

2023 Black History Month Classroom Ideas

Aside from many of the obvious links to the language curriculum, this poster can be specifically used in teaching the media literacy curriculum in a variety of ways. It is important to note that while we highlight the contributions of Black Canadians in February, educators should be embedding these ideas in our classrooms throughout the year. African Canadian history *is* Canadian history.

Suggested Announcement

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 Black girls back.

Open-Ended Questions

Primary

- When does this scene take place (past, present, future)?
- Describe one of the two subjects (people) using their features (eyes, nose, hair, etc.).
- Name and describe how different colours are used in the poster.

Junior

- What do you notice about our two subjects? Explain your observations?
- Who are our heroes? Write a creative narrative about one or both of them.
- Name and describe the colours in the poster. How are colour and contrast used to tell a story?

Intermediate

- When does this scene take place (past, present, future)? What visual elements has the artist included to show this? Explain.
- In what ways do our heroes challenge stereotypes?
- Describe one of the two subjects (people) using their features (eyes, nose, hair, etc.).
- Name and describe the colours in the poster. How is colour used to show contrast in the image?

Expanded 2023 Black History Month Letter

“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 Black people 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 the connections that exist between everything from actresses and 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.

Activity

- What are some examples of #BlackGirlMagic and/or #BlackBoyJoy that you can think of in our world today? Consider those present in media, those weaving magic daily in the community, and examples from history.
- Using a Venn diagram, create a comparison of some modern Black role models and their historic counterparts. Examples include:
 - a) Beyoncé and Harriet Tubman
 - b) Quinta Brunson and Rosa Parks
 - c) Jullie Black and Viola Desmond
 - d) Michaelle Jean and Mary Ann Shadd
 - e) Select your own examples

“Each one, teach one”

This African American proverb has been used throughout the Black diaspora as a symbol of mentoring and resilience. The mentorship aspect encourages those with skills to share that knowledge with others. The phrase also speaks to the resilience of Black people fighting for literacy through informal and often illegal education during some of the most oppressive practices they have faced, including slavery and Apartheid. In a modern educational setting, we are actively seeking more Black educators to impart their skills to the next generation and address the lack of representation in our schools.²

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

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

Activity

1. Research the history of African Canadians in your community.
 - a) What community groups exist?
 - b) What mentoring and role modeling aspects are present in these groups?
 - c) How long have they been established?

Standards of Beauty

While it is exciting that Black physical features are now accepted and praised within our society, the reality is that the appropriation, discrimination, and criminalization of Black women is still rampant. Beauty standards have always centred whiteness, which has resulted in Blackness being seen as inferior. Black women, who face multiple oppression points, are subjected to discrimination on multiple fronts. From the exploitation of Sara Baartman³ to the insulting exaggeration of Black features seen in the origins of clowns to the ongoing discrimination against Black hairstyles in Canada,⁴ Black physical features have not been valued in mainstream media or society. The layers of oppression that colonialism has placed on Black physical features are deep: they have been exoticized, criminalized, exploited, and appropriated while constantly being ridiculed as tropes and stereotypes. Despite this, Black people always find a way. For example, did you know 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 woman" stereotype as their facial expressions are neutral to show how they are quite simply *being*.

Activity

1. Watch: youtube.com/watch?v=KV8BkzhhdLs

Based on this video:

- What do you notice about the body language of the Black co-hosts? How engaged are they?
- What is the diversity rate of the celebrities who have "perfect features?" Who is included? Who is missing?

2. Watch: [Sheryl Lee Ralph on the Golden Globes Red Carpet](#)

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think this video has gone viral?
- Who is this message for? How do you know?
- This message may be centred on Blackness but is much more generic. How do you know? What is Sheryl Lee Ralph's goal?
- Cultural appropriation is a common issue. Research examples of appropriation (e.g., the Kardashian/Jenners altering their bodies to profit from "Black" features).

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

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

3. Read: ellecanada.com/beauty/hair/race-based-hair-discrimination

Discussion Questions:

- If workplaces have policies on how employees can wear their hair, what can you infer about their equity and inclusion policies?
- Black hair was not part of haircare training until recently. What message does that send about how acceptable and “normal” Black hair is?

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’!

