

2023 Black History Month Poster

“Each one, teach one.” #BlackGirlMagic

Concept

The 2023 ETFO Black History Month poster is a visual representation of the beauty that lies within Black features: specifically - hair, nose, and lips, that have been historically criminalized and degraded by white beauty standards. The sisterhood and solidarity on display, speak to the relationships and mentoring that are so crucial in the Black community and can be found in classrooms with more Black educators. Our two subjects are a living representation of #BlackGirlMagic, the ability for Black joy to be found and celebrated in a world that often does not love them back.

What is #BlackGirlMagic?

#BlackGirlMagic is a concept and movement created to celebrate the beauty, power, and resilience of Black girls and women and to congratulate them on their accomplishments.¹ This hashtag has become a unifying symbol of sisterhood on social media to help show connections for everything from actresses to musicians to everyday moments captured between mothers and daughters. This poster serves as a reminder to all educators and students across Ontario that #BlackGirlMagic exists in our schools, classrooms, and communities on a daily basis.

“Each one, teach one”

This African proverb has been used throughout the Black diaspora in a variety of contexts as a marker of mentoring and resilience. The mentoring aspect of the phrase is fairly self-explanatory as it encourages everyone who has a skill, to share that skill with others and pass on their knowledge. The resilience comes from the fact that this quote has been used to exemplify the informal and often illegal education needed to teach Black people literacy during some of the most oppressive practices Black people have faced, including Apartheid and slavery. In a modern educational setting, we are actively seeking more Black educators who can impart their skillset to the next generation to address the lack of representation in our schools.²

Standards of Beauty

While it is exciting that we can now see that Black physical features are accepted and praised within our society, the reality is that the appropriation, discrimination, and criminalization that Black women face is still rampant. Whiteness has always centred itself in terms of beauty standards which has immediately subjected Blackness to be seen as inferior and lesser than. Black women, who face multiple oppression points are inherently subjected to discrimination on multiple fronts.



From the exploitation of Sara Baartman,³ to the insulting exaggeration of Black features seen in the origins of clowns, to the ongoing discrimination Black hairstyles face here in Canada,⁴ Black physical features have not been valued in mainstream media. The layers of oppression that colonialism has placed on Black physical features are deep as they have been exoticized, criminalized, exploited, and appropriated while constantly being ridiculed as tropes and stereotypes. Despite this, Black people always find a way. As an example, did you know that Black women once used the patterns and styles of their cornrows and locs to create maps that could be used to escape slavery to safety? How magical is that?

Our two subjects' facial expressions deliberately represent what all students and people within our society seek: the ability to simply exist. They are neither countering nor fulfilling the "angry Black women" as their facial expressions are neutral to show how they are quite simply, being.

Caribbean Influence and the Colour Palette

The background of this year's poster aside from being eye-catching and bright, is a tribute to the vibrant colours that have become synonymous with the Caribbean. They also serve to represent the joy and happiness that is representative of the freedom within both of our subjects. Lastly, Ontario has a significant population who can trace their lineage back to the Caribbean and their influence is palpable, including but not limited to, Caribana,⁵ the festival filled with great food, music, and revellers playing mas'!

The Artist: Benny Bing

Benny Bing is a contemporary Canadian artist who explores themes of identity, gender, and Blackness. Being born in Nigeria, Bing has always drawn influence from the pride and beauty in his cultural upbringing. This included paying homage to the matriarchal family structure he came from which can be seen in his art as it focuses on empowering portrayals of Black femininity. As a Bajan-Nigerian Canadian, Benny is a living representation of the diaspora whose works influence our society well.

Notably, Benny was a successful professional who after receiving paints as a gift, chose to start painting as a hobby. This leisure activity soon unearthed a dormant talent that he has now translated into a career. He is a reminder to all of our students that not only will you likely have several careers professionally, but that it is so crucial to have interests and hobbies as you never know where your passion projects can take you.

¹ palmsinatl.com/2017/05/blackgirlmagic-blackboyjoy/

² etfo.ca/news-publications/publications/generation-black-public-symposium

³ blackpast.org/global-african-history/baartman-sara-saartjie-1789-1815/

⁴ ellecanada.com/beauty/hair/race-based-hair-discrimination

⁵ caribana.com/who-we-are/

