



2020 Black History Month Poster

“The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.” – Toni Morrison

Concept

The 2020 ETFO Black History Month Poster is a visual representation of several themes within the African Canadian experience from the past and present while providing an insightful look into our future. The central image is a young Muslim woman wearing a hijab which is representative of the modern-day Canadian experience in various urban areas across the province. Though our primary character’s religious identity and carefree attitude challenges stereotypes simply by existing, her skateboard, headphones and style of dress provide elements that many students, regardless of race, can connect with. This concept integrates elements of colour while using Afrofuturism to recognize historic Black communities. The background elements, including the quote on the sidewalk by author Toni Morrison who passed away in August 2019, all give context and perspective that educates the viewer while drawing in their eye.

Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was an African-American writer acclaimed for her examination of Black experience (particularly Black female experience) within the Black community. Best known for her novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, she also received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Morrison’s unique intentional commentary on issues and challenges within the Black community from the past and present inspired a generation of writers and leaders including Oprah Winfrey and former President Barack Obama. The exemplary work of Toni Morrison demonstrates society’s need for more stories about marginalized communities but more importantly, for those stories to be told by authors from those communities.

What’s the significance of the quote?

Racism is the belief in superiority of one race over another. Racism is often enacted through prejudice and violence, as well as overt and systemic actions that aim to maintain discriminatory practices. A significant byproduct of these practices is distraction. When racist opinions are shared and reported as facts, it forces oppressed communities to pause efforts to progress and refute the erroneous claims made. This is especially relevant when we examine the stereotypes and dominant narratives of Black people which do not reflect the historic achievements of African civilizations including the world’s first university, first known art, economic development and amazingly diverse linguistic variations between tribes and countries. The path to equality is not linear and the energy that must be invested in proving oneself as capable and equal prevents actual gains from being made in our society.



The Past: Historic Communities

This poster recognizes Hogan's Alley, British Columbia and Africville, Nova Scotia, self-contained and thriving historically Black communities here in Canada. Both communities were not only essential culturally but provided safety for Black Canadians at times of racial segregation and discrimination. The inclusion of the futuristic train is a nod to rail systems where many Black Canadians worked as porters in the past and traveled across the country via the rail system.

The Present: Displacement

Hogan's Alley and Africville were both communities that were systematically destroyed as part of **gentrification** projects that **displaced** all the residents in those communities. Today, Black and marginalized communities across our province continue to face similar challenges of being displaced from their communities. The physical changes of the communities represent the dismantling of the society and the cultural erosion of its members as they no longer live closely together. Though promises are sometimes made, renewal projects do not provide adequate or similar affordable housing for residents.

The Future: Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is the reimagining of a future filled with arts, science and technology seen through a Black lens which is a tribute to the groundbreaking innovations of early African development. The design of this poster incorporates elements that represent Afrofuturism, particularly the fisheye perspective. The futuristic light rail system seen in the background merges the past and the future together. The disposition of our primary character, being both relaxed and confident, is a reimagining of how we would hope all our young people can live in this province and country. A world where a young, urban, Black Muslim woman can feel and exude a sense of comfort and belonging is the utopic society we are all building towards.

Definition of Terms

Gentrification: the buying and renovation of houses and stores in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper- or middle-income families or individuals, raising property values but often displacing low-income families and small businesses.

Displaced: lacking a home, country, etc.; moved or put out of the usual or proper place.

Afrofuturism: a movement in literature, music, art, etc., featuring futuristic or science fiction themes which incorporate elements of Black history and culture.