

A GUIDE TO BLACK HISTORY MONTH



Resources, activities, and tips for families to explore and uplift Black History, heritage and culture.

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A QUICK INTRODUCTION

For many of us, 2020 has been a wake-up call to open our eyes, learn and take action against deep-rooted racism ingrained in many levels of society. Our commitment to ending racism is not a one-day job, but a lifelong commitment to better educate ourselves, question our implicit bias or existing racial prejudices and stand up against racism.



But how do we go about ensuring we commit meaningfully to this pledge?

Black History Month (BHM) is an occasion for all of us to ensure that #BlackLivesMatter doesn't stop at a social media hashtag and that our solidarity is not performative. Our quick resource pack is inspired from our publication back in June, [A Parent's Guide To Black Lives Matter](#), and aims to shine the spotlight on the many ways we can ensure both ourselves and our children explore and uplift Black history, heritage and culture.

Participating in Black History Month is important as it encourages us to dedicate a month to educating ourselves about the **multifaceted history** of Black culture and civilisations, aspects that many of us did not get introduced to in school, and to challenge the oversimplification of Black history within society. This month encourages us to view history **centred on the Black experience** and is a step to advocate for more **inclusive education** from the **multitude of ethnic identities** that make up the delicate and important fabric of Black cultural and ethnic groups. Black History Month is an impactful and important springboard to **expand educational horizons** and acknowledge the generational contributions of Black people both **past and present**. **Listening to Black narratives is imperative to understanding where we have been, how far we have come and how far we have to go as a society.**

WHAT IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH?



Black History Month is an annual celebration throughout October that marks the achievements and contributions of Black people across the UK, and puts the spotlight on Black history, heritage, tradition and culture. Talking about Black History at home is a great starting point to create an inclusive space, as well as fill some of the gaps in history lessons and our own personal knowledge.

This October, if you haven't already, **invite children to actively see colour, to see culture, to see history, and to acknowledge that race has an impact on people's life experiences and their world view.**

Black history is **beautiful, far reaching and extremely interesting!** After all, it is part of our everyday lives, the clothes we wear, the music we listen to and everyday items we could not imagine living without.

Whilst October is the official month to mark Black History, this doesn't mean educating ourselves about Black History should be reduced to just four weeks of the year. It's impossible to squeeze thousands of years of history into just 31 days. Black history, and by extension, Black voices, should be heard **365 days a year.** This year has underscored the importance of Black people **leading and contributing** to how their history is presented. This means going beyond one version of history, and **making space for a wider breadth of narratives** of Black History, listening to Black voices, and learning about how history has impacted the lives of real citizens.



WHY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH IMPORTANT?

Black History Month originally aimed to fill the gaps in the education system and combat racism in the 1980s. This aim is still important today, we should all make a conscious effort to learn about the **influence and contributions** of Black people throughout history to make an **inclusive space** for everyone. To appreciate each other better, and to be more grateful for the things we have and where they come from. The children of today will grow up to be the **leaders, business owners and voices of tomorrow**, so the history lessons and perspectives we teach them now, both in school and at home, are the first step in enabling **long-lasting change** and **empowerment** that spans generations.



BLACK HISTORY IS NOT JUST A NARRATIVE OF STRUGGLE

Whilst it is important to underscore the importance of racism both today and throughout history, it is equally important to **celebrate Black achievements, contributions, and history outside a frame of struggle**. It's important to learn about the slave trade, colonialism and civil rights movements, but it is equally important to acknowledge and explore Black History in its own right throughout history.

The ethnic heritage and contributions of Black communities is something valuable that's worth exploring and helps us to acknowledge that **Black history is multidimensional, beautiful and inspirational** with many positive elements. We can all do more to ensure we take the time to understand different cultures, traditions and stories. For example, we can expose our children to different cuisines, Black authors, Black musicians, and Black artists and help our children celebrate diversity. We can also introduce our children to diverse books, films, cartoons, and music to ensure our children do not associate influential heroes, the most 'beautiful' characters, or the loudest voices as solely White. At the same time as introducing our children to new perspectives, ideas and culture, this also allows us to **support Black-owned businesses**, and as such, help reduce some of the economic inequalities faced today. Some directories of Black-owned businesses in the UK can be found at UK [Black Owned](#) and [Black2Business](#).

As well as this, we can and all should recognise the contributions that Black inventors, scientists, artists, musicians and politicians (to name a few), have made towards many of the modern-day amenities that are used everyday, giving them the credit that's well deserved. While Thomas Edison is renowned for inventing the lightbulb, few people know that it was actually an African-American inventor, Lewis Latimer, who invented the **carbon filament** that allows the bulb to function.



Other inventions which were pioneered or greatly improved by Black inventors include the **three-light traffic light system** (Garrett Morgan, 1923), **refrigerated trucks** (Frederick McKinley Jones, 1940) and **the first colour PC monitor** (Mark Dean, 1980). These are just a few great trivia facts that can even set your kids apart from others in their class or friendship group, and a way for children to show off their knowledge about the world (as well as boosting their chances in Trivial Pursuit).

