The Word.
Assistant Superintendent
Fatima Morrell, Ed. D.

28 Days

Welcome to Black History Month,

Why have we decided as a country that we should encapsulate the entire depth and breadth of the historical greatness and genius of the African American people into 28 days? For our scholars, February amounts to even fewer contact days however, once we subtract the days for our winter recess and weekends. We actually only have approximately 15 days to attempt the impossible endeavor of empowering our African American and Afro-Latino students via African and African American curriculum inclusion in schools. Of course, Black people are proud to have the opportunity to highlight the achievements of the ancestors who have made valuable contributions and offered their intellectual footprint in the establishment, building and shaping of America. Be that as it may, it is long overdue that we recognize the notion of compressing the vast legacy of intellectual greatness and African American contributions to society into 28 short days is quite farcical. Indeed, it is troubling that historically, we have only been able to educate all students in our country from a Eurocentric educational framework, even when the population of students we serve are predominantly black. Should not black and brown students see people who look like them in their textbooks, learning materials, and artifacts and images reflected in the school the same as any other children? We need a curriculum of inclusion and systemic daily practices that empower students through recognition of their cultural heritage, historical contributions of their ancestors, and a pedagogy of social justice, for each school day of the year. This is one of the reasons why the work of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and curriculum inclusion to address the diversity of the students we serve, is so vitally important and critical. If such a curriculum was in place and implemented at a high level, would there still be a need for 28 days of African American historical highlights and truth telling?

We pay homage and give honor to Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who established Negro History week in February, 1926, which later became Black History Month. It is time to fully integrate African American history and culture into our daily educational practices. The work of creating a curriculum that reflects the diversity of our students is critical. The celebration of Black History Month should be an ongoing endeavor that is integrated into the curriculum on a daily basis. This is why Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT) is so important in schools.

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It should be noted that Dr. Woodson was responding to a time period of Jim Crowism and second class citizenship for Blacks in America. He was rightfully, very much concerned with the history of students of African descent not being recognized as valuable to American society, as Black people were marginalized in almost every dimension of American culture, and surely omitted from all aspects of educational and civic engagement. In his 1933 seminal work, the Mis-Education of the Negro, Woodson explained how Blacks were being culturally indoctrinated rather than taught to think for themselves in schools. He understood that Blacks were being disempowered in the educational system and thus, would be mentally and physically dependent upon oppressive systems that would maintain them in places of intellectual inferiority for generations to come. We are thankful for the diligent efforts and foresight of Dr. Woodson, that African American culture and history are even recognized at all. It can be stated with a certain degree of certainty that Dr. Woodson never intended for the history and culture of African Americans to be relegated to just 28 days or 15 short school days for our scholars. However, federal recognition of the month occurred in 1976, and that was a great first step to uplifting the voices of so many who have been left out of the annals of American History for no reason other than the melanin levels of their skin.

At any rate, since we have these 15 days in which to include the historical legacy of brilliance, contributions, and intellectual achievements of African Americans, great achievements which helped to mold and develop America into the world power that it is today, one can only hope that each school in our District is well poised to honor and celebrate Black history in a myriad of ways during the 15 days that students will be in session during Black History month. Within these 28 days, there are a plethora of ways to celebrate the heroes and heroines of African descent by engaging in a multitude of culturally responsive and inclusive African American heritage and history activities. I would like to briefly mention practices that should be occurring all year long as reminders: 1) Ensure all students have access to the New Jersey Amistad Curriculum Resource by creating small group work instructional activities in learning areas which engage students in accessing primary and secondary source documents using the Amistad. (2) Highlight a famous African American each morning on the PA system, provide an incentive for students who produce factual information of the person being highlighted. (3) Provide an incentive for any student who participates in the August Wilson Monologue Competition as an audience participant or a competitor. (4) Engage students in the Districtwide African American Essay Contest; (5) Conduct research on unsung heroes and heroines that move beyond Dr. Martin Luther King and Harriet Tubman. (6) Invite an African American, Native American, or Latino historian or elder into classrooms to share authentic cultural stories via the African oral tradition of storytelling. (7) Allow students to research, then take on the roles of famous African Americans they admire and conduct a re-enactment of their lives and contributions for a live audience. (8) Conduct a multicultural assembly program and allow students to demonstrate the arts of drumming, dancing, singing, spoken word, poetry resuscitations, hip-hop, monologues, visual arts, and drama which relate to them historically and culturally. (9) Invite members from the community to come into the schools as guest readers in order to read books authored by African Americans and other diverse groups. (9) Participate in the Districtwide African American Read-In. (10) Ensure schools and classrooms are decorated with visually pleasing academic displays, posters, photos, and other artifacts that are representative of the students in the school and classrooms.

