

PWS UPDATE

Park West School Newsletter

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February 25, 2019 African Heritage Month Edition

Every year, for the month of February, Canadians are invited to participate in **Black History / African Heritage Month** festivities and events that honour the legacy of Canadians of African and Caribbean descent, past and present. Canadians take this time to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of black Canadians who, throughout history, have done so much to make Canada the culturally diverse, compassionate and prosperous nation it is today. During African Heritage Month (as it is called in Nova Scotia), Canadians can gain insight into the experiences of black Canadians and their vital role in the community. 2019 marks the 23rd anniversary since Black History Month was first officially celebrated by the Government of Canada. The month-long celebration was formally recognized following a motion introduced in the House of Commons in December 1995 by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Honourable Jean Augustine. The motion was carried unanimously by the House of Commons in December 1995 and the Government of Canada officially celebrated Black History Month for the first time in 1996. In honour of this 23rd anniversary, the Government of Canada is recognizing this important milestone through its events and promotional materials, including its educational poster (several are on display here at Park West). African Heritage Month will highlight key milestones and courageous accomplishments of those who helped shape Canada's history. We recognize contributions and moments from early settlement, the abolition of slavery, the Underground Railroad, icons such as Viola Desmond, and notable black Canadians in all fields (*including education, healthcare, inventions, science, academics, law and justice, civil and human rights, sports, entertainment, art, literature, politics, the military*) who have played defining roles in Canada's history. Lots has happened at our school and in our classrooms this month to honour and celebrate Canadians of African descent. Our students (in grades primary to 9) have learned so much about their contributions to the rich diversity of our province, country, and world.

- In **grade 4 Ross/Matheson** the students are learning about African-Canadian icon Viola Desmond. They are reading books and watching videos about her life and courageous actions. They will create a storyboard that tells her story. They will also be doing a collaborative art project featuring her.
- In **music the grade primary classes** are learning several African "Hello" songs and games with their music teacher, Ms. Moen. Jambo!
- **Ms. Francis and her grade one class** are reading lots of picture books to learn more about African heritage. They read Martin's Big Words, and wrote about their dreams for the world. They then created hand print collages depicting peace and unity. They read a book about Viola Desmond, and will be reading Henry's Freedom Box (by Henry "Box" Brown), Salt In His Shoes (by Michael Jordan), Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad (by Faith Ringgold), and Up Home (by local author Shauntay Grant).
- **Ms. Joseph's grade 3 class** watched a film about Martin Luther King Jr.. They travelled back in time to do a comparison between his youth and present times. They watched a Brain Pop presentation about Rosa Parks, and then recorded facts in their non-fiction journals about what they had learned. They created colourful portraits of famous African Americans and Canadians. They discussed civil rights, discrimination, and ways to solve problems using non-violent ways. They brainstormed what positive changes they envision for society, and our world, and might have to stand up for in the future.
- During African Heritage Month, **Ms. Comeau (our school librarian)**, is reading aloud to classes a variety of books about African culture, the countries of Africa, that feature the stories of people of African descent (and where they are the main characters), books that are written by black authors, and, generally focusing on African Canadian authors. There are lots of African heritage themed posters on display in our library.
- In **grade 2 Ms. Webber** has her students busy working on creating African themed art within the context of the science related topics of adaptation and habitats. They have been reading some African folk tales and books, such as White Socks Only, Ruby Bridges, and The Freedom Quilt.
- **Ms. Gouthro's grade 6 class** have been learning how to differentiate between the terms *bias, prejudice, discrimination, and racism*. They realize how they interrelate. They've discussed the importance of these terms and how to use them appropriately. They've been connecting these terms (and their meanings) to outcomes they're covering in English Language Arts and Health. They are engaging in an activity to learn about segregation in the world around us. They have become more aware of the inequalities that still exist in our world. They have determined that education is the key for us to be able to change the world, and to support one another. They are using their newly-learned technology skills to do research on notable African Nova Scotians and their contributions to society. Each student will be preparing a slide presentation on an individual from Nova Scotia. They are going to teach one other about these valuable community members in our own province (i.e. who they are, what achievements they have accomplished, challenges they faced, and our own opinions/values - how we feel, things we learned.).
- Students in our **strings ensemble** (under the direction of their teacher, Mr. Joyce) learned to play and presented (at a recent concert here at PWS) the following pieces by composers of African descent: Hymn to Freedom (by Canadian jazz great, Oscar Peterson), This Little Light of Mine (written by Harry Dixon Loes), and The Lion Sleeps Tonight (originally recorded by Solomon Linda in Zulu – one of South Africa's 11 official languages).
- In observance of African Heritage Month **Ms. MacDonald's grade 5 class** is researching the lives of African Canadians who have made significant contributions to Canadian life and society. The students are writing short biographies highlighting their contributions. In addition, they will create posters in honour of the individuals they have researched.
- Students in **1 – Kostlac** have been reading lots of books about Viola Desmond, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and other heroes of African descent. They have been discussing how we can better create a peaceful world, where we accept others and treat them with respect and kindness. They are also reading folktales from Africa, learning about some animals that live in Africa, and creating some African-themed art and crafts.