A few interesting historical figures and events to explore (please research your own resources as well):

- 1.) Civil rights movements
- 2.) Key figures such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks
- 3.) Mary Seacole, the brave heroine, traveller, business woman and nurse who defied social expectations of the 19th century.
- 4.) Florence Price, the first African-American woman to be recognised as a symphonic composer



5.) Diane Abbott, Britain's first and longest serving Black MP

6.) John Kent, Britain's first Black police officer

7.) The Windrush Generation, with inspiring people such as Caribbean neurologist Dr Risien Russel, Sam King - the Jamaican RAF pilot and Mayor of London Borough of Southwark. More pioneering figures to explore can be found at [Windrush Foundation](#)

8.) [Black WWI and WWII soldiers](#) such as [Walter Tull](#)

9.) [Black Britons](#) in the Tudor, Edwardian and Victorian Period. For example, John Blanke - Henry VIII's trumpet player!

10.) Black Royals, such as [Omoba Aina](#), a Yoruba princess given to Queen Victoria as a gift. [Dido 'Belle' Lindsay](#), the first dual heritage Black Aristocrat. Prince Alemayehu, son of [Emperor Tewodros II of Ethiopia](#), who at seven-years old was taken to the UK along with looted treasures during the British invasion of Ethiopia in 1868.



The list shouldn't stop here (unfortunately we can't include everyone or our guide would go on for years!) We should, however, all actively research and **make space for less known Black History**.

A part of Black History month is reflecting on how we can broaden historical discourse, which means looking beyond the same famous figures and events. Ways to do this could include supporting Black narratives in **exhibitions, museums and galleries, attending educational visits, reading diverse books, and getting involved in our local community**.

RETHINKING HOW WE SEE AFRICA

Western perception has contributed to portrayals of Africa as an impoverished, suffering 'country' with a dark past, rather than a continent with over a **billion people, 50+ countries and 2000+ languages - each with unique traditions and stories**. It's important to remember that there is so much history to discover, learn and talk about dating from before, and indeed after, the Slave Trade. Child friendly books such as *Amazing Africa* by Atinuke (6 years +), which illustrates Africa country by country, are excellent resources to inspire children to see Africa in all its diversity.



- 1.) **The World Heritage Sites across Africa:** A good place to start to show and celebrate the geographical diversity and natural beauty across the continent. Where would your children like to visit most?

- 2.) **The immensity of Africa's size:** It's hard to visualise just how big Africa is, but actually, you can fit the US, China, India, Japan and many European countries into Africa! You can draw this out to visualise it with your children.

- 3.) **Kingdoms of Ancient and Medieval Africa:** History in Africa didn't start at colonisation. Read up how different African kingdoms and civilisations, such as the Moors contributed to shaping Africa and the world today.

- 4.) **Reconstructing African history outside a lens of slavery and colonisation:** Parents and Older teens can check out the [UNESCO project](#) for more reading. No country in Africa is the same and there are fun ways we can help our children see the world in it's enormity. You could get your children to choose one African country and at dinner-time ask: what is the national language, what is the capital, a famous song from and one interesting thing you found out about their country. Children enjoy showing off their new skills, let them take centre stage!

THINKING ABOUT WINDRUSH

Perhaps you had scarcely heard of Windrush prior to the high-profile political and media attention in 2018, in which hundreds of Caribbean people in the UK were unlawfully wrongly targeted by immigration enforcement laws after being granted indefinite leave to remain. This saw many elderly Caribbean people wrongfully deported to their countries of origin, stripped of their citizenship and rights - with some sadly passing away due to their treatment.

The [National Archives](#) quotes that “**between 1948 and 1970 nearly half a million people left their homes in the West Indies to live in Britain**” to help to rebuild the UK after the Second World War. Not only did so many of the Windrush generation lose their lives due to deportation, when they initially arrived in the UK upon invitation on behalf of the Commonwealth to work, they were met with extreme racism, prejudice and hatred. Many often found themselves without the means to return back to their home countries once they had arrived, meaning some had no choice but to stay.

It's therefore important to explore, discover and discuss the impact and influence of Caribbean presence in the UK, as well as understand Caribbean history in its own right. This helps us to not only celebrate Caribbean culture and history, but contributes to better contextualising the difficulties faced from the Windrush scandal. The Windrush generation had a significant impact on British culture, they brought reggae, ska, dub, amazing food and so much more to the UK. Many people are not aware of the extent to which the Caribbean community has permanently fortified and shaped British music, fashion and culture today.

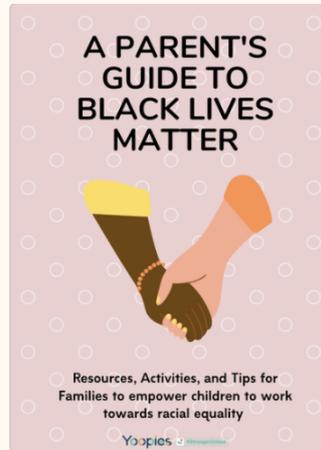
Some family friendly resources on Caribbean history, culture and heritage, as well as their impact on British culture can be found at:

- 1.) [The Windrush Foundation](#): a selection of fantastic downloadable resources that incorporate music, geography and history in an engaging way for children.
- 2.) [National Archives](#): Caribbean History revealed



Thank you for exploring our guide! We hope that your Black History Month will be inspiring and interesting.

Providing our children with resources from the Black Community is a great way to start the conversation. We have a list of diverse resources for all age groups which can be found in our full guide: ["Parent's Guide to Black Lives Matter"](#).



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