Global Voices is a weekly column written by Craig and Marc Kielburger examining current events, topics and issues affecting local and global communities. Each month, engaging classroom resources are created to accompany one column to help educators bring world issues into the classroom in a digestible manner. For more information on how to sign up please visit WE.org/global-voices-signup.

Fact Sheet

- In 1926, American historian and teacher Carter Woodson established “Negro History Week” in the U.S. to address the absence of black history from the standard school history curriculum. He chose the second week of February, as it included the birthdays of famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass and President Abraham Lincoln. (TIME Magazine)

- In 1976, President Gerald Ford declared the first national Black History Month in the U.S. (TIME Magazine)

- In 1995, the House of Commons passed a motion recognizing Black History Month in Canada. The motion was put forward by the Honourable Jean Augustine, the first black woman elected to Canada’s Parliament. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

- The first known black person to arrive in what would become Canada was Mathieu da Costa, an interpreter with Samuel de Champlain’s exploration voyage in 1608. (blackhistorycanada.ca)

- A 1708 British law permitted settlers to bring slaves to Canada. Britain did not abolish slavery through all its territories—including Canada—until 1833. (blackhistorycanada.ca)

- Just like in the U.S., segregation existed in Canada. Blacks were often refused admittance to stores and restaurants, had to sit in separate sections on buses and in theatres, and were sometimes sent to separate schools. Although black soldiers served our country in the First World War, they were placed in a segregated battalion. They weren’t allowed in the navy or air force until the Second World War. The last segregated school in Canada—in Nova Scotia—was closed in 1983. (Blackhistorycanada.ca, Veterans Canada)

- In the 1950s, civil rights activist Hugh Burnett fought against segregation in Ontario. His hometown of Dresden, Ontario, had restaurants that would not admit black people. His work helped lead to a law prohibiting segregation in the province in 1954. (The Canadian Encyclopedia)
Classroom Activity - Grades 4 to 8

Essential Question:

► Why is it important that the histories of all Canadians be acknowledged and valued?

Learning Goals:

Students will:

► Investigate the significance of Black History Month in Canada
► Recognize the importance of understanding Canadian history from diverse perspectives
► Begin to identify gaps or missing information in their understanding of Canadian history

Discussion:

1. The authors state that they come from “position of privilege.” What are they referring to?

2. Why are there gaps in the Canadian education system around black histories?

3. How does connecting to personal and cultural histories help a person to develop their own identity?

4. What steps can we take to continue learning more about the history and the contributions of the black community in Canadian history?

Warm Up (30 minutes)

Educator’s Note: The following lesson will focus on exploring the histories of black people and communities in Canada, recognizing why they have been excluded from many current Canadian history curricula and giving ideas for how students can take action to make sure the histories of all Canadians are represented in their educational experience. Ensure that all students in the classroom feel included in the lesson and emphasize that this lesson is about recognizing all the parts of Canadian history they may have been previously unaware of.

Distribute sticky notes to each student and ask students to think about a person who made a significant contribution to Canadian history and write this on the sticky note. Below the name of the individual, encourage students to include why this person is historically significant. What was their achievement?

Ask each student to share their historical figure and his or her significance with the class and post their sticky note on the front board after they have shared. Ask students, what do you notice about the people who were chosen? Are there any similarities? Are people of all types of identities represented?

Then ask students, how many of these people are of African or Caribbean descent, or would identify as black?

Investigate and Learn (2 x 90 minutes)

As a class or in small groups, read the article “Canadian Youth Speak Out About Black History Month.” Place chart paper with the discussion questions above around the classroom and provide each student with a marker. Invite students to respond to the questions individually or in pairs. Encourage them to reflect on the article and their own perspective about the gaps in their knowledge and understanding in regards to black history in Canada.

Show students the video “Black History Matters, Don John, TEDx Southampton,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUDA5NLnGYY (17:51). Provide students with the following question to guide them as they watch:

• Why is teaching black history important?

• How has the lack of representation of black history in schools impacted the development of the identity of black people?

• How does a connection to cultural histories impact the development of self identity?

• How can all people become involved in raising awareness about the importance of black history in Canada?

• What is the main purpose of Black History Month?
As a class, discuss the questions about the video and ask students to respond to one or more of the questions as an individual reflection.

Dive Deeper (2 x 60 minutes)

In the same small groups, ask students to select one black Canadian historical figure who has made a contribution to Canadian history. Encourage them to consider choosing an individual who they don’t know about or who has not been prominent in their history classes. Invite students to research the contributions this individual has made to Canadian history and the impact they have had. Provide students with the following questions as research prompts:

- What is the background of this individual?
- What contribution has this individual made to Canada society?
- Why is this contribution significant? How has it impacted current Canadian society?
- Why should students learn about this person?

After the groups have conducted their research, encourage them to present their findings to the school community to raise awareness about the contributions black Canadians have made to Canada’s history. Students can choose one of the following formats to present their research:

- A video documentary or news presentation outlining the contributions this individual has made to Canadian society to be posted on the school’s social media pages
- An infographic or poster to be displayed around the school
- A short (three-minute) announcement to be played throughout the school to raise awareness

Challenge students to explore and conduct an investigation of the school library to find as many resources about black Canadian history as possible. If students do not have access to the school library, consider using a local library.

Explain to students that they will be conducting an audit of their school library to assess how the current educational system values black Canadian history. The library provides resources to students to collect information about certain topics. In small groups, ask students to find all the resources in the library that reference or provide information about black Canadian history. As students are collecting the information, encourage them to consider:

- How much information does the library hold? Is the information current and relevant?
- Compared to other historical texts, is there enough information about black Canadian history?
- What types of books or information is available? What are the main areas of information?
- What information is missing?

After students have participated in the library investigation and audit, challenge them to take action to find ways to increase representation of black history in the school and raise awareness about the issue in their school and local community.

Example action:

- Write a letter or a short speech to the school’s principal and librarian describing how the library should increase the type of books and information available for students who are interested in learning more about black Canadian history. Encourage students to also discuss the impact of learning about the contributions of black Canadians.