Our students will appreciate and learn in deeper ways when we implement solid efforts to include their true histories, legacies of greatness, and cultural backgrounds in the curriculum, and in every other aspect of social and academic endeavor of the school. They will also be fully engaged and attuned to learning in a school that not only recognizes their history for 28 days of the year, but also values them and the contributions of their ancestors whom have made America great, each and every day of the year. This will indeed require a curriculum of inclusion and a pedagogy of social justice and uplift throughout the year.

Thank you,

Dr. Morrell,

Guardian of Equity
The staff of Newcomer Academy prides themselves on creating a welcoming environment for the students. Bulletin boards are multilingual, QR codes connect students to culturally responsive websites and everyone’s flag is posted throughout the school on our flag walls. There are at least 20 languages spoken by students and learning objectives are posted on a QR code and translated into multiple languages so students understand what is expected of them in class. Many times, QR codes will take students to visual aids to assist and support with language acquisition and understanding. Translanguaging is used in all classrooms and word walls are multilingual. Newcomer students’ work and images decorate the halls and classrooms. Newcomer Academy is a place where all students feel welcome and respected.

Furthermore, this feeling extends to classes where students are given the scaffolds needed to be successful in content classes. The ninth-grade students participate in the Bridges curriculum. Bridges is a program designed for immigrant students who have recently entered public high schools as “English Language Learners” or “emergent bilinguals” but who have low levels of home language literacy upon entry to ninth grade. The Bridges classes have been specifically designed to meet their language, literacy, academic, socio-cultural and emotional needs. The students also have one-to-one devices. The ninth and tenth graders use iPads and the eleventh and twelve graders have laptops. With this program students will know how to use a variety of devices for research and study before they graduate. Students learn how to research, make websites and create projects using the available technology. The use of the Bridges curriculum, and EngageNY, combined with daily access to technology allows our students to bridge the language gap and make meaningful progress and connections to new framework standards.

Teachers at Newcomer Academy are trained in culturally responsive teaching to ensure all our students feel respected. Teachers value and incorporate students’ cultures in their daily instruction. Global Competency is a goal for teachers and students at Newcomer Academy. Two staff members have participated in the Fulbright Global Classrooms initiative and have trained teachers on global education. Global education emphasizes the unity and interdependence of human society, while allowing students to develop a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity. Global education also teaches the importance of social justice and protection of human rights. Many teachers have also been trained in restorative circles and implement them throughout the year. Circles are used in health and advisement to develop relationships, build communities, and respond to conflicts and problems that arise.

Newcomer Academy is not just a place for students to learn; it is a home and safe place for all our students. Kudos to Mrs. Jones and her team for creating linguistically responsive literacy programs in Newcomer Academy to support our Multilingual Learners in being academically successful. Nice work!
linguistically responsive but in a way that is holistic, involving every aspect of their intellect. MBK is that program which strategically nurtures critical thinking in young men of color. We here at MBK diligently work to bring students to the awareness of their cultural brilliance and even to the manifestation of their own individual brilliance. Our students are compiled with novel ideas, bold imaginations, and clever solutions to the world they live in. We recognize that the answer they have been waiting on is already inside of them. We, as educators of the My Brother’s Keeper program, also compiled with a deep comprehension and appreciation of our students, know that they have the capacity, on multi-levels to transcend the marginalized expectations that is also strategically and repeatedly communicated through systemic racism. They are bombarded from every angle with negativity because of generational, corporate hatred. But, let it be known that MBK Buffalo is changing the narrative. Our MBK scholars are not oblivious to the world they live in and accept the challenge to pull from the generation before them and push the generation ahead of them. They are receiving what they deserve, an unconfined academic career that cultivates, develops, and prepares them for the manifestation of their purpose. The future should look promising to our students. At MBK, we provide this type of education through CLRT, revealing the truth of our scholars’ identity, past, present, and future. We reveal truth to restore, to plant, and to liberate. The future belongs to them!

