



Celebrating Black History Month

Teaching Guide/Student Worksheets

This guide supports the use of the profiles Celebrating Black History Month. It offers vocabulary words from the text and several short answer questions based on the content of each profile. In some cases, references to related websites are included with additional materials about the person or their pursuits. Lastly, the guide includes two or three activities per profile called “Newspaper Tie-ins.” These activities suggest how to bring the lessons of these historical figures into the present, to make their lives relevant and apply the lessons to today’s news. These graphic organizers were created for students in grades 4-8 and can be narrowed or expanded to accommodate the needs of each instructor’s class. Feel free to modify these activities or create your own.

*Written by Mary Hadigan Miller, Educational Services Director
for the New York News Publishers Association –
News Media Literacy/Newspaper In Education Program
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Any questions contact Mary at mmiller@nynpa.com or call 518-449-1667

Florida Standards

The Florida Department of Education defines that the Florida Standards provide a robust set of goals for every grade. Emphasizing analytical thinking rather than rote memorization, the Florida Standards will prepare our students for success in college, career and life. The Florida Standards will reflect the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.

Building on the foundation of success that has made Florida a national model, The Florida Standards provide a clear set of goals for every student, parent, and teacher.

For more information on Florida Standards, go to the CPALMS website. CPALMS is the State of Florida's official source for standards information and course descriptions: <http://www.cpalms.org>.

The reading material and activities in this packet applies to the following Florida Standards for grades four through twelve.

Social Studies: SS.4.A.1.1; SS.4.A.1.2; SS.4.C.2.2; SS.4.C.2.3; SS.5.C.2.4; SS.5.C.2.5; SS.7.C.2.11; SS.7.C.2.13; SS.7.C.2.14; SS.8.A.1.1; SS.8.A.1.2; SS.8.A.1.3; SS.8.A.1.4; SS.8.A.1.5; SS.8.A.1.6; SS.8.A.1.7; SS.8.FL.1.2; SS.8.FL.1.3; SS.8.FL.1.4; SS.8.FL.1.5; SS.8.FL.1.6; SS.912.A.1.2; SS.912.A.1.5; SS.912.A.1.6; SS.912.A.1.7; SS.912.A.7.6; SS.912.C.2.2; SS.912.C.2.3; SS.912.C.2.4; SS.912.C.2.5; SS.912.C.2.8; SS.912.H.1.6; SS.912.S.1.4 **Language Arts:** LAFS.412.RI.1.1; LAFS.412.RI.1.2; LAFS.412.RI.1.3; LAFS.412.RI.2.4; LAFS.412.RI.2.5; LAFS.412.RI.2.6; LAFS.412.RI.3.7; LAFS.412.SL.1.1; LAFS.412.SL.1.2; LAFS.412.SL.1.3; LAFS.412.SL.2.4; LAFS.412.SL.2.5; LAFS.412.SL.2.6; LAFS.412.W.1.1; LAFS.412.W.1.2; LAFS.412.W.1.3; LAFS.412.W.2.4; LAFS.412.W.2.5; LAFS.412.W.2.6; LAFS.412.W.3.7; LAFS.412.W.3.8

Newspaper in Education

The Newspaper in Education (NIE) program is a cooperative effort between schools and local newspapers to promote the use of newspapers in print and electronic form as educational resources. Our educational resources fall into the category of informational text.

Informational text is a type of nonfiction text. The primary purpose of informational text is to convey information about the natural or social world. Florida NIE programs provide schools with class sets of informational text in the form of the daily newspaper and original curriculum. NIE teaching materials cover a variety of subjects and are consistent with Florida's education standards.

Florida Press Educational Services, Inc. (FPES) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization of newspaper professionals that promotes literacy, particularly for young people. FPES members consist of daily and weekly newspapers throughout the state of Florida. Through its member newspapers, FPES serves educators, students and families in all 67 Florida counties. For more information about FPES, visit fpesnie.org, or email ktower@flpress.com or jpushkin@tampabay.com. Follow us on Twitter at [Twitter.com/nie_fpes](https://twitter.com/nie_fpes).

Name _____

Sojourner Truth

Vocabulary – write a brief definition of the following words:

reneged _____

gratitude _____

emancipation _____

experimental _____

eloquent _____

heroine _____

Read the profile of Sojourner Truth. Then answer the following questions.

1. How many owners did Sojourner have before she gained her freedom? _____

2. What two major social causes did Sojourner fight for in her lifetime? _____

3. Isabella started her life as a free person by insisting on justice for her family. What did Isabella do?

4. Why was Sojourner never allowed to vote? _____

Related Online News Article: *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* - Aug. 26, 1876 – Headline: On the Life of Sojourner Truth - <http://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/601687>

Newspaper Tie-ins:

- Look for the editorial section of your newspaper. After reviewing several editorial opinions, write a pro or con for whether children should be allowed to vote.
- Find newspaper articles relating to the violation of human rights. Compare the plight of the individual/group to the plight facing slaves in Truth's lifetime.
- Look through the newspaper for examples of people fighting for the equality of others. What group of people are they working for? How and why are they doing it? Compare this modern group with the African Americans during Sojourner Truth's lifetime. Use the following page to organize your writing.

