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)

WE Learning Framework Skills

These icons identify the most relevant skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at WE.org/we-schools/program/learning-framework/.

Subject

► Canadian and World Studies
► English

Materials

► Sticky notes
► Computer with Internet access/Projector

Key Terms

► Abolitionist—A person who fought to end slavery in the 1800s.
► Pre-colonial history—Referring to the history of non-European countries before the arrival of white European colonizers.
► Segregation—Racist policies and social practices that restrict what non-whites may do. For example, separate schools for non-whites, and restaurants and stores that refuse to admit non-white customers.
Classroom Activity - Grades 9 to 12

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 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 their name 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 their 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?

Place the following images of historical Canadian figures on the front board and ask students to identify who these people are and why they are significant to Canadian history:
• Harry Jerome – A black Canadian track and field athlete who went to the Olympics three times and won bronze in the 100m race in 1964.
• Mary Ann Shadd – Canada’s first black female newspaper publisher. She founded and edited The Provincial Freeman 1853 and ran a racially integrated school for black refugees in Windsor, Ontario.
• Portia White – The first black Canadian singer to become an international star in the 1930s and 40s.
• Lawrence “Larry” McCarty – The first black police officer, who came to Canada with experience in the Jamaican Constabulary Force. The first time he applied to the Toronto Police Service he was rejected for being 1/8 of an inch too short. However, when being measured for a suit, was found to be the correct height. He reapplied in 1960 and served for 32 years.

Extension: The likeness of Viola Desmond, a civil rights icon for black Canadians, has been placed on the vertical $10 note. This is the first time a Canadian woman has been celebrated on the face of the country’s currency. Ask students to consider, what is the process of being placed on Canadian currency? Why has this occurred at this time? What is the significance? Why has it taken this long to recognize a contribution that a black Canadian has made to Canadian history?

After student have identified these individuals, ask students why is it important to recognize members of all the communities in Canada within history? Encourage them to consider what other contributions black Canadian have made to history and what fields they were from. For example: politics, finance, arts and film, law enforcement or sports.

Explain to students that February is Black History Month in Canada, which recognizes the rich history and honours the legacy of the contributions that black Canadians have made. Invite students to consider why a specific month has been created for this purpose. Why has the current education system missed out on recognizing the histories of black Canadians?
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 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 gap in our current education regarding black history.

Show students the video “Black History Matters | Don John | TEDx Southampton,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUDA5NLnGYY (17:51). Before showing students the video, place the following questions on the front board for students to reflect on.

Questions:

- Why is teaching black history important?
- How has this gap in teaching impacted the development of black people’s identities?
- How does a connection to cultural histories impact self-identity development?
- Why has the acknowledgement of black histories become significant to our current society?
- How can all people become involved in raising awareness?
- What is the main purpose of Black History Month?
- How can a shift in mindset be created, so that history does not repeat itself?

Ask students to create small groups and discuss the following questions. Allocate each group one question to present to the class and, as students are contributing their answers, write them on the front board.

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 is unknown or not a prominent. Invite students to research the contributions that this individual has made to Canadian history and the impact that this has had on Canada. Use the following questions as research prompts:

- What is the background of this individual?
- What is the contribution that this individual has made to Canada?
- Why is this contribution significant? How has it impacted current Canadian society?
- Why should this history be included in the educational curriculum?
- Why is it important to learn about black Canadians?

After groups have conducted their research, encourage them to present this to the school community to raise awareness about the contributions that black Canadians have made to Canada’s history. Students can use the following options to present their research:

- 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
- Infographic or poster to be posted around the school
- Short (three-minute) announcement to be played across the school to raise awareness

Dive Deeper (2 x 60 minutes)

Educator’s Note: The following activities provide students the opportunity to assess their current educational experiences and the information that is available to them as students to learn about black history in Canada.

Option 1:

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.
Option 2:

In pairs or in small groups, provide each group with the relevant curriculum documents that outline what students will learn in History or Social Studies in their province. Using sticky notes, ask students to look through the objectives and the outcomes and create a list when the document makes reference to the history of black Canadians. Ask students, does this content provide students with about the knowledge they need to understand all parts of Canadian history? Why is there a gap in the historical knowledge students are exposed to in the classroom? What can you do to change this?

Challenge students to write letters to their Provincial Minister for Education outlining the gaps in the historical content currently being taught in classrooms. Using their knowledge about significant black Canadian historical figures, encourage students to provide an example of why it is important for these histories to be included in the curriculum and how it will impact students’ development of self-identity and increase their awareness and respect for the histories of all Canadians.

**Extension:** As students are reflecting on the gaps in the current educational system, encourage them to consider what other communities are reflected in the dominant narrative of Canadian history. Why do these gaps exist, even though Canada promotes values of inclusiveness and diversity? How does this impact the biases and perspectives of students in Canadian schools today?