

Creative Resources for Teachers Celebrating Black History Month

By Kristine Kim on February 2, 2017 12:30 PM

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From educational hip-hop to kid-friendly newspapers, here are some ways for teachers to incorporate and honor Black History Month in their lessons—beyond covering Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech once again.

1. Hit the theaters.

The movie **"Hidden Figures"** tells the untold true stories of three African-American female mathematicians. Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Johnson were among several black female mathematicians who made significant contributions to NASA's space program during the 1960s, despite race and gender barriers.



Teachers should place an added emphasis on historical black women because they are often marginalized during the celebration of black history, said Donnesha A. Blake, who teaches Black Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Teachers can use **Scholastic's interactive space-exploration timeline** to highlight the achievements of Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut, and the Center for the History of Physics' lesson plan and reference guide, **"When Computers Wore Skirts,"** to teach students about race and gender breakthroughs achieved by brilliant African-American women.

The National Society of Black Engineers also recently launched a nationwide campaign titled **#BlackSTEMLikeMe**, which aims to encourage black students and STEM professionals to share their personal stories to highlight contributions by black men and women in the field, and to show black students that they can pursue a future in STEM. Teachers can help their students share their STEM stories and photos, which will be shared through the campaign.

2. Music videos can be educational.

Last February, special education teacher Gary Hamilton wrote for *Education Week Teacher* about incorporating contemporary culture in the classroom for Black History Month. Hamilton explained that pop culture and music can be a powerful way to get students thinking critically

through real-life applications. **Artists like Kendrick Lamar** who use their music as a platform on black empowerment can help increase students' awareness, interest, and pride, Hamilton said.

Learning platforms like Flocabulary can be a way to use **educational music videos** to spark student engagement. Teachers can find free music videos on historical African-American figures and leaders such as Ruby Bridges and Martin Luther King Jr., as well as on historical events such as the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the Selma-to-Montgomery march.

Teachers can also use the music videos' accompanying lesson plans, quizzes, and other activities to help students build off of what they watch and to create their own raps and songs about their aspirations after analyzing King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

3. News for kids, by kids.

The kid-friendly section of TIME Magazine, **TIME For Kids**, features a special on Black History Month where students can read articles by kid reporters on historical events in black history and on current news about African-American authors and athletes like basketball star Stephen Curry and ballerina Misty Copeland.

Scholastic also has a collection of articles detailing the achievements and contributions of African-Americans to U.S. history, written by student writers who are a part of the **Scholastic Kids Press Corps**.

4. Use documentaries as starting points for discussion.

Pulling content from documentaries might also help facilitate academic discussions and discourse on social justice issues in U.S. history. The documentary **"The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975,"** for example, provides footage on the anti-war and Black Power movements. The film includes audio interviews from various African-American artists, activists, musicians, and scholars to depict the state of the people, society, culture, and style between the '60s and '70s.

CBS Sports Network will also be airing "The Black 14: Wyoming Football 1969" on Saturday, Feb. 11, which tells the story of African-American football players who were dismissed from the University of Wyoming's football team in 1969 for protesting racial injustices. Teachers may find parallels to current controversial issues concerning race, such as the more recent **national-anthem protest that may have reached classrooms**. Opening up the classroom to these discussions may help students apply history to the present.

5. Help students learn from art and literature.

The Library of Congress and the National Gallery of Art offer primary sources—that are available online—for teachers looking to share **historical artifacts and artwork** with their students. Teachers can use **historical photographs** of child attendees of the March on Washington to discuss its impact on the Civil Rights Movement.

Analysis of complex texts like *Beloved* by Toni Morrison can offer opportunities to talk about perspectives and identity. The National Council of Teachers of English provides **multiple lesson plans** on Morrison's book, as well as a **guide for teaching racially sensitive literature**.

"As educators who build reasoning and analytical skills, illuminate historical experiences, and strengthen empathy across perspectives, our role feels more critical than ever," author and guest opinion blogger Homa S. Tavangar recently wrote for **Education Week**.

Tavangar added that although incorporating black history should be done throughout the year, adding emphasis during the month of February can help students dig deeper into a significant aspect of American history.

Other resources:

- **PBS** offers free resources for teachers on topics ranging from the anniversaries of important civil rights milestones to talking about "Stop, Question, and Frisk," a controversial police procedure in New York City, in relation to the ongoing debate on race, justice, and policy.
- The **National Education Association** and **Smithsonian Education** each provide their own set of diverse K-12 lesson plans and resources, covering subjects like the Harlem Renaissance, poetry, African-American inventors, and more.

Source: First **image** by Flickr user John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, licensed under Creative Commons. "Hidden Figures" image courtesy of 20th Century Fox Film Corporation.

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- [African-American History Museum Gears Up for School Visits](#)
- [Bringing Black History Month to STEM Classes](#)
- ['Fixing' Black History Month](#)
- [Black History Isn't Just About February \(Opinion\)](#)
- [Social Justice Isn't the Only Reason to Teach About Race \(Opinion\)](#)
- [To the Educators Who Will Teach My Black Daughter \(Opinion\)](#)

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