Name _____

African Americans during the early 1880s	Group from today's news
What is the problem?	What is the problem?
Who is trying to help?	Who is trying to help?
How are they trying to help?	How are they trying to help?
Why are they trying to help?	Why are they trying to help?
How are these two groups the same?	
How are they different?	

Assessment question: What was the most interesting thing you learned while doing this lesson?

Name _____

John “Bud” Fowler

Vocabulary – write a brief definition of the following words:

matured _____

amateur _____

exhibition _____

instability _____

hostile _____

released _____

Read the Famous New Yorker profile of John Fowler. Then answer the following questions.

1. What was John Fowler’s last name at birth? _____
2. How did Fowler get the nickname Bud? _____
3. About how old was Fowler when he was signed to play baseball professionally? _____
4. What new equipment did Fowler use while playing and why? _____

5. Why did Bud Fowler stop playing baseball? _____

Related Online News Article: *The Topeka Capital Journal* – August 6, 2011 Headline: Negro Leagues greats started in Topeka

<http://www.cjonline.com/article/20110806/SPORTS/308069876>

Related Website: Negro Leagues Baseball Museum - <https://www.nlbm.com/s/history.htm>

Newspaper Tie-ins:

- Nicknames are fairly common in the sports world. Look through recent editions of newspaper sports sections and try to find as many nicknames as you can. Share them as a class. What do they say about the players or teams? What nicknames can you find in other sections of the newspaper? Discuss as a class.
- John “Bud” Fowler faced racial prejudice even though he was a successful professional athlete. Look through the newspaper for current examples of discrimination. Select one example and determine the basis for the discrimination (for example: age, race, gender, economic, etc.) Share your examples as a class and brainstorm possible remedies to fight against continued prejudice.

Name _____

Who? (The person or group being discriminated against)

When?

Where?

What? (Describe what type of prejudice took place)

How? (Brainstorm how this discrimination might be stopped.)

Follow up: If you were to get involved with a cause which would you select and why?

Assessment question: What one thing you learned today surprised you?

Name _____

Bessie Buchanan

Vocabulary – write a brief definition of the following words and phrases:

legendary _____

endorsed _____

incumbent _____

landslide _____

advocate _____

delegate _____

revered _____

Read the Famous New Yorker profile of Bessie Buchanan. Then answer the following questions.

1. As a young woman, how did Bessie Allison Buchanan earn a living? _____

2. Why did Bessie travel to France? Who did she follow there? _____

3. What happened to humiliate Mrs. Buchanan and her friend, Josephine Baker? Where were they? _____

4. What did Bessie Buchanan do to make history in 1954? _____

5. What was the last public office Buchanan held before she retired? _____

Related Online News Article: National Edition of *The Afro American* – newspaper published in Baltimore, MD, July 3, 1954 – Headline: Savoy Ballroom Owner's Wife Seeks Assembly Job
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2211&dat=19540703&id=Jc4mAAAAIBAJ&sjid=kwIGAAAAIBAJ&pg=4924,7018071>

Newspaper Tie-ins:

- Pretend you are a volunteer for one of the local candidates running for office. Create a newspaper advertisement urging others to support your candidate over his/her opponents.
- Look through the local newspaper (in-print or online) for news about local, state or national elections and the candidates seeking positions. Use the graphic organizer on the next page to create a candidate profile highlighting each candidate's position on key issues. (Work in small groups with each group profiling a different candidate. Share group profiles with the class.)

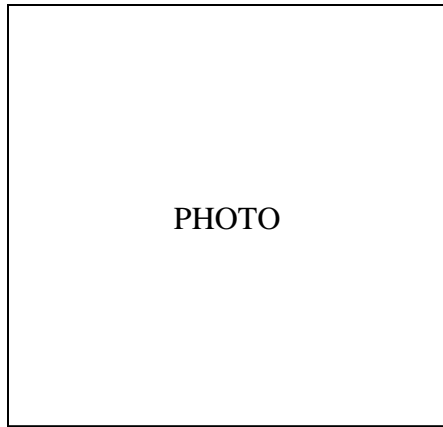
Assessment question: What one thing about this lesson would you like to know more about?

Name

Candidate Profile

Candidate's Name: _____

Political Party Affiliation: _____



Age:

Religion:

Residence:

Family:

Endorsements:

Experience: _____

Education: _____

Occupation(s): _____

Qualifications: _____

Any other facts cited in newspaper articles, ads, opinion pieces, etc.: _____

If the election were to take place today, would you vote for this candidate? Why or why not?

Name _____

Sammy Davis Jr.

