

**Localizing Black History:
An Introduction to the Fort Erie & Greater Buffalo - Niagara Region's Black History**

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Abstract

I selected localizing Black history as my research area of focus as growing up a mixed person of colour, I rarely learned about Black history within local contexts as I will introduce you to within this project. Though not taught the full scope of Canadian history during my time as a student in the NCDSB (Niagara Catholic District School board), I was one of the lucky few whose parents took the time to provide tid-bits of information about the rich Black History Fort Erie and the Greater Buffalo Niagara region is home to. My goal and aim with this project is to eliminate future students walking down the streets of their hometowns not knowing about the incredible history around them. The research methodology used for this project was performed primarily through archival research at the Fort Erie Historical Museum, the African Corridor in Buffalo NY, as well as online discovery research. However, in order to grasp the gaps missing in current education, and what avenue to take with the product of the project I took advisement from local Black champions pushing for Black education. In my findings most of the past education surrounding Black History in school's until recently has been plagiarized from America. While these two nations share a deep-rooted history, for far too long has Canada has adopted the same Black history narratives as the US, highlighting amazing Black change makers such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King; however, it has failed to mention Canada's change makers. Currently, there has been an influx to introduce some of Canada's Black history into "The Ontario Curriculum;" however, just the word "Black," is only mentioned 14 times for grades 3 – 8, to compare the word "British" which is used 63 times. While the curriculum mentions Black history 14 times, it is not always taught, and is usually a topic, module, or unit that is 'missed,' in order to ensure the central focus of the course is completed in its entirety. The archival research completed for this project and subsequent curriculum developed demonstrates the rich local Black history of the Fort Erie and Greater Buffalo Niagara region for those living within these areas and will provide middle school educators with a way in which to introduce this rich history to students in this region.

Reflection

Throughout my escapades conducting archival research I spoke with many incredible people, some new faces and some familiar. This project has been incredibly rewarding as over the last four months, I have discovered I live dap smack in the middle of old Black settlements, around the corner from a freedom ferry landing, and most importantly I have had the opportunity to finally feel connected to my home, in a way I never had before. Upon my research there is one main article I would like to highlight as well as share a quote. "Museum Holds Evidence of Slavery," written by Tiffany Meyer spoke with "Ford," who eloquently described a recurring thought I have had throughout my research when reflecting on how Canada views Black history, *"instead we look down our noses at our southern neighbors with a jaundice eye."* Further in her article Meyer spoke with Angelo Di Ianni who said, *"I could not at this point, point out a specific lesson or grade that (slavery in Canada) might be Covered. My suspicion is, this is a fact that's not very well dealt with."* (Mayer, 2006) This article provided me with 3 main frames of clarity.

One I was not delusional in my feeling that Canada has white-out at history and approached racism with a smile. Two that there is a strong need for acknowledgement of our Black history and the best way of doing so is through our education system. Three, the optimal way of action is for me to start right here at home localizing Black history.

Classroom Context

Classroom Size: up to 40 **Grades:** 7 -8 (Ages 12- 14) **Location:** Fort Erie / Niagara Region

Kingston & Niagara Region Land Acknowledgement:

Kingston Ontario is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat. We acknowledge the traditional lands we have settled on and are thankful and respectful of the environment we are surrounded by. Kingston is on Lake Ontario, at the mouth of the Cataraqui and St. Lawrence rivers (City of Kingston, 2021).

There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today. The Regional Municipality of Niagara stands with all Indigenous people, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live. We recognize that we must do more to learn about the history and current situation of Indigenous people. This will help us better understand our roles and take responsibility towards reconciliation as treaty people, residents, and caretakers. It is my understanding that this territory is included in the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Ojibwe and Allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Black History Topic and The Importance of Localizing History

History Period: Black History in Fort Erie and the Greater Buffalo Niagara Region

Topic Overview:

As debates expand over the newly politicized inclusion of critical race theory to elementary and secondary teaching institutions, a key component of critical race theory is establishing the knowledge of local history. Currently in the NDSB and the NCDSB there are no solidified units in history or social studies that capture Fort Erie and the Greater Buffalo Niagara regions history to include Black or Indigenous stories. The colonized writing of history has white-out POC stories and how they were integral parts in establishing the state of our societies and communities today.

Importance of Localizing Black History:

Discovering the untold and forgotten Black stories and history that have shaped our local communities, in hopes to provide a full view of our local history, while celebrating Black revolutionaries and change makers.