Activity

1. Read: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/caribbean-canadians

- Ontario has roughly 68 per cent of the Caribbean population in Canada which includes those that have been here for multiple generations, newcomers, and those who work as migrant workers. Research the migrant workers and record their living conditions. How does this differ from the rights that Canadians have?
- Focus on the Political Life section of the link above. Research one of the historic organizations mentioned that fought for Black rights. How have the issues they focused on changed (or not) over time? What lessons can you take from these freedom fighters?

The Artist: Benny Bing

Benny Bing is a contemporary Canadian artist who explores themes of identity, gender, and Blackness in his work. Born in Nigeria, Bing has always drawn influence from the pride and beauty in his cultural upbringing. This includes paying homage to the matriarchal family structure he came from, as seen in his art’s focus on empowering portrayals of Black femininity. As a Bajan-Nigerian Canadian, Benny is a living representation of the diaspora whose works positively influence our society.

Benny was a successful professional who started painting as a hobby after receiving paints as a gift. This leisure activity soon unearthed a dormant talent that he translated into a career. He is a reminder to all students that not only will they likely have several careers, but also that it is crucial to have interests and hobbies, as you never know where your passion projects might take you.

⁵ caribana.com/who-we-are/

Curriculum Connections ⁶

Historically, one barrier educators have cited to engaging with new, diverse content is not always understanding how they can bring the curriculum to life. Below are a variety of excerpts from the curriculum that can aid in creation of activities that may integrate this year's Black History Month poster. Some considerations for program planning can be found on page 22 of the curriculum document.

Planning Language Programs for English Language Learners

Ontario schools have some of the most multilingual student populations in the world. The first language of approximately 20 per cent of the children in Ontario's English language schools is a language other than English. Ontario's linguistic heritage includes several Aboriginal languages; many African, Asian, and European languages; and some varieties of English, such as Jamaican Creole. Many English language learners were born in Canada and raised in families and communities in which languages other than English were spoken, or in which the variety of English spoken differed significantly from the English of Ontario classrooms. Other English language learners arrive in Ontario as newcomers from other countries; they may have experience of highly sophisticated educational systems, or they may have come from regions where access to formal schooling was limited.

When they start school in Ontario, many of these children are entering a new linguistic and cultural environment. All teachers share in the responsibility for their English language development. English language learners (children who are learning English as a second or additional language in English-language schools) bring a rich diversity of background knowledge and experience to the classroom. These students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds not only support their learning in their new environment but also become a cultural asset in the classroom community. Teachers will find positive ways to incorporate this diversity into their instructional programs and into the classroom environment.

Antidiscrimination Education in the Language Program – Ontario curriculum, (p. 28)

The implementation of antidiscrimination principles in education influences all aspects of school life. It promotes a school climate that encourages all students to work to high standards, affirms the worth of all students, and helps students strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image. It encourages staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the wider society. It requires schools to adopt measures to provide a safe environment for learning, free from harassment, violence, and expressions of hate.

⁶ The information provided under Curriculum Connections is courtesy of the Ontario Curriculum.
edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/sshg18curr2013.pdf

Antidiscrimination education encourages students to think critically about themselves and others in the world around them in order to promote fairness, healthy relationships, and active, responsible citizenship.

Concepts of Media Literacy Curriculum – Grades 1-7 (pp. 57-142)

Responding to and Evaluating Texts – Grade 4

1.3 express opinions about ideas, issues, and/or experiences presented in media texts, and give evidence from the texts to support their opinions (e.g., “I think this documentary about lions is one-sided because it only shows them as predators” or defend an opinion about whether or not a sitcom or video game reflects reality).

Teacher prompts: “Which elements of this sitcom (or video game) seemed realistic and believable to you? Why? Did anything seem exaggerated?” “Do the characters in the program accurately represent the diversity of society? Explain.”

1. Understanding Media Texts

1.1 identify the purpose and audience for a variety of media texts (e.g., this print advertisement is designed to interest children in taking karate lessons; this website is designed to provide information to fans about a favourite singer; this CD cover is designed to attract classical music fans/pop fans/rap fans). Teacher prompt: “Why do you think this text was created? What age, gender, cultural group is it aimed at? How do you know?”

Media Literacy – Grade 7

1. Understanding Media Texts (p. 142)

Making Inferences/Interpreting Messages

1.2 interpret increasingly complex or difficult media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations (e.g., identify the editorial positions of two different newspapers by comparing the selection of stories and the composition of elements [photos, images, text] on their front pages; identify the themes in a contemporary action movie or comedy and explain how these themes contribute to the popularity of the film; explain how standards of beauty are established in advertising).