Vocabulary – write a brief definition of the following words and phrase:

racism _____

precocious _____

bigotry _____

integrated _____

variety show(s) _____

prestigious _____

Read the Famous New Yorker profile of Sammy Davis Jr. Then answer the following questions.

6. How did Sammy Davis Jr. first get into the entertainment business? _____

7. When did Sammy Jr. say he first experienced racism? _____

8. True or False: Sammy Davis lost an eye while serving in WWII. _____
9. Why wasn't Sammy Davis Jr. allowed to stay in some of the hotels he performed in? _____

10. Name two ways Sammy Davis Jr. served his country? _____

Related Online Newspaper Clippings:

The Item, Sumter, S.C., Thursday, May 17, 1990, Headline: Sammy Davis Jr Entertainer Remembered for Warmth, Generosity

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1980&dat=19900517&id=YZUiAAAIBAJ&sjid=takFAAAIBAJ&pg=1386,3800280>

The Afro-American, Baltimore, MD, November 28, 1964, Headline: Friars Salute Sammy Davis

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2211&dat=19641128&id=nusmAAAIBAJ&sjid=zQIGAAIAIBAJ&pg=873,5503640>

Newspaper Tie-ins:

- Read and study the format of musical reviews. After listening to recordings of Sammy Davis Jr., each student should write their own review of his singing. Be prepared to share with the class.

- Sammy Davis Jr., along with thousands of others, participated in the March on Washington (1963) demanded civil and economic rights for African Americans. With other actions and demonstrations, the march helped pave the way for Civil Rights Act of 1964. Use the chart on the next page to compare and contrast Sammy Davis Jr's struggles with someone today.

Name _____

Sammy Davis Jr. faced a certain amount of racism and social injustice. Look through the newspaper (in-print or electronic) for examples of people standing up for their rights or the rights of others. Compare and contrast these modern actions with those of Davis. Use the chart below to organize the information you find.

Davis' struggles for himself and others	Modern struggles for equality and social justice

Follow Up: The efforts of Davis and others eventually lead to desegregation of nightclubs and better treatment and pay for entertainers of color. What do you think might be the short-term or long-term effects of social justice efforts going on today?

Assessment question: What do you think you'll remember most about this lesson? Why?

Series Exercises:

1. Select any two African Americans and compare and contrast their lives and accomplishments.
2. Create a crossword puzzle using key vocabulary words from each profile. Consider using the crossword puzzle student interactive tool available free online at www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/crossword/
3. Write an obituary notice for each.
4. Write a classified ad for each profile. The classified could be a help wanted ad, an item for sale ad, or perhaps a lost and found notice. Use your imagination and have fun!
5. Write a journal entry from each personality's perspective regarding the challenge(s) each faced during his/her lifetime.
6. Using various sources, including the Internet, try to find primary documents relating to each individual.
7. Some of these famous people's homes may now be museums or have been designated historical landmarks. Research these online. What more can you find out about any of these African Americans that you didn't already know from his/her profile?
8. Check your library for an autobiography or biography about one of these people and read an extensive account of his/her life. Write a book report using appropriate organizational strategies and make an oral presentation to the class.

Answer Key:

Sojourner Truth:

1. four owners
2. anti-slavery and women's rights
3. She sued Dumont for selling her son into southern slavery before his scheduled emancipation.
4. When she was younger because she was a slave and slaves had little to no rights. Even after slavery was ended, she was a woman and women didn't gain the right to vote until after her death.

John "Bud" Fowler:

1. John Fowler was born with the last name of Jackson.
2. He got the nickname Bud because that is what he called everyone else.
3. He was about 20 years old.
4. He used shin guards because other players slid into him wearing sharpened spikes.
5. Fowler stopped playing baseball because of he was getting old and had injuries.

Bessie Buchanan:

1. She was an entertainer.
2. She performed at the Moulin Rouge. She followed Josephine Baker.
3. Staff at the Stork Club in NYC refused to serve them because they were African American.
4. She became the first black female to be elected to the NYS Assembly.
5. NYS Human Rights Commissioner

Sammy Davis Jr.:

1. He started performing as a child, dancing with his father and Will Mastin.
2. In the United States Army during World War II
3. False – He lost his eye in a car accident.
4. Hotels discriminated against people of color and refused to allow them to stay there.
5. He served in the US Army and on the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity.

Additional online resources:

<http://www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov/index.html> - African American History Month resources created by government agencies including Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Park Service and more.

<http://new.civiced.org/resources/curriculum/black-history-month> - The Center for Civic Education - The School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program presents educators with lesson plans that explore the use of nonviolence in history, paying particular attention to the civil rights movement and African American history.

<http://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/black-history-month.htm> - National Education Association, Black History Month website

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html> - Using Primary Resources Teacher's Guide and Analysis Tool from Library of Congress

Name _____

A Study Guide*

Working in groups of no more than five, choose and study carefully a newspaper story about someone or a group of people working to make your community a better place for everyone to live. Answer the questions below based on details from the chosen story.