- **Ms. Ssebazza and her grade 2 students** are studying the famous African women Viola Desmond and Rosa Parks, and how they courageously challenged civil rights; causing political, societal, and legal changes in our countries. They are also studying African folktales, with a focus on Anansi the spider.
- **Mr. Nelson's grade 6 students** are learning how people of African descent came to Nova Scotia in the past, and how notable Nova Scotians of the present have contributed to our society in significant and varied ways.
- **Grade 7 students** are creating a puzzle celebrating African heritage and contributions of people of African descent. Each student has selected a notable person of African heritage, an African Nova Scotia community or settlement, or a black inventor (and their invention) to study. Based on what they've learned they will then create a 'puzzle piece' to contribute to the class puzzle.
- Students in **Ms. Seminatore's (Ms. Walker's) grade primary class** have read books about Martin Luther King Jr., and then discussed how he had a dream that everyone could be friends. Students then created pictures of how we can all be friends in a diverse world. They will also be learning about Viola Desmond.
- In **grade 5 – Shupe** students are researching, discussing, and reading about the heroic stories of Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, Viola Desmond, and the people of Africville.
- Our **grade 9** teachers (math, social studies, science, and English language arts) have collaborated to create an impressive co-curricular African heritage themed project for their students. Students have formed groups to research various African countries (chosen by our own students based on their relationships to those countries; such as where they were born, or where they may have family ties). Each subject will be incorporating lessons and projects based on these African country groups and their research. The students will be doing research into culture, history, literature, science, math, economic and political issues, and various socio-economic issues. They will be reading, writing, analyzing, discussing, predicting, problem solving, creating graphs and pictorial depictions, etc. This is the first time we have created and presented such an all-encompassing project that incorporates all four core subject areas at the grade 9 level.
- As part of the grade 9 comprehensive project **Ms. Martin is leading her English Language Arts (ELA)** classes in studying the lives of famous writers from African countries; including Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, Armah from Ghana, and Warsan Shire from Kenya. She has arranged for Kanaar Bell (a Jamaican born Nova Scotian poet) to visit each grade 9 class to make a presentation about his own spoken word poetry, and his process of writing and reciting poetry.
- Students in **Ms. Campbell's grade primary class** have read some books about Martin Luther King Jr.. They have had some meaningful discussions and completed some activities to better understand his accomplishments. They also read about Viola Desmond and made connections to the story of Martin Luther King Jr. They have discussed how everyone should be treated equal, despite their skin colour or where they're from.
- **Ms. McKnight, our art teacher**, is incorporating an African heritage theme into her art program.
 - **Grade 7** students have been working in groups of two to four to create cooperative portraits of influential African-Canadians. They will be displayed in the cafeteria upon completion.
 - **Grade 8** students are researching and celebrating influential, important, and historical places/facilities in relation to African Nova Scotian history and communities. They are creating a whole-grade art collage based on four images: Africville, Seaview Park Church, The Black Cultural Centre, and The Freedom Stone.
 - **Grade 9** students have been working on individual portraits of influential African-Canadian people who inspire them in some way. Some students have chosen great historical figures, while others have chosen individuals who are currently in the spotlight on the music scene, sports, or on-screen.
 - Ms. McKnight is also working on a project with students in **Ms. Leon's grade 6 class**. They are creatively portraying Viola Desmond's likeness at the entrance to their classroom, after learning about her significance.
- In **grade 1 Griswold** they have been reading about and discussing several people that have been influential in making the world a better and more equal place. They include Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, Harriet Tubman, and in particular, Nova Scotian Viola Desmond; a local entrepreneur and trailblazer for racial equality in Canada. She has inspired us to stand up for what is right and fair and to never give up!
- Students in **Ms. Tracey's 5/6 class** have been busy during African Heritage Month. They have read the story Henry Box Brown, and how he mailed himself to freedom during the underground railroad movement. They discussed the significance of the underground railroad; how many found freedom, and new lives. Students then completed a creative activity about where they would mail themselves to freedom. They have been reading about Martin Luther King Jr., and completed an art activity inspired by what they learned about this great man. Each student wrote their own *"I have a dream"*. They read books about and researched Rosa Parks and Viola Desmond, and their contributions to the civil rights movement. They continue their work by researching an African Canadian who has made a positive contribution to society. They will be writing a biography on them, based on their research. They are using their technology skills to create documents, slide shows, and other visuals, to showcase their findings.
- Our **school choir** (under the direction of music teacher, Ms. Kerr) performed an African-themed selection (complete with African drums) at our recent *"Music Night at Park West"* concert.
- **Mr. MacLellan's grade 3 class** has learned about Martin Luther King Jr.. They learned about Peace Doves. They created their own Peace Doves using the finger prints of all students in the class, representing many nations. Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., they shared *their* dreams for the world. They have a field trip planned to the public library to partake in a presentation called *"Melba's Trombone"*. This presentation is adapted from a non-fiction story book, and highlights the historical musical achievements of African women, particularly Melba Doretta Liston.
- On Friday, February 15th, our staff and students in grades primary to nine were treated to a live **performance of West African drumming and dance**, presented by the Africa Festival of Arts and Culture. Students and teachers participated in this interactive presentation by dancing and playing a variety of African drums.

