canada, the Underground Railroad was established to ferry slaves from the American South to free Northern states or to what was then British North America; it brought between 30,000-40,000 people to what is now Canada ([Canadian Encyclopedia](#))
- Canada has a long history of black achievement, including Mary Ann Shadd, the first black woman in North America to publish a newspaper and Lincoln Alexander, the first black man elected to Parliament ([CBC](#))
- Canada also has a long history of anti-black systemic racism, including the denial of roads and basic sanitation for the Nova Scotian black community of Africville, followed by its eventual demolition ([Rabble](#)) and the use of racial profiling and carding as police tactics targeting the black community in Toronto ([Toronto Star](#))
- Black Lives Matter formed in the United States in 2012 following a spate of black men killed by police officers ([USA Today](#)) before spreading across Canadian cities to address anti-black racism ([MacLean's](#))
- Black History Month was established to create inclusivity and tell the often ignored histories of racialized communities in Canada ([Ontario Black History Society](#)).
- Similarly, in the 1990s, the Toronto District School Board introduced an Afrocentric School which uses a different curriculum to address the underperformance of black students; it has been largely successful, not only achieving excellent test scores, but increasing students self-esteem, confidence and social skills ([Toronto Star](#))

### NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

Core Skill Sets:



These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at [www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/](http://www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/).

### KEY TERMS

**Black History Month**—Drawing inspiration from Black History Month in the United States which dates back to 1976, Black History Month was federally recognized in Canada in 1995. Black History Month is a time to learn about the contributions of black Canadians and to celebrate their achievements.

**Racial profiling**—The practice of law enforcement officials targeting specific individuals based on their race. The existence of racial profiling and its impact on the disproportionate number of visible minorities in Canadian prisons, has been generally acknowledged by the Ontario Human Rights Commission and other bodies.

## THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- **Themes:** Community, Values and Ethics, Local Issues
- **Course Connections:** English, Canadian and World Studies

## MATERIALS

- Front board
- Paper and writing utensils
- Computer/tablet with Internet access and video capability
- Chart paper and markers

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Understand the importance of learning multiple historical perspectives with a focus on Black history
- Recognize the need and space for black history in current history curriculum
- Identify the need to learn more about black Canadian history

## DISCUSS

1. What do you know about the history of black Canadians?
2. Is the perspective of black people in Canada taught adequately in schools? How are schools teaching “a touristic view of black history”?
3. What is the link between Eurocentric education and students from racialized communities under performing?
4. An elementary student quoted in the *Global Voices* article “Black History Month can make us all better Canadians” states “[Black History Month is] the month we have to feel bad about black people because there were slaves.” Why might this student say this? What is the problem with this statement? Do you think it is reflective of the majority opinion of Canadians? What is Black History Month to you? How can we make Black History Month more meaningful?
5. How can learning about the history of black people in Canada make you a better Canadian?
6. Why might students with an increased sense of empathy perform better in schools?

## DIVE DEEPER

Create small groups. Distribute chart paper and markers to groups. Have students discuss the following questions and record the collaboratively formed answers:

- Do you believe that Canada is an inclusive country? Provide examples for and against.
- Is there evidence of racism in your local community? Or in Canada? Provide examples.

Show “History of racism in Canada” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvqXh83lJgM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvqXh83lJgM) (7:46).

Ask students: Did the video present a new perspective of Canadian history? Were you aware that Canadian history had a darker past?

Using think-pair-share, ask students: What is systemic racism? In pairs, research the term “systemic racism.” Instruct students to write a short paragraph about their understanding of systemic racism and they have seen or been affected by racism in the community or across the country.

Systemic racism: racial discrimination that has become established as normal behaviour within a society or organization.

As a class, read the *Global Voices* article and use the provided discussion questions. Ask students to think about the question: How can learning about the histories of black Canadians create a broader understanding of the “real history” of Canada?

In small groups, ask students to think about the history they have been taught in school. How much do they know about the histories of black people in Canada, ask students to keep in mind that the first black immigrants arrived in the early 1600s. On chart paper, create two columns. List topics and time periods they remember being taught in history classes throughout their school careers. In the second column, ask students to record all the history they remember being taught that includes black Canadians. Ask students: Do you believe there is a gap in the history taught in schools? What historical perspective are included? How can more black history be integrated into the history taught in school?

Instruct students to, individually or in pairs, write a letter to the Principal of the school or their provincial education minister discussing one of the following topics or a similar topic of their choosing. Students may need to perform research to better understand the issues first:

- Increasing and integrating the role of black people in Canadian history
- Importance of including multiple historical perspectives making history more relevant and reflective of Canadian society

## RESOURCES

“CBC News: Being Black in Canada”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORW\\_e8P8RcY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORW_e8P8RcY) (22:34)

Black History Canada [www.blackhistorycanada.ca/](http://www.blackhistorycanada.ca/)

Book of Negroes [www.cbc.ca/bookofnegroes/](http://www.cbc.ca/bookofnegroes/)