On a weekly basis now, MBK has been receiving State-wide recognition. Under the leadership of “Momma Morrell”, our young men and their work is being talked about everywhere, from the Commissioner, other school districts, community organizations, to Statewide Educational Experts. MBK Buffalo has become the standard for all other school districts Statewide. What an honor it is for our young people to exhibit their leadership skills in demonstrating that, under the right support and leadership, they can carry out the legacy of greatness.

Last month, we celebrated the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Scholars quoted Dr. King and wrote pieces of their own to express the social justice concerns of their generation and how they are contributing to a better world. United in brotherly and sisterly love with parents and community members, we raised our voices and declared that we are agents of change for today and tomorrow. We were even graced by esteemed Board Member Sharon Belton-Cottman, who read a poem written by her brother when he was a little boy but still strikes the heart of racial equality today.

On the 24th of January, we took nearly 100 scholars to Buffalo’s own, Paul Robeson Theater at the African-American Cultural Center, to view Richard Wright’s, Native Son. Many of our scholars had never been to a play. They were so engaged, as they sat on the edge of their seats anticipating the next move of each character. But then, the actors themselves blessed our scholars by having a talk back and eating lunch with them. They talked about the play, how it affected them as a young men of color because the same issues that happened in the play are some of the same issues men of color face today. Yes, even in 2019! Nonetheless, our scholars truly enjoyed themselves and their brothers. Stay tuned. There is so much more to come.
As January passes and February begins, consider the impact Dr. Martin Luther King and other great African Americans have had on the social conscience of our country and the world. In particular, as the Buffalo City School District resumes its work with CLRT through the guidance of TAC-D, let us reflect on the educational influence of a few great African American leaders.

Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute, developed his programs in a time of growing racial hostility and violence. He provided an industrial and agricultural education for his students, much like the education he received at the Hampton Institute, as a way of limiting the backlash against his school from whites. Washington’s success required a delicate balancing act. To maintain his position among whites as a non-threatening spokesman for his race, he had to maintain a conservative stance on race relations. However, Washington increasingly protested acts of racial injustice. While raising funds from white supporters, he secretly funneled the contributions to challenge unfair labor contracts, voting restrictions, and segregated public facilities.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s fight for equity in education remains unknown to many. Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. points out that Dr. King began his fight for educational equity with his own education, completing high school at 15, college at 19, seminary school at 22 and a doctoral degree at 26. Reverend Jackson reminds us that “Dr. King laid down the case for affordable education for all Americans, including Polish children – from the ghetto and the barrios, to the Appalachian Mountains and the reservations – he was a proponent for all and believed that strong minds break strong chains and once you learn your lesson well, the oppressor could not unlearn you.” Reverend Jackson remembers when Dr. King told him “he read a fiction and non-fiction book once a week. He was an avid reader and, in the spirit of Dr. King, we fight for equal, high-quality education, skilled trade training, affordable college education and beyond.”

The works of Maya Angelou, distinguished poet, author and educator were inspired by her desire to illustrate, with words, the issues of race, identity and literacy. In her article posted on May 28, 2014, Meris Stansbury, describes five ways Maya Angelou influenced education: 1. Angelou wrote for everyone to include children. 2. She never stopped learning and teaching, her works explain the nature and importance of education. 3. Ms. Angelou inspired programs at colleges and universities such as the Maya Angelou Institute for the Improvement of Child and Family Education, with a mission to improve child and family education through community partnerships, program development and implementation, and professional education and research. 4. She was outspoken on current education issues to include her criticism of President Obama’s Race to the Top education initiative, concerned with the impact test-centric polices were having on children’s love for reading and literature. 5. Advancing the understanding of ignorance vs. illiteracy which were themes in her poems and novels. One of Ms. Angelou’s famous quotes reads… “My mother said I must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more intelligent and more educated than college professors.”

Hopefully the passion, vision and work of these great leaders will inspire all stakeholders in the BCSD to continue our CLRT efforts to fulfill their aspirations to create and provide an equitable education for all our students. February as Black History Month, is a reminder to incorporate instruction recognizing the contributions of African Americans throughout the entire school year. In this way, we affirm the cultural identities of our diverse school children to develop all students’ understanding and appreciation of all cultures. Please consider using the literature from the authors listed below to supplement and enhance your instruction throughout the year.

| AUTHORS |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| African American Children’s Literature | Lucille Clifton | Brenda Wilkinson |
| | Jeanette Caines | Rosa Guy |
| | Sharon Bell Mathis | Mildred Walter |
| | Camille Yarbrough | John Steptoe |
| | Mildred Taylor | Joyce Hansen |
| | Emily Moore | Joyce Carol Thomas |
| | | Eloise Greenfield |
| | | Patricia McKissack |
| | | Walter Dean Myers |
| | | Rita Garcia-Williams |
| | | Angela Johnson |

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Even though the month of February is nationally recognized as “Black History Month”, we realize that the positive impact of African Americans, both historically and currently, is far too great to confine to one month. To avoid perpetuating an “othering” of Black students and families, it is important that we teach, celebrate, and integrate into the curriculum Black History throughout the entire year.

