

Michigan Celebrates

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

with Teaching Black History: Lessons from Educators

WEEK 3

February 2024

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

The Michigan Department of Education is excited to showcase lessons from educators to support instruction focused on Black history with a calendar during each week in February in celebration of Black History Month. Teaching diverse perspectives aligned to the work of [Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop](#) to provide students with mirrors and windows to increase engagement in learning throughout the year is a student right and an educator responsibility. Additionally, instruction to honor specific groups of people during recognized heritage months brings emphasis to instructional areas that have not traditionally received adequate time nor attention.

This week's calendar includes five lessons suggested by Michigan educators for Michigan educators. Each educator also shares a personal why for teaching Black history.

February

19

Brecka Arnett

Bridge Academy East, National Heritage Academy

Grade Band:
Preschool–5

Content Area(s):
Social Studies,
Math, Science,
English Language
Arts, Art, Music

Standard(s):
ELA RI.K-5.3

Why do you teach Black History?

In my diverse school that includes 74% Black students, my students need to see and hear the variety of past and present people who have stood for their rights to education and who are doing amazing things for our nation. My students need to know that there are people who look like them and sound like them doing amazing things and have been for a long time. But it is important to teach Black history across Michigan for the classrooms that are not as diverse as mine so that everyone is made aware of the amazing things of the past and currently going on through Black communities around Michigan and the world.

Lesson Description/Summary: I alternate days reading from [Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History](#) one day and [Little Leaders: Exceptional Men in Black History](#) another. We chart the name and the important things they are known for, where they live, how old they were when they made an impact, and lastly how their actions impact us today.

Resource: [Little Leaders Books and Resources](#)

February

20

Bruce Geffen

A2 Virtual+ Academy, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Grade Band: 9–12

Content Area(s): Social Studies, English Language Arts

Standard(s):
SS D2 & 3 - P1.2 and P2.4.
USHG 7.2.3 & WHG 7.2.6;
ELA RI.9-12.1, 2, & 6

Why do you teach Black History?

I teach it because it is OUR history! It is part of ALL of us!

Lesson Description/Summary: How the African American Press covered the daily occurrences and events of the Holocaust.

Resource: [Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust](#)

February

21

Kimberli McMahan

Adams Elementary, Midland Public Schools

Grade Band: 3–5

Content Area(s):
Social Studies,
World Language

Standard(s):
SS 3-C5.0.1
P1.1, P2.1, P3.4

Why do you teach Black History?

I believe that teaching Black history is important in order to understand the experience of our Black students and families, and to take action to stand alongside them to prevent racism and exclusion. In our district, there are very few Black students, which I believe makes it even more difficult for those students to feel visible and to feel a sense of deep belonging, which they deserve. I teach Black history to my extra-curricular 5th grade Culture Club by inviting the Black Student Alliance from Dow High School (one of the high schools in our district) to present on Black history, Juneteenth, the current experience of Black people in the U.S. and in our district, Black representation in the media, and more. It is eye-opening for my students and educates them in an authentic way as they learn from Black students in our district. I always encourage them to be allies to our Black students if they see examples of exclusion or racism.

As a World Language Teacher (I teach four languages and the culture of the countries where those languages are spoken), I take great care to teach the history of Black people in other countries, as well. When we study French, we learn about Haiti, for example, and how the uprising of people who were enslaved came years before the Civil War, including how it has contributed to their current state of poverty, and how we can take action. When we study Spanish, we talk about the Dominican Republic (DR), for one, and students learn about the history there, I dispel the notion that Spanish-speaking people are always light-skinned brown people from Mexico. We learn about the famous baseball players that come from the DR, as well as the Black history of people across the Spanish-speaking world. In elementary school (K-5), my students are learning Black history around the world, and applying the lessons they learn to develop an open-minded, welcoming, activist world view.

Lesson Description/Summary: To connect students with Black leaders and historical figures; to educate young students about the diversity of Black people; to empower students to take action as allies for Black students who experience injustice.

February

22

John Stempien

Lowell Middle School, Lowell Area Schools

Grade Band: 6–8

Content Area(s):
Social Studies

Standard(s):
SS 8 – U4.3.2

Why do you teach Black History?

The “why” is to discover, include, and finally synthesize marginalized histories, such as Black history, for a clearer understanding of where we have been and how we move forward.

Lesson Description/Summary: Students read selected chapters of Frederick Douglass’s biography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Selected scenes from the PBS docudrama—*The Abolitionists*, are also used to supplement the text. Students cite passages from the biography, identifying the consequences of the slave system.

Resource: [Focus on Frederick Douglass](#)

February

23

Jennifer Van Every

Upton Elementary, Royal Oak Schools

Grade Band: 3–5

Content Area(s):
Social Studies,
English Language
Arts

Standard(s):
ELA RI 3.1 & 7,
SL 3.3 & 4, RI 4.3,
SL 4-5.1 & 4

Why do you teach Black History?

My “why” for teaching Black history is because it is American history! My 4th and 5th graders learn to understand perspectives as the focus for social studies education. We consider the multiple viewpoints of people now and throughout history and understand that each person’s story should be seen and heard. Our classes do not focus on the lives, struggles, and accomplishments of Black Americans for one month out of the year, but the entire year.

Lesson Description/Summary: Each year I take the month of February to highlight the lives, contributions, and stories of famous (and lesser known) African Americans. Students learn about a different person or event each day through stories and videos. At the end of the month, they have the opportunity to create a collaborative Google Slide deck that we share with each other to play a Guess Who? game from their research.

Thank you to all of the Michigan educators who shared their why for teaching Black history and submitted their lessons. Look for the next set of lessons on **Thursday, February 22, 2024**. For diverse literature recommendations please visit MDE’s [Equity in Literacy webpage](#).