1. Remembering (retrieve)

Who committed the action? _____

What is the action? _____

When did the action take place? _____

Where did the action take place? _____

2. Understanding (summarize)

Retell or give the main idea. _____

3. Applying (carry out)

Why is (the specific event) _____ significant?

4. Analyzing (compare)

How does (the problem in the story) _____ compare with another problem _____?

5. Evaluating (judge)

Do you agree with a viewpoint offered by someone in the story or the opinion expressed by the person writing the opinion _____?

What do you think? _____

6. Creating (plan)

Devise an action plan to solve the problem and present your plan to a group of students, parents, school and/or community officials? _____

(*Bloom's Taxonomy revised)

Name _____

Levels of Thinking and Reasoning*

From your newspaper, choose a story about diversity in your community that interests and/or involves you and is likely to appeal to other students in your class. Ask a question on each level and have a classmate read the story and answer the questions. Also, ask for a critique of the questions.

Headline: _____ Author: _____ Newspaper: _____ Date: _____

Create

Evaluate

Analyze

Apply

Understand

Remember

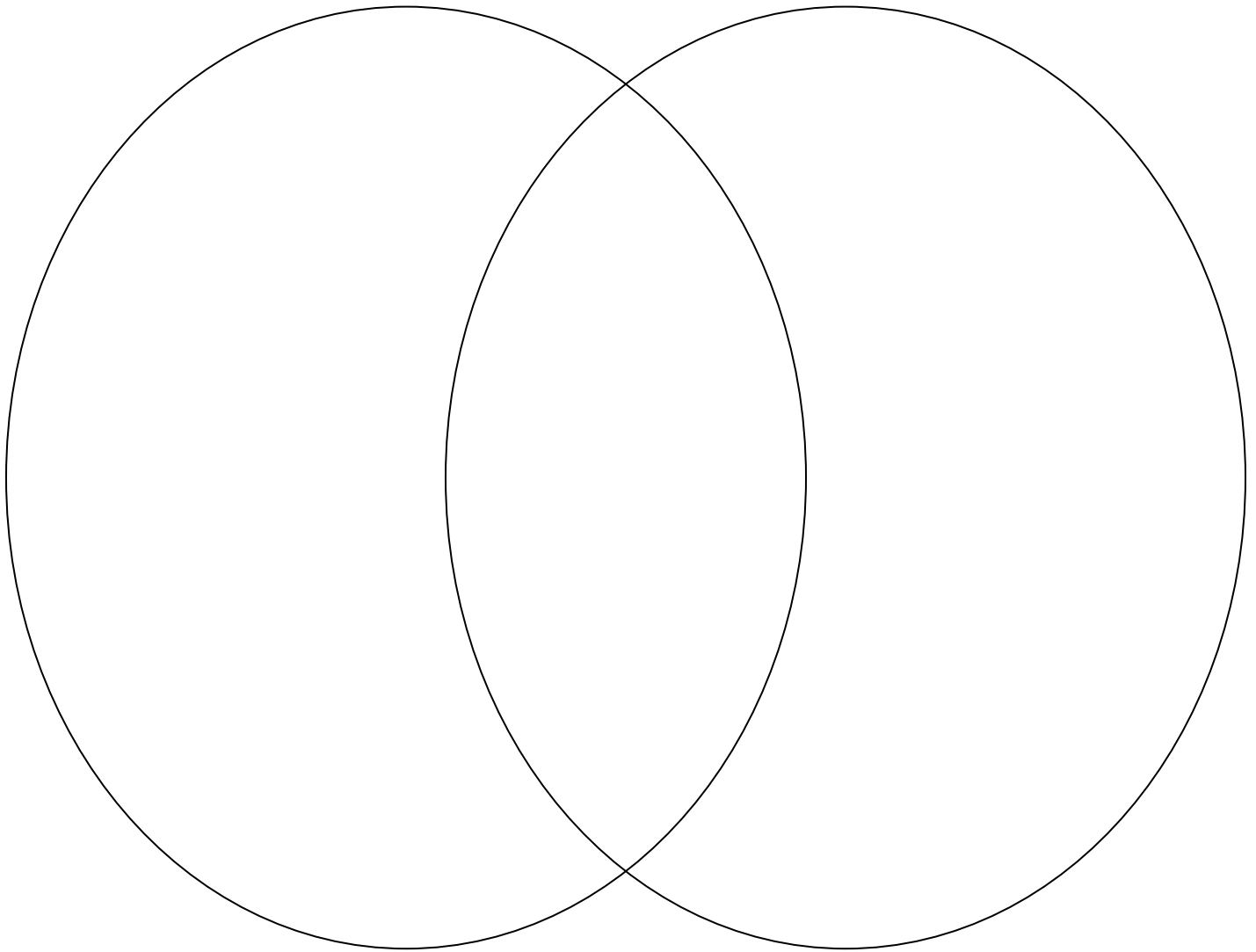
Follow-up: Did the story appeal to your classmate? Did your classmate offer complete answers to the questions? Did your classmate recommend any changes to the questions?