Below are just a few past and upcoming BPS activities and events, highlighting the Black experience, of which students, parents, and caregivers have already attended or may partake:

First, we would like to thank the parents and families of the My Brother’s Keeper program for coming out to Open Mic on January 12th. Parents proudly joined us as their sons stood before his fellow brothers and lifted their voices in poetry and song in remembrance of the late Dr. Martin Luther King.

We also thank our parents for joining us at the MBK Open House. Parents brought their future MBK scholars out to shadow and the response to join was overwhelming. Parents thanked MBK program staff for implementing this program. They expressed that they have been looking for programs like MBK for their son and were so impressed with what they heard and saw.

On Saturday, February 2nd, the Gamma Phi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. will sponsor the Historically Black College and University (HBCUs) Think Tank at the Bennett Community School Campus. This event will expose families to the experiences of HBCUs including open discussions about college life. The event will also provide financial aid and application information. Representatives from the following HBCUs will be available:

- Bethune Cookman
- Hampton University
- Howard University
- Kentucky State
- Morgan State
- Johnson C. Smith
- Tennessee State

The exploration of Black History will continue throughout the campus on Saturday, February 9th as the achievements of Africans Americans – past and present - are celebrated through engagement in The Power of Words facilitated by A city of Buffalo African American currently making history – Creative Director of Get Fokus’d Productions - Mrs. Aitina Fareed-Cooke.

The BPS MBK Male Academy Scholars are also making history! On Saturday, February 9th, at 10:00 a.m., families are invited to the Albright Knox Art Gallery to marvel at the beautiful manifestation of intellect, artistic grit and personal expressions that will be showcased in the MBK “Freedom” Collage Art Installation. The MBK scholars created the work as they learned about the legacy of slavery during their summer field experiences at the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad site, which served as inspiration for the collage. The day will culminate at noon with the inspiring August Wilson Monologue Competition at Buffalo State College. Come and enjoy the moment our High School students will compete for an all-expenses paid New York City trip and a chance to perform their monologue on the nationally renowned August Wilson Stage on Broadway. We are so very proud of our students and our families.
This year is significant in American History, but especially for African Americans and people of African descent. According to the Association for the Study of African Life and History (2019), an association founded by Carter G. Woodson, the first African men and women arrived by ship at Point Comfort, present day Fort Monroe in Virginia. This is known because John Rolfe, Secretary and Recorder General of Virginia, recorded the arrival of “20” Africans in August 1619. Understanding American history requires examining the repugnant institution of slavery. Africans were forcibly migrated, placed in chattel slavery and used as involuntary laborers for multiple generations in the development of the United States of America.

A commission to acknowledge the contributions African Americans have made to this country from 1619 to 2019 was organized in 2016 by Congress, and is called the 400 Years of African American History. The 15 member commission, appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, consists of governors, civil rights and historical organizations, the National Park Service, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institutes, and members of Congress. The purpose of the commission is to acknowledge the impact of slavery and laws that enforced racial discrimination in our country; to encourage civic, patriotic, historical, and educational organizations to participate and commemorate activities.

Teaching about American enslavement can be extremely challenging. According to Teaching Tolerance (2018), students are unable to contextualize how the world they inhabit was shaped by the institution of slavery and white supremacy. Both issues are in contrast to our shared common democratic principles of justice, equality, and liberty for all. Discussing slavery and white supremacy requires a structured framework to foster breadth and depth. Similar to the New York State Framework there is a structured framework for teaching about American enslavement. The Framework for Teaching American Slavery focuses on the following Key Concepts:

1. Slavery, which was practiced by Europeans prior to their arrival in the Americas, was important to all of the colonial powers and existed in all of the European North American colonies.

2. Slavery and the slave trade were central to the development and growth of the economy across British North America and, later, the United States.

3. Protections for slavery were embedded in the founding documents; enslavers dominated the federal government, Supreme Court and Senate from 1787 through 1860.