Week Overview

| Day | Topic and Guiding Question | Objectives | Activities |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 1 | Topic: What is Black history? Guiding question: Why is Black history separate from ‘regular’ history? | 1.) What is the current understanding of Canadian Black history? 1a.) What is known about local black history? 2.) Who wrote history? 3.) Discovering the importance of the inclusion of BIPOC history | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness quiz • Word map • Videos • Homework – students to read and answer questions from the Tiffany Mayer article |
| 2 | Topic: Fort Erie – People and Places <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Josiah Henson - Aunt Betsy - Burr Plato - Harriet Tubman Fort Erie Landmarks & Little Africa | 1.) Establishing the Black stories of our backyard 2.) Adding local Canadian voices to black history month | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split class into four groups, each group to read about one local person and summarize their story on chart paper • Videos • Homework – students to read & write a reflective piece on the Crystal Beach riot |
| 3 | Topic: Fort Erie & Buffalo a shared cross border history <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Underground railroad - Niagara Movement NAACP - War’s | 1.) Establishing the black stories of our backyard 2.) Adding local Canadian voices to Black history month 3.) Connecting the intertwined Black history of the US & Canada | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kahoot awareness quiz • Videos • Homework – students to find examples of modern /local Black history to present on day 4 |
| 4 | Topic: Niagara Region & Modern Black History <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buffalo - St. Catherine’s - Niagara Falls - Modern Stories | 1.) Connect the past with the present – see the progress 2.) Identify areas of change needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos • Student presentations |
| 5 | Topic: Site Tour / Scavenger hunt | 1.) Talking a walk through the past, identifying landmarks and seeing where both those enslaved and freed lived, worked, and found peace. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field trip to local spots • 2 page reflection on local Black history introduction week / feedback |

What is Black History in Canada?

| 1. Lesson Information | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Unit/Topic of Lesson What is Black history?</p> <p>Guiding question: Why is Black history separate from ‘regular’ history</p> <p>Length of Lesson 75 minutes</p> | <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Word map ● Awareness quiz ● Videos | |
| 2. Materials, Equipment and Technical/Other Requirements | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chart paper or white/chalk board & markers or chalk - Computer with speaker (for teacher to use) - Projector/ screen - Internet to access YouTube | | |
| 3. Learning Goal/Success Criteria: What will students/participants learn by the end of the session? | | |
| <p>Learning Goal: We are learning about what Black history is, and the importance of the inclusion of black history</p> <p>Student Success Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student understands what Black history is ● Student can describe why Black history is separate / has its own month ● Student can describe why it is important to include Black history in history | | |
| 4. Lesson Plan Activities | Timing | Notes / Homework |
| 1. Awareness Quiz | 5 Minutes | Appendix item 1 |
| 2. Write the words “Black history” on the center of the chart paper. Ask class “what do you know about black history?” | 25 minutes | |
| 3. Watch these videos: Canadian Black History Overview Niagara Region Black History Brief | 10 Minutes | Appendix item 2 - Simcoe article Appendix item 3 – Chloe Cooley excerpt |
| 4. Teacher to read Simcoe article | 20 minutes | |
| 5. Students silent read on slide expert | | |
| 6. Watch these videos: Intro to Chloe Cooley Chloe Cooley - The end of Slavery | | |
| 7. Ask students what they noticed from the videos. What was in these videos that were not already included on our brainstorming notes? | 15 minutes | Appendix item 4 - Tiffany Mayer homework reading |
| 8. Ask students: a.) What do we think happened with Chloe Clooney? b.) How do you think Chloe Clooney really impacted the change John Simcoe fought for? | | |

Fort Erie’s Black History

| 1. Lesson Information | |
|--|---|
| <p>Unit/Topic of Lesson How do we localize Black history? Fort Erie's Black History in review</p> <p>Guiding question: Where can we find local black history?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Length of Lesson 75 minutes | <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Split class into four groups, each group to read about one local person and summarize their story on chart paper ● Videos ● Homework – students to read & write a reflective piece on the Crystal Beach riot |

| 2. Materials, Equipment and Technical/Other Requirements |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● White board and markers ● Chart paper and markers ● Internet ● Notebook / paper or GoogleDocs for students to write down their thoughts |

| 3. Learning Goal/Success Criteria: What will students/participants learn by the end of the session? |
|---|
| <p>Learning Goal: We are learning about local Black stories and places to highlight history in our own backyard in hopes to promote localizing and actively searching for local Black history.</p> <p>Success Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student understands how to locate / research local Black history in his/her town ● Student can describe how local Black history helped shaped current society ● Student can detail local Black history stories, and pioneers in their town |

| 4. Lesson Plan Activities | Timing | Notes / Homework |
|--|------------|--|
| 1.) Split class up into four groups, each one to read a provided article on a local Black person, and provide summary for the class | 30 minutes | Appendix items 5 – 6 (Appendix item 6&7 additional resources for people) |
| 2.) Teacher to go over important details of each person, providing a more thorough and clear outline of each individuals life i.) Videos included on slides: Burr Plato Josiah Henson Harriet Tubman | 20 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Josiah Henson” ● “Josiah Henson arrives to make new life” ● “The Underground Railway & Aunt Betsy” ● “Betzy (Betsy) Robinson” ● “Torontonion Discovers Family’s links to Underground Railroad” ● “Harriet Tubman Tribute” |
| 3.) Teacher to give lesson on each ‘place’ to include main details: Where it is, why its historical | 25 minutes | <p>Appendix 8 – 13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Ferried to freedom” ● “Little Africa” - Map of little Africa ● “Bertie Hall” ● “Forsyth Ferry Landing & St. Paul’s Anglican Church” ● “Erie Beach Hotel” ● “Black Creek Tavern” <p>Homework article – Appendix item 14 Read & Reflect</p> |