Did You Know? People of African descent are celebrated for many inventions we use and enjoy today. Those inventions include: **air conditioning unit** for trucks (Frederick M. Jones, 1949); **bicycle frame** (L. R. Johnson, 1899); **baby buggy** (W. H. Richardson, 1899); **blood plasma bag** (Charles Drew, 1945); **cellular technology** (Henry T. Sampson, 1971), **clothes dryer** (G. T. Sampson, 1862); **curtain rod** (S. R. Scratton, 1889); **door knob** (O. Dorsey, 1878); **dust pan** (Lawrence P. Ray, 1897); **egg beater** (Willie Johnson, 1884); **automatic elevator doors** (Alexander Miles, 1867); **fire escape ladder** (J. W. Winters, 1878); **golf tee** (T. Grant, 1899); **guitar** (Robert F. Flemming, Jr., 1886); **ironing board** (Sarah Boone, 1887); **key chain** (F. J. Loudin, 1894); rotary blade **lawn mower** (L. A. Burr, 1889); **peanut products** (George Washington Carver, 1896); **refrigerator** (J. Standard, 1891); **stove** (T. A. Carrington, 1876); **traffic light** (Garrett Morgan, 1923); **tricycle** (M. A. Cherry, 1886); **GPS technology** (Dr. Gladys West)

