

Relevant Unit

Module 1: African American Community and Culture

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

How did the establishment of free schools for African Americans in 18th- and 19th-century New York help transform the lives and identities of its students?

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Assess how the education received at the African Free School helped create a class of important African American leaders
- Evaluate the importance of education and literacy to the betterment of the New York African American community

Introduction

Read “A Day in the Life of an African Free School Student” available at: <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/history/curriculum.html>

- Compared to what you spend your time learning, what is different and what is the same from what students at the African Free School learned?
- For which careers do you think boys and girls were prepared by what was taught at this school?

Instructional Procedures

Step One:

“Monday morning schedule” available at <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/history/curriculum.html>

Glossary:

Composition	writing to answer a question given by a teacher
Class of merit	a group of honors students
Master	the teacher
Monitor General of Reading	a student assigned to copy that day’s reading lesson on all the individual slates/ chalkboards
Monitor General of Arithmetic	a student assigned to copy that day’s math problems on all the individual slates/ chalkboards
Dismission	being excused from school for lunch

Commence that exercise	do homework
Pay tickets	rewards for right answers are given out as pay by the teacher which can be traded in for toys
Signals for ciphering	math problems that will be assigned later

Divide the class into 7 small groups. Give one of the eight bullet points of the Monday morning schedule out to each group (put bullet points 5 and 6 together).

- Instruct each group to find out who is doing the teaching in that period.
- Gather the seven groups and have them report. Over the course of Monday, who is doing most of the teaching? Is this surprising, or not? Would this be a good way to run a school? Why?

Step Two:

Biographies of seven important leaders from the African Free School: Ira Aldridge, Charles C. Andrews, Samuel E. Cornish, Alexander Crummell, Henry Highland Garnet, James McCune Smith, and John Teasman, available at <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/bios/ira-aldridge.html>.

Assign each of the groups one of the individuals on this website.

- Who is this person?
- How was he connected to the African Free School?
- What, if anything, did he study there?
- What kinds of things did he go on to do as a grown-up?

Gather the class together and discuss the following questions:

- How did the African Free School prepare its students to be leaders in their community?
- How does your school prepare you to be a leader in your community?
- Judging by the contributions made by the seven people reported on by each group, why was establishing the African Free School a good idea for the African American community in New York?

Materials

A Day in the Life of an African Free School Student
<https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/history/curriculum.html>

African Free School Bios from the New York Historical Society
<https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/bios/ira-aldridge.html>