

Ways to Celebrate Black History Month with Your Child

Celebrate Black History Month with these 28 ideas, one for each day of February, that recognize the heritage, accomplishments and culture of African Americans in the United States.

1. Share with students "I, Too, Sing America" poet Langston Hughes and have a discussion about the poem's vocabulary, rhythm, and meaning.
2. Bake sweet potato biscuits, a traditional food treat, with this delicious recipe.
3. Listen to the blues and then invite students to compose their own 12-bar blues music.
4. Conduct a read-aloud of Dr. Martin Luther Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech, then students to write their own speeches about what they are inspired to change in the world.



Many different activities can help children appreciate Black History Month.

5. Play the African counting game Mancala. To make the game board, use a large egg carton (cut off the lid) and tape an extra cup (cut from another carton) to each end.
6. View an interactive timeline chronicling "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow" and other historical events, such as the ratification of the 14th Amendment.
7. See James Karales's photographs of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery civil rights marches.
8. Examine these oral histories from elderly African Americans in Elbert County, Georgia, and Abbeville County, South Carolina on the National Park Service website.
9. For older students, share excerpts from *Push*, a novel by Sapphire, and clips from the film *Precious*. Host a discussion about the culture *Precious* grows up in, and how she overcomes adversity with education.
10. Share excerpts of contemporary novelist Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* with students and, using the reading guide, have a discussion about her portrayal of white and black middle-class kids in America.
11. Teach about the importance of journalism as well as its limitations by exploring a variety of clippings from the freedom rides of 1961 to the reporting on Malcolm X's assassination.
12. Watch student-made digital stories on important African Americans. Divide students into groups to make their own digital stories about a person of their choice.
13. Teach students the songs of the civil rights movement, such as "This Little Light of Mine" and "Oh, Freedom." Discuss how the lyrics reflect the defiant and hopeful spirit of the time.
14. Trace the history of the blues from its beginnings in the fields of the South to its global impact on today's music. Visit the Kennedy Center to learn about B. B. King and other musicians.
15. Teach students about director, producer, writer, and actor Spike Lee, a successful and prolific African American filmmaker.
16. Take students through artists' interpretations of freedom and equality with works by Norman Rockwell, Martin Puryear, and many others, in this gallery from the National Endowment for the Humanities. (Enter the gallery, chose "Themes" on the upper right, and then choose "Freedom and Equality.")
17. View artist Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series, which depicts the migration of slaves from the South to the North in search of a better life.
18. Read "A Pledge to Rescue Our Youth" by poet Maya Angelou. Then, watch a video

Upcoming Events

Feb. 27: Black History Program

Feb. 28: Celebrate 100th Day (K-3)

March 24-28: Scholastic Book Fair



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Starr Detroit Academy
19360 Harper Ave.
Harper Woods, MI 48225
313.649.2200
www.starracademy.org



Ways to Celebrate continued...

about her inspiration for this profound piece on youth and education.

19. Learn about the history of hip-hop music, a genre that emerged in the Bronx, New York City, in 1970. Ask students to bring in examples of their favorite songs or dances to discuss.

20. Teach students about Nelson Mandela, his imprisonment, and battle to end apartheid in South Africa. (Follow the link, then scroll down to "South Africa Lesson Plans.")

21. Explore CNN's Black in America, a special report on the modern black experience. Read articles, watch videos, and track population and migration trends going as far back to the late 18th century with an interactive map.

22. Learn about the scientific work of African Americans with these Black History Month resources from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

23. Read excerpts from President Barack Obama's The Audacity of Hope (or his Audacity of Hope speech) and discuss the importance of the election of our country's first black president.

24. Who was the first African American tennis player to win the U.S. Open? Who was the first African American woman elected to U.S. Congress? Find out about many famous firsts in black history on Biography.

25. Tour an online exhibit that marked the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision that changed education and helped end segregation in schools.

Staff Profile: LaTacha Banks



One of the most rewarding moments any teacher can experience is when students grasp a new, difficult concept.

LaTacha Banks says these "aha" moments are what keep her energized in her role at Starr Detroit Academy.

"The most rewarding part of working at SDA is seeing students succeed," Banks said. "I am a strong advocate for education, and when you see a student have one of those moments when they understand a new topic, it's priceless."

Banks is in her second year teaching at Starr Detroit Academy, as she is one of the founding teachers at the school. Teaching at a start-up school allows her to have a profound impact on her students, both in the classroom and in the way the school operates.

"I believe wholeheartedly in the mission statement, core values and the expectations that SDA stands for," Banks said. "I wanted to be a part of something that was new and groundbreaking. Being a part of something from the beginning will give you the opportunity to make a difference in the policy and procedures, but most importantly on the children whose lives we touch each day."

Banks was born in Little Rock, Ark., and holds a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate from Wayne State University. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in reading comprehension. She feels passionate about helping the children of Detroit move on to college and achieve their dreams.

"It feels amazing to state that you are a part of something so unique that is designed for the success of children as well as their families," Banks said. "I must say it's a pleasure to collaborate and work side by side with such a wonderful group of colleagues. My challenge is making sure all stakeholders are buying into a well-rounded culture, and I think we're doing that."