(*Bloom's Taxonomy revised)

Name _____

Venn Diagram

Directions: Compare one person from the Celebrating Black History Month profiles with someone in the news who is working to improve the community.



Follow-Up: What character trait do they share?

Name _____

KLW Chart

Directions: Before you read fill out the **KNOW** column with what you already know about the topic. As you read fill in what you've **LEARNED** in the center column. After you have finished reading fill in the **WANT** column with what you *want* to know more about.

KNOW	LEARN	WANT TO KNOW

Follow-Up: Conduct research to answer your questions.

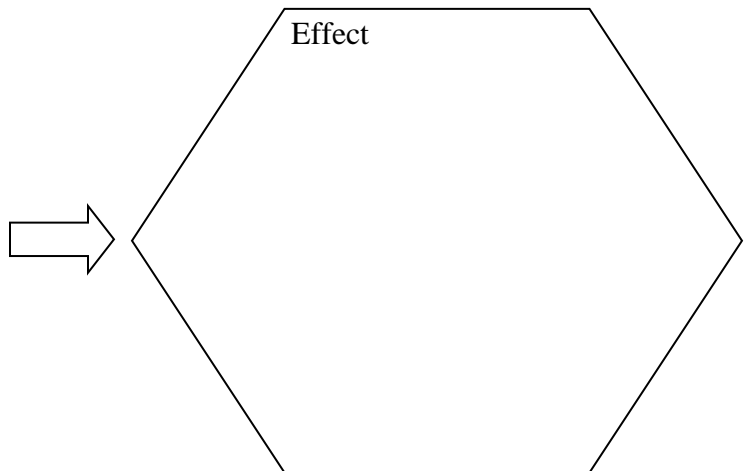
Name _____

Cause and Effect

Directions: Select one or more news stories that focus on issues of equality and justice. Identify causes and effects.

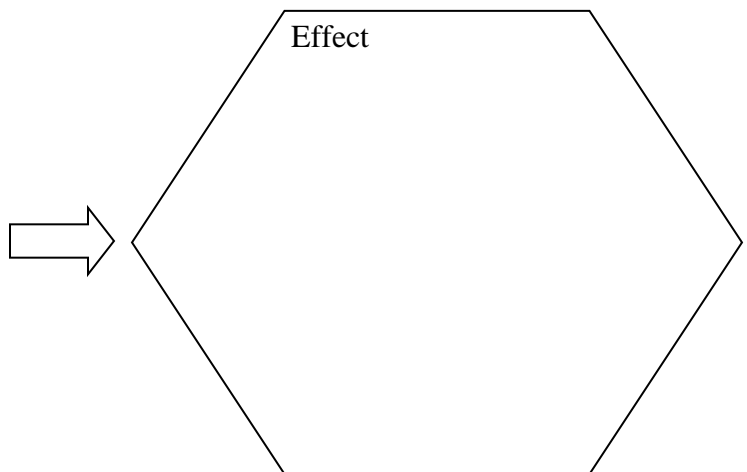
Story Headline:

Cause



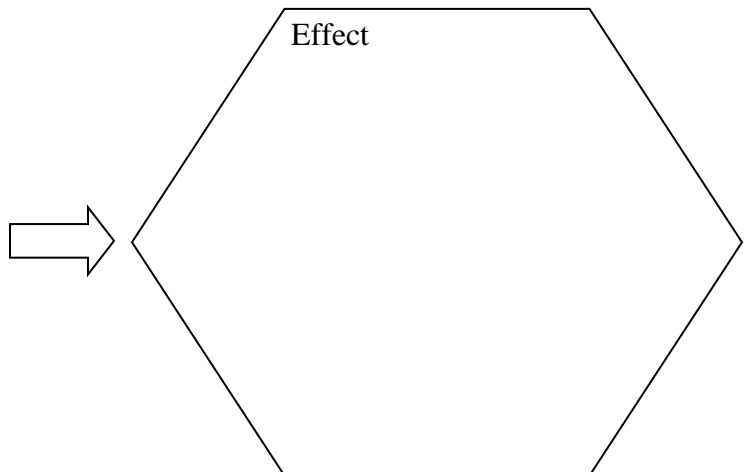
Story Headline:

Cause



Story Headline:

Cause



Follow-Up: Which effects represent positive and which, negative results, for the people involved?

Additional Research Activity: Florida Press Education Services

During the last year of his life, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference organized the Poor People's Campaign, a movement to end poverty and promote economic justice for all Americans regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. In 1968, they drafted a statement given to members of the U.S. government and publicly demanded an economic and social bill of rights to help citizens obtain jobs, income, education and housing, among other items.

