AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY THROUGH THE ORAL TRADITION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

Renee Bos and Robert Coffman, Howard County Public Schools
Ellicott City, Maryland
## Our System

77 Schools  
42 elementary schools  
20 middle schools  
12 high schools  
3 education centers  

Total Enrollment: 56,799* 
Pre-K: 1,314  
Elementary (K–5): 24,978  
Middle (6–8): 13,180  
High (9–12): 17,233  
Special School: 94  
*Official count (9/30/17)

## Our Students

### Race/Ethnicity FY18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Students Receiving Special Services FY17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced-price Lunch</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ltd. English Proficient</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW WERE WE TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN MIDDLE SCHOOL?
African American History in Middle School

- Embedded into curriculum in Social Studies
  - 6th grade regional Geography and Cultures Unit on Africa
  - 8th grade US History colonies to 1877.
- ELA curriculum
- Black Saga Competition
Black Saga

Quiz/Trivia based competition to memorize facts about African American history.

William Tucker

1st African American born in the colonies, The first African-American man born in the Americas, he was a free man. In 1660, slavery was first recognized by Virginia law.
New Goals

Create a more in-depth experience of African American history for middle school students that reflected our district’s priorities of:

● Empowering students
● Student centered learning
● Constructivist learning
● Inquiry learning
● Reading and writing from authentic sources
● A community interest in moving from Black Saga competition to the Frederick Douglass oratory competition.
● Reflecting research on the best practices for teaching African American history.
WHAT DID WE DO?

We worked with community groups, teachers, and students, to create a course that we think is unique.
African American History Based on the Oral Tradition.

- Introduction: African Heritage and the Slave Trade (not a full unit)
- Unit 1: The Slave Community
- Unit 2: War, Reconstruction, Reaction, and Reform
- Unit 3: “The New Negro”
- Unit 4: The Depression, World War II, and the Cold War
- Unit 5: The Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movements
- Unit 6: Contemporary African American Thought
Each unit is structured around:

- Essential Questions
- Background Information (very basic)
- Selection of speeches
- Socratic seminar
- Oratorical practice
- Oratorical final project
WE’D RATHER SHOW YOU THAN TELL YOU...
Groups of 5

As a group of 5 you will be speed racing through a unit in our curriculum. From start to finish (sort of).
Unit 6: Contemporary African American Thought

Essential Questions:

● How has the expansion of African American wealth impacted African American culture and experience?
● What is the driving force behind the Black Lives Matter movement? How does this connect to patriotism? To white privilege?
● How has mass incarceration impacted the African American experience in the United States?
1st we provide some context for students, below is an example.

- Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise
Directions

- On each table is a folder with speeches.
- Each person should choose a speech, read the speech, and feel free to highlight and annotate the speech with any important information or words you find inspirational.
- If you have time, do some background research on the author, the occasion the speech was given, or the time period your speech was delivered.
- You have about 20 minutes.

Think About

- How has the expansion of African American wealth impacted African American culture and experience?
- What is the driving force behind the Black Lives Matter movement? How does this connect to patriotism? To white privilege?
- How has mass incarceration impacted the African American experience in the United States?
As a table talk about each of the following questions, try to use as much textual evidence to support your answers as possible.

- How has the expansion of African American wealth impacted African American culture and experience?
- What is the driving force behind the Black Lives Matter movement? How does this connect to patriotism? To white privilege?
- How has mass incarceration impacted the African American experience in the United States?
CHALLENGES AND KEYS TO MAKING THIS WORK
Our Staff FY17

• 4,675 classroom teachers, 74% of whom hold a master’s degree or above
• Total staff: 8,435
(10/16–10/17)

Staff Race/Ethnicity† FY18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

†Total is >100% due to rounding.
Training Teachers

- Best practices for teaching African American history
- Providing background knowledge
- Discussing themes
  - African Americans do not have a single experience or perspective.
  - There is both personal and systemic racism.
  - There has always been a civil rights movement, it changes throughout eras.
  - African American leaders have formed alliances with other oppressed groups to work for civil and human rights.
  - Intersectionality
  - Patriotism is an integral part of African American history.
Results and Course Preview

https://tinyurl.com/hcpssafram
Practice Oratory:

- Pick a section of the speech you read today that particularly spoke to you.
- Spend a few minutes determining how you would give this speech.
If you’re always trying to be normal you will never know how amazing you can be.

- Maya Angelou