

Montana's African American Heritage Resources



Detail of "Aunt Milly [sic] Ringold, Once a Slave: R.I.P."
Montana Historical Society Research Center: #944-585

Model Lesson Plan: Fourth–Sixth Grade

While the African-American population in Montana has consistently remained small throughout its history, Black Montanans have participated in virtually every aspect of community life. In 1805, “York,” the slave servant of William Clark, traveled to the area as a member of the Corps of Discovery and became the first documented person of African descent to spend time in what would become Montana Territory. In the following years African Americans moved to the region where they participated as fur trappers, servants, interpreters, homesteaders, and business owners.

In many ways African Americans experienced life just as other citizens of Montana; they established churches and social organizations, served in the military, and worked the land. At the same time, they struggled to establish their rights to vote and gain an equal, not separate, education.

For the most part, the stories of these African-American residents have remained unheard. This is changing. By utilizing this lesson and the associated [Montana's African American Heritage Resources](#) web site, teachers will now be able to easily access primary and secondary source materials so their students might develop a better understanding of this important cultural group, whose achievements and impact on Montana were greater than their small number.

Overcoming Prejudice

Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals:

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of African American life in Montana and the changes in their social structure through time. (SS8:B4.3 and 4)

Students will:

- Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (CC.ELA.RI.4.7)
- Conduct short research projects to answer a question (CC.ELA.W.4.7)
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly (CC.ELA.W.4.2)

Suggested Duration:

Three to five 50-minute class periods

Understandings:

Without engaging in protests and marches, individual African-Americans broke through several color barriers in Montana.



Revised 10/14/2024

Montana's African American Heritage Resources



Essential Questions:

- How (and why) did skin color affect social status?
- What difficulties are there in being the first?
- What might be some of the effects of someone breaking the color barrier?
- Why did African Americans organize their own institutions (e.g. churches, civic and social organizations, etc.)?

Students will be able to:

- Use the internet to find information about African Americans in Montana.
- Interpret primary source material to learn more about a topic.
- Share what they learned with others.

Students will know that:

- Historically, skin color has had a major impact on social status.
- Montana African Americans made social, economic, and political gains over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks:

- Create a poster board highlighting the life of an African American in Montana.
- Include biographical information, photographs, and other available primary source material from the Montana's African American Heritage Resources website of the Montana Historical Society.
- Exhibit an understanding of changing opportunities for African American Montanans.

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Montana Historical Society, African-Americans in Montana Homepage, <http://mhs.mt.gov/shpo/AfricanAmericans>
- Computers with Internet access for student use
- Copies of Graphic Organizer (below)

Stage 3 Learning Activities

Step 1

Discuss essential questions. Teachers may also wish to use the K/W/L instructional technique, asking students what they know, what they want to know, and, at the conclusion of the lesson, what they have learned, about African American history in Montana and in the United States.

Step 2

Divide students into three groups or work together as a class to investigate how job options changed for African Americans. Encourage them to include stories of individuals they may know personally.

Montana's African American Heritage Resources



- a. Explain the decennial census, why it was established, and how historians use it to gain information about the lives of ordinary people.
- b. Have each group look at a different census year and complete the graphic organizer.

Group 1 will answer the question “What jobs were available for African Americans in Montana in 1870?” using https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/AfricanAmericans/AfAm_docs/CensusData/1870Occupationsoverager12.pdf.

Group 2 will answer the question “What jobs were available for African Americans in Montana in 1910?” using https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/AfricanAmericans/AfAm_docs/CensusData/1910Occupationsoverager11.pdf.

Group 3 will answer the question “What jobs were available for African Americans in Montana in 1930?” using https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/AfricanAmericans/AfAm_docs/CensusData/1930Occupationsoverager14.pdf.

- c. Have students share their findings and discuss. What does the data suggest about changes in African Americans’ social status? Do students think there are greater or fewer job options for African-Americans today?

Share information with your students about ways in which African Americans were discriminated against in Montana. For example:

- In 1872, the Territorial Legislature voted to segregate schools—so African American and white children could not go to the same schools. The law was overturned in 1883 mostly because of the expense of maintaining separate schools for small black populations.
- African Americans and whites served in segregated units in the military until after World War II. (One of the most famous black units was the Tenth Cavalry. The Tenth Cavalry became well known for its gallant charge up San Juan Hill during the 1898 Spanish American War. Some of the Tenth Cavalry was stationed in Montana.)
- It was illegal for blacks and whites to marry in Montana between 1909 and 1953.
- Many labor unions refused to allow African Americans to become members. In 1942, Butte miners refused to work with Southern black soldiers who had been sent to Butte to help make sure there was enough copper produced for the war effort.
- Many businesses refused to hire African Americans, especially in professional roles. For example, Octavia Bridgewater graduated from nursing school in 1930, but she had to work as a private duty nurse for wealthy families because Montana hospitals would not hire black nurses

Montana's African American Heritage Resources



until after World War II.

- Many businesses in Montana refused to serve African Americans until after 1955, when the Montana legislature passed a law guaranteeing “equal accommodations.” However, there was no punishment for businesses that broke the law, so many businesses continued to discriminate until the federal 1964 Civil Rights Act made discrimination in public places illegal.

Ask your students: How do these facts challenge (or confirm) their conclusions about the types of jobs available for African Americans between 1870 and 1930.

Step 3

- Introduce Poster Project: Let students know that your class will be creating a black history exhibit and that each student will contribute one poster for the exhibit, featuring either a person or an organization. To help them choose their person, they will watch the PowerPoint presentation, “Profiles of African American Montanans.”
- Let them know that you expect them to take notes during the presentation. By the end of the presentation they should have a list of several people or organizations they think would be worthy of including in your exhibit.
- Show students the PowerPoint, using the accompanying script (modifying it as necessary for your grade level.) **Note: Slides 47-49 are about a murder and show a gruesome image of a man hanging. Delete these slides before showing the PowerPoint to your students.**
- Have students use the [Montana's African American Heritage Resources](#) website and other sites to research their topics and create their posters. The Timeline (under the History tab) and the MHS Collections (under Resources and Research) will be particularly useful.
- Arrange to display your exhibit and to have other classes, parents, or community members view the students' work.

Step 4

Lead your students in a discussion of the following:

- a. Many of the people students researched were “firsts.” How might it have felt to be a “first”?
- b. What is the relationship between the African American trailblazers the students researched and the changing opportunities they documented through their study of the census?
- c. What other factors might have contributed to changing opportunities for African American Montanans?
- d. How might it feel today to be a member of the African American community in Montana?
- e. What can students do to make sure everyone feels welcome and a part of the overall community?

Student names: _____

Analyzing Census Data to Learn More about African American History

Working together, answer the following questions.

What year is the census data from? _____

How many years ago was this information collected? _____

List five of the common jobs held by African Americans in Montana during this time period. _____

Do you think people in these jobs made a lot of money? Why or why not? _____

How many African Americans worked as doctors, lawyers, or bankers? _____

Did any of the African Americans in Montana at this time own their own businesses?

What businesses? (Give examples.) _____

What does the census data make you wonder about? What questions does it raise? _____

Where could you go to find out the answers to these questions? _____

What conclusions can you draw from this data? _____