Teacher prompts: “What are the differences in the way these sources cover this event? What do the differences tell you about each news source?” “What standards of beauty are projected in movies and advertisements? How do these standards affect students?”

Production Perspectives

1.6 identify who produces various media texts and determine the commercial, ideological, political, cultural, and/or artistic interests or perspectives that the texts may involve (e.g., films may be classified as “artistic,” “commercial,”

“documentary,” and so on, reflecting the different perspectives and approaches they take; one magazine contains a majority of pieces offering a political perspective, whereas another features various pieces written from different perspectives).

Teacher prompt: “Identify two or more perspectives evident on a cereal box. What makes these perspectives apparent? Are different kinds of graphics used for each? Are there differences in the positioning of elements? Is one perspective more dominant than the other? Explain why this might be the case.”

2. Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques

By the end of Grade 7, students will:

2.1 explain how individual elements of various media forms combine to create, reinforce, and/or enhance meaning. Teacher prompt: “Explain how different elements of maps, such as colour (used to show different topographical features) and legends (used to show scale and compass orientation), are used in combination to make maps meaningful.” “Describe the interrelationship of instrumentals, lyrics, and vocals in a favourite song.”

Overall Expectations

By the end of Grade 8, students will:

1. demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts;
2. identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning;
3. create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques; and
4. reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts.

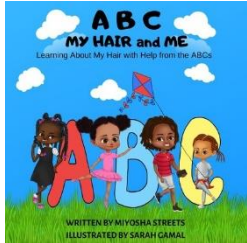
Specific Expectations - a member of a particular age/gender/ethnocultural/socio-economic group might react to a controversial article in a print or online news magazine and give reasons for their prediction.

Language teacher prompt: “Do you think all members of a particular group would react the same way to this issue? Could an older person react the same way as a teenager? Why, or why not?”

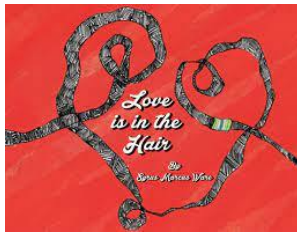
Resource and Media List

All resources for younger grades can be used in older divisions.

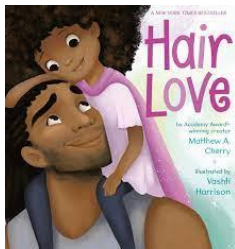
Primary Texts



ABC My Hair and Me, Miyosha Streets; Sarah Gamal, illus.



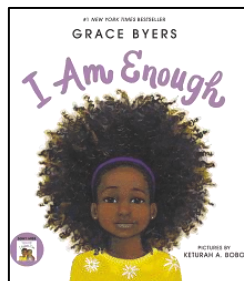
Love is in the Hair, Syrus Marcus Ware



Hair Love, Matthew A. Cherry; Vashti Harrison, illus.



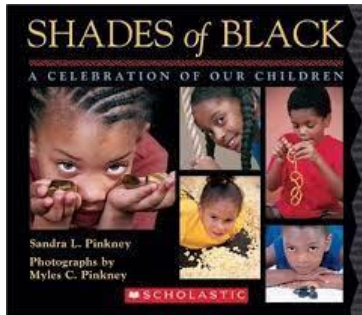
ABC I Love Me, Miriam Muhammad



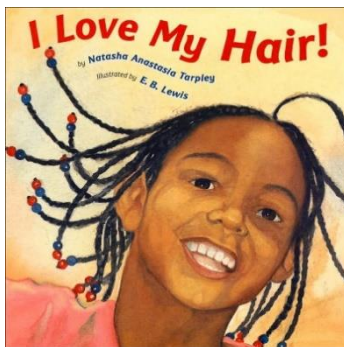
I Am Enough, Grace Byers; Keturah A. Bobo, illus.



Skin Like Mine, Latashia M. Perry; Bea Jackson, illus.



Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children, Sandra L. Pinkney; Myles C. Pinkney, photo.



I Love My Hair, Natasha Anastasia Tarpley; E.B. Lewis, illus.

Junior/Intermediate Videos

[I Love My Hair – Gracie's Corner](#)
[Sheryl Lee Ralph on the Golden Globes Red Carpet](#)
[India Arie – Video](#)
[India Arie – I am not my hair](#)
[Chronnixx – Black is Beautiful](#)