How might a lack of education contribute to poverty? How might increased education lead to economic success not only for individuals, but also for an entire community? Did you know that according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers with more education have lower unemployment rates and higher incomes than workers with less education? Some studies suggest that people with higher levels of education are also healthier. Other studies suggest that higher education rates correlate to lower crime. Discuss these ideas with your class. In what ways do you think increased education might economically benefit a community?

Dr. King championed education, but he also stressed action. In 1947, he wrote an essay titled "The Purpose of Education." In this essay, he wrote: "Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate." What does Dr. King mean? To what worthy objectives might he refer? What is the power of your education? How might you be able to use it to help others?

Use your newspaper, the Internet and the school media center to research economic and education statistics for your state and community. Possible topics include median household income, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates and literacy rates. In addition to the newspaper, some other sources could include the State of Florida website, the Florida Department of Education website, the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Department of Education and the National Education Association. How does our state compare to others? Create a graphic organizer to show what you have learned. Share your results with your classmates.

Florida Press Education Services activity: Do the research

Doing research is a great way to learn about a topic or person. The process of doing the research – finding credible websites, reading the information, looking at photos, and understanding the information – will increase your knowledge in a fun way. For this research assignment, you will take on the role of being a detective to learn more about a notable Floridian. The first step is to choose one of the notable Floridians listed and learn more about him or her. You can work by yourself or with a partner.

Cannonball Adderley
Wally Amos
Mary McLeod Bethune
Clarence Fort
Robert Hayling
Zora Neale Hurston
Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr.
James Weldon Johnson
Joseph E. Lee
Carrie Meek
Julee Panton
Sidney Poitier
Philip Randolph
John C. Riley
Deion Sanders
Augusta Savage
Wesley Snipes
William Monroe Wells
Joseph E. Lee

1. When you are doing research, it is important to use credible websites. Websites such as Wikipedia and personal blogs are not always credible since some of the information presented as fact may be opinion or plagiarized from another source. Be sure to keep a list of your sources.
2. Research the person you chose. Write down the important facts, including:
 - Who is this person?
 - What is his or her background?
 - Where was this person born and where did he or she live?
 - When did this person live?
 - Why is this person notable and/or important?
 - How is this person a role model?
3. Create your own set of lesson plans about the person you chose. Using one of the worksheets from this packet as a model, create your own vocabulary list, reading comprehension questions and newspaper tie-in activities.
4. Next, compare the person you chose to one of the other individuals you have read about: Sojourner Truth, John “Bud” Fowler, Bessie Buchanan or Sammy Davis Jr. Create a graphic organizer to show what you have learned (comparison chart, Venn diagram, KWL chart).
5. Create an oral presentation about what you have learned and discovered. Have the other students in the class complete your worksheets.

Celebrating Black History Month



Sojourner Truth

(c. 1797-1883)

Sojourner Truth's story begins with the birth of a girl named Isabella in Ulster County, New York, in the late 1790s. Isabella was the daughter of James, also known as Baumfree, and Betsy, a Dutch-speaking couple who farmed on rented land. They were all the property of Johannis Hardenbergh, an American colonel in the War of Independence.

As slaves, James and Betsy had to work on Hardenbergh's land for part of every year. Their owner could sell them, or any of their children, whenever he chose. When Col. Hardenbergh's son died in 1807, little Isabella was sold for \$100 to the Neely family in Twaalfskill.

By 1810, Isabella had learned to speak English, and had been sold twice more. As the slave of James Dumont of Kingston, she married another slave and bore five children, while time ran

out for slavery in New York. According to state law, any slave born before 1799 would become free on July 4, 1827, but those born later, including Isabella's children, would still have to work for their former owners until the boys were 28, and the girls were 25.

James Dumont had promised to set Isabella free ahead of time, but when he reneged on that promise, she left him at the end of 1826. She made her way to the Van Wagenen family of Wagondale, who paid Dumont \$30 to secure Isabella's freedom. In gratitude, she adopted the Van Wagenen name.

Later, Isabella Van Wagenen sued Dumont for selling her son Peter to Southerners before the official emancipation date. She convinced an Ulster County jury that Dumont had broken state law, and Peter was brought back to New York and freed.

For the next decade, Isabella lived an intensely religious life. Like many Americans of all races, she wanted to achieve moral perfection and spiritual comfort in a time of change. Throughout the 1830s, while living in Kingston and New York City, she preached alongside white people at revival meetings, and sometimes tried to live in communities dedicated to sharing and social harmony. These experiences often disappointed her.

On June 1, 1843, the day of Pentecost, Isabella decided to leave New York, change her name, and head east. In another experimental community, in Northampton, Massachusetts, she heard people preach that spiritual perfection included ending slavery everywhere. Sharing her own story, she began to preach the same message.

When she returned to New York City in 1845 to address an anti-slavery convention, she called herself Sojourner Truth. Under that name, she dictated her life story and paid to have it published in 1850. She never learned to read or write, but became an eloquent speaker during tours throughout the northern states.