Fort Erie & Buffalo a Shared Cross Border History

| 1. Lesson Information | |
|---|---|
| Unit/Topic of Lesson Connecting two nations through a shared history Guiding question: Why can we not separate American and Canadian Black history? Length of Lesson 75 minutes | Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kahoot quiz • Videos |

| 2. Materials, Equipment and Technical/Other Requirements |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chart paper or white/chalk board & markers or chalk - Computer with speaker (for teacher to use) - Projector/ screen - Internet to access YouTube - Computers, Ipad, or cellphones (for kahoot use only) |

| 3. Learning Goal/Success Criteria: What will students/participants learn by the end of the session? |
|--|
| Learning Goal: We are learning about how the deeper rooted local history between Fort Erie and Buffalo makes it so U.S and Canadian Black history always remain shared, yet with their own Unique storylines Student Success Criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student understands why our history is shared / how • Student can describe how our histories work together yet how they are still uniquely their own • Student can describe how without each other; each respective Black history would look very different now |

| 4. Lesson Plan Activities | Timing | Notes / Homework |
|---|------------|--|
| 1.) Kahoot Recap Kahoot | 5 Minutes | Appendix items 15 – 22 |
| 2.) Videos What is the underground railroad? How the railroad worked Harriet Tubman & the Railroad | 54 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Civil Rights Meetings: • “Negro troops helped keep order among Irish” • “Runchey’s Company of men: the black as a soldier” • “Black Canadian and the war of 1812-1814” • “The black as a soldier in early years of Niagara” |
| 3.) Teacher to provide lesson on the Niagara Movement, NAACP & Wars / Conflict | 15 minutes | Homework: |
| 4.) Open discussion on Crystal Beach Riot | | 1.) Find an example of a modern Black story that makes you feel inspired 2.) Find a piece of Black history in the region |

Niagara Region & Modern Black History

| 1. Lesson Information | |
|--|---|
| Unit/Topic of Lesson Remembering Black history and safeguarding it's future Guiding question: How can we honour the past and safeguard the future? Length of Lesson 75 minutes | Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos / lecture • Student presentations |

| 2. Materials, Equipment and Technical/Other Requirements |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Computer with speaker (for teacher to use) - Projector/ screen - Internet to access YouTube |

| 3. Learning Goal/Success Criteria: What will students/participants learn by the end of the session? |
|--|
| Learning Goal: We are learning about what Black history is, and the importance of the inclusion of black history Student Success Criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student understands what Black history is • Student can describe why Black history is separate / has its own month • Student can describe why it is important to include Black history in history |

| 4. Lesson Plan Activities | Timing | Notes / Homework |
|--|--|--|
| 1.) Teacher to provide lesson on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffalo • Niagara Falls / St. Catharines Black Settlement St. Catharines • Niagara on the Lake • BLM <hr/> 2.) Student Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 minutes per student | 20 Minutes 1hour & 20 minutes | Remind students to start preparing their two-page reflection after the tour on day 5 (Friday) to be complete by Monday |

Site Tour / Lunch

| 1. Lesson Information | |
|---|--|
| <p>Unit/Topic of Lesson Seeing history</p> <p>Guiding question: Why is it important to take time to visit the places discussed in days 1-4?</p> <p>Length of Lesson Full Day 7 hours</p> | <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tour ● Lunch ● Reflection |

| 2. Materials, Equipment and Technical/Other Requirements |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signed parent / guardian consent form for students - Bus |

| 3. Learning Goal/Success Criteria: What will students/participants learn by the end of the session? |
|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: We have learned about Black history and the importance of the inclusion of Black history, this tour will provide the opportunity for student to connect the history with the land by seeing the historical sites discussed in days 1-4.</p> <p>Student Success Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student can identify the site and recall the correlating in class lesson ● Student can describe the main events that took place the location ● Student can describe the Black people(s) that lived and or crossed at that location |

| 4. Lesson Plan Activities | Timing | Notes / Homework |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1.) Erie Beach Hotel – nature walk 2.) The Old Fort 3.) Forsyth Ferry Landing 4.) Lunch at Black Creek Tavern 5.) Little Africa & Colored Cemetery 6.) Bertie Hall (Dolls House) 7.) St. Paul’s Anglican Church | 1 hour 1 hour 30 minutes 1.5 hours 1 hour 1 hour 30 minutes | |
| Q&A for final written assignment / opportunity to start working on assignment | 30 minutes | Students to write two-page reflection |

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