Sojourner Truth eventually settled in Michigan, but her work wasn't finished when slavery ended. Unable to vote because she was a woman, she continued to speak for both racial and gender equality until her death on November 26, 1883. Sojourner Truth is revered to the present day as a heroine in the history of human rights in America.



Sojourner Truth, albumen silver print, circa 1870, National Portrait Gallery

Celebrating Black History Month



John “Bud” Fowler

(1858 — 1913)



Bud Fowler, in the middle of the back row, with his Keokuk teammates in 1885. Image courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library

Sixty years before Jackie Robinson broke the color line in professional baseball, athletes like Bud Fowler played and starred alongside whites until racism drove them out of the game.

Bud Fowler was born John W. Jackson in Fort Plain, Montgomery County, New York on March 16, 1858. John’s father had escaped slavery to make his living as a barber. John grew up in Cooperstown, which wasn’t yet called the birthplace of baseball. John learned the game there, along with his father’s barbering trade.

In the 1870s John changed his name to Fowler and sought his fortune as a baseball player. He was nicknamed “Bud” for calling everyone else by that name. As Bud Fowler matured as a player, small regional leagues were forming across the country alongside the more prestigious National League. Outside the south, few teams objected to blacks playing alongside whites. The spread of minor league baseball created many opportunities for Fowler, but he often worked as a barber to help make ends meet.

In 1878, Fowler pitched an amateur team to victory in an exhibition game against the Boston Red Caps, later known as the Atlanta Braves. Soon afterward the Lynn Live Oaks of the International League hired Fowler, making him the first known black man to play professional baseball.

Over the next decade Fowler played multiple positions in towns and cities across the country. He never stayed in one place long. Some said he had a wandering nature, while others blamed his constant movement on white racism or the financial instability of early ball clubs. In 1885, Fowler was a star for Keokuk’s club in the Western League, until the league folded. After a short stay in Colorado, he helped Topeka win the 1886 pennant in a revived Western league.

After a failed attempt to form an all-black league, Fowler returned to the International League as a member of the 1887 Binghamton Bingos. After fielding just one black player the year before, the International League now had six. Many white players felt that was too many, including some of Fowler’s Binghamton teammates. In an increasingly hostile environment, Fowler pioneered the use of shin guards to protect himself from the sharpened spikes on sliding players’ shoes.

A group of white Bingos finally went on strike, refusing to play alongside Fowler and another black teammate. The Bingos released Fowler, and shortly afterward the International League officially excluded black players from its teams. This was the beginning of the end for blacks in the minor leagues.

Fowler continued to play on racially mixed teams in smaller, poorer leagues into the 1890s, but opportunities dwindled as he grew older. By the end of the century black players were shut out of organized baseball. Bud Fowler continued to play on independent all-black teams until age and injuries ended his career. He died on February 26, 1913 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Frankfort NY. The Society for American Baseball Research put a marker on the grave in 1987. In 2013, Cooperstown renamed a street after Fowler and placed a memorial plaque in Doubleday Field to honor one of the Hall of Fame city’s real contributions to baseball history.

To learn more the history of segregated baseball go to the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum at <http://baseballhall.org/education/curriculum/civil-rights>. This is one of a series of four Celebrating Black History Month profiles, written by Kevin Gilbert for the NYNPA - News Media Literacy/Newspaper In Education Program. All rights reserved 2019.

Celebrating Black History Month



Bessie Buchanan

(1902-1980)

As an entertainer, Bessie Allison Buchanan didn't become as famous as some of her peers in 1920s Harlem, but as a community leader she made history in a more important way.

Bessie Allison was born in New York City on March 7, 1902. She grew up in the city's theatrical district and came of age at a time of new opportunities for black entertainers. At age 19, she performed in *Shuffle Along*, one of the first all-black musicals to become a Broadway hit. As white jazz fans flocked to Harlem, she became a chorus dancer at the legendary Cotton Club. A talented singer as well, she made recordings for Black Swan records.

In 1925 she performed in the *Plantation Review* and shared a dressing room with the future international superstar Josephine Baker. After Baker made her name in France, Bessie followed her across the Atlantic in 1927 to perform at the famous Moulin Rouge theater. While Baker stayed in Europe, Bessie eventually returned to New York. In 1929 she married Charles Buchanan, one of Harlem's most successful businessmen, who managed the Savoy Ballroom nightclub.

The Savoy became a center of the swing band movement of the 1930s, while Bessie Buchanan became part of Harlem's social elite. Ranked among Harlem's best-dressed women, she strove to improve medical services in Harlem and wrote a regular column for her husband's weekly newspaper, *The People's Voice*.

Even one of Harlem's elite could still be humiliated by racial discrimination. In October 1951 Buchanan took Josephine Baker to dinner at the stylish Stork Club, but the white staff refused to serve them. The snub sparked a protest campaign and raised Buchanan's profile as a champion of equal rights.

Powerful New Yorkers saw Buchanan as a potential political leader. In the 1950s, the Democratic party in New York City gave voters more voice in choosing candidates for office. In Harlem, Democrats noticed that more women than men were registered to vote. Party leaders set a goal of electing the first black woman to the State Assembly in 1954.

Bessie Buchanan seemed ideally suited for this historic role. She was a celebrity in Harlem and could finance a campaign with her husband's money. The Democratic leadership endorsed her in the primary for the 12th Assembly District against a Democratic incumbent. Buchanan won the nomination, 3,832 votes to 2,586. Whoever won the general election would make history, since the Republican party also nominated a woman, Lucille Pickett. Buchanan won in a landslide.

Assemblywoman Buchanan served four terms in Albany, earning respect as an advocate for equal rights. She might have become the first black woman elected to Congress, but her husband's friendship with the powerful incumbent in her district, Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, kept her from challenging him.

In 1960 Governor Nelson Rockefeller, a Republican, made Buchanan a delegate to a White House conference on aging. In 1962, after deciding not to seek a fifth term, Buchanan surprised Democrats by endorsing Rockefeller for reelection. He rewarded her with an appointment to the state Human Rights Commission. She combated discrimination as a commissioner until her retirement in 1967. Bessie Allison Buchanan died on September 7, 1980, still revered as a symbol of Harlem's cultural vitality and political activism.



Bessie Buchanan with Governor Nelson Rockefeller, 1962
Source: New York State Archives

Celebrating Black History Month



Sammy Davis, Jr. (1925-1990)



Sammy Davis Jr. with President Richard Nixon.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number LC-DIG-ppmsca-31145]

Sammy Davis Jr. struggled with racism for much of his career, but his success as a performer and celebrity helped Americans envision racial equality in the world of entertainment.

Samuel George Davis Jr. was born in Harlem, New York City, on December 8, 1925. Sammy Davis Sr. was a dancer in a touring troupe led by Will Mastin. When his marriage broke up, Davis took Sammy Jr. on the road with the Mastin troupe. Junior was a precocious mimic of his father's and Mastin's dance moves and became their partner in the Will Mastin Trio. To dodge child labor laws, Mastin sometimes claimed that Junior was an adult midget. In 1933, Mastin and Davis took the seven year old to a Brooklyn movie studio to make his film debut in the short subject *Rufus Jones for President*.

Davis Sr. tried to shield his son as much as possible from the bigotry of his time. Sammy Davis Jr. later claimed that he never experienced real race hatred until he joined the Army during World War II. Conditions improved when he was transferred to a racially integrated entertainment unit.

After the war, Sammy Davis Jr. rejoined the Will Mastin Trio and became its real star. A great singer

as well as a great dancer, he recorded hit records and appeared on early TV variety shows. He received sympathy nationwide after losing an eye in a 1954 car accident, and came back to star in the Broadway musical *Mr. Wonderful* in 1956. The hit show was one of the first musicals with a racially mixed cast. He would have another Broadway hit with *Golden Boy* in 1964.

As black Americans demanded greater racial equality, Sammy Davis Jr. received opportunities and honors few black performers had enjoyed before. In 1956, he became the first black member of the Friars' Club, a prestigious club for New York entertainers. In Hollywood, he befriended the actor Humphrey Bogart and became part of Bogart's social circle of movie and music stars. After Bogart's death, the singer Frank Sinatra became the leader of the group, which he called "The Clan." Better known as "The Rat Pack," Sinatra's friends made numerous movies together and popularized Las Vegas as an entertainment capital.

Despite progress, black performers in the 1950s still faced barriers to full acceptance in American society. In Las Vegas, Davis wasn't allowed to stay in some of the hotels he performed in. In Hollywood, a movie studio executive reportedly used gangsters to force Davis into ending his romance with the white actress, Kim Novak.

Few Americans knew about Davis's personal problems. They saw him as a symbol of progress in race relations and someone who helped break down racial barriers wherever he performed. The U.S government recognized his symbolic value by appointing him to the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity. Increasingly Americans saw Davis as the equal of white entertainers. He appeared regularly in movies, TV and on stage, and scored a number one single in 1972 with the song, *The Candy Man*. Sammy Davis Jr. sometimes called himself "the World's Greatest Entertainer," and by the time he died on May 16, 1990, many people thought he was right.

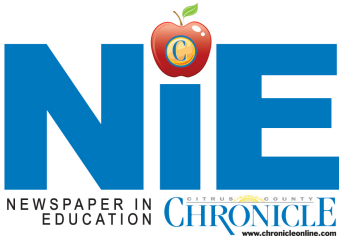
To watch and hear Sammy Davis Jr. perform his hit song "The Candy Man go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYihDAhVPko>. This is one of a series of four Celebrating Black History Month profiles, written by Kevin Gilbert for the NYNPA - News Media Literacy/Newspaper In Education Program. All rights reserved 2019.

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