4. “Slavery was an institution of power,” designed to create profit for the enslavers and break the will of the enslaved and was a relentless quest for profit abetted by racism.
5. Enslaved people resisted the efforts of their enslavers to reduce them to commodities in both revolutionary and everyday ways.

6. The experience of slavery varied depending on time, location, crop, labor performed, size of slaveholding and gender.

7. Slavery was the central cause of the Civil War.

8. Slavery shaped the fundamental beliefs of Americans about race and whiteness, and white supremacy was both a product and legacy of slavery.

9. Enslaved and free people of African descent had a profound impact on American culture, producing leaders and literary, artistic and folk traditions that continue to influence the nation.

10. By knowing how to read and interpret the sources that tell the story of American slavery, we gain insight into some of what enslaved Americans aspired to, created, thought and desired (Teaching Tolerance, 2018).

Embedded in the Teaching American Slavery Framework are engaging inquiry models for elementary, middle and high schools located at:

**Elementary**

**Middle School**

**High School**

**References**
400 Years of Perseverance 1619-2019. (2019).
Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

Fact:
Multicultural resources not only serve the role of “mirror,” but also provide a “window” through which readers view cultures other than their own (Bishop, 1990).

In the early elementary grades, we invest an immense amount of time teaching students to become proficient readers, yet often times we fail to remember that students are discovering their place in school and the world at the same time. With access to mirror texts, students are able to see that their narrative matters, similarly, with access to window texts, students learn to understand and appreciate the narratives of others. As research has indicated, when young readers see their own culture recreated in literature, primary sources, and other resources, they learn that their culture is valued. To see one’s life experiences represented in vast collections is empowering, and constitutes a first step toward developing a sense of a shared human experience. “Young readers, whether they are of the particular culture described in a book, can make connections with its characters through shared experiences. Furthermore, they may gain an emotional stake in understanding how and why people live as they do” (Temple, 1998).

Fiction:
Schools are not adequately teaching American History. Most educators are not sufficiently prepared to teach it, and textbooks do not have enough material representing an inclusive shared experience or perspective of other cultures. As a result, students lack a basic knowledge of the important role their people played in shaping the United States and the impact it continues to have on race relations today. As Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries powerfully illustrates: We the people would much rather have the Disney version of history, in which villains are easily spotted, suffering never lasts long, heroes invariably prevail and life always gets better. We prefer to pick and choose what aspects of the past to hold on to, gladly jettisoning that which makes us uneasy…. Our problem as Americans is we actually hate history. What we love is nostalgia. Our preference for nostalgia and for a history that never happened is not without consequence. As a result of nostalgia, we improperly educate students because. Although we teach them that slavery happened, we fail to provide the detail or historical context they need to make sense of its origin, evolution, demise and legacy.

Reality:
In addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, overarching library services are driven by their core commitment to the principles of fundamental freedoms and equity of access to information and knowledge for all by providing a broad range of materials and services reflecting all communities and needs. We strive to develop culturally diverse and multilingual collections and services, including digital and multimedia resources. One of the most complete and vast free resources available for educators to access is housed in the nation’s Library of Congress. (see hyperlink to Library of Congress) https://www.loc.gov/search/?in=&q=african+americans&new=true&st=.

The Library also subscribes to a vast number of electronic resources and has created online collections of digitized books, documents, and other materials. (see hyperlink to Library of Congress) https://www.loc.gov/collections/?q=african+american

These electronic resources cover a wide range of subjects useful for the study of African American history and culture. Several databases focus solely on African American subjects, while other products are interdisciplinary. The Library’s resources in the area of African American history and culture are unparalleled, due in large part to the vast resources that were largely acquired through copyright deposit. The strength of the African American resources in the General Collections is greatly enhanced by the number of related resources available in the Library’s special collections. These materials include manuscripts, microform, oral history transcripts and recordings, folk archives, newspapers, periodicals, legal works, music, recorded sound, motion pictures, prints and photographs, maps and atlases, and subscription databases.

Subject areas where resources are especially strong include: slavery; the slave trade; slave narratives; abolitionist movement and anti-slavery publications; the Civil War and its literature; lynching; riots; and, civil disturbances. The Library’s Manuscript Division has virtually unparalleled collections of the organizational records of civil rights organizations and the personal papers of the leaders. Examples include the records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League; the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; the personal papers of Justice Thurgood Marshall; Martin Luther King, Jr. FBI Files; and others.

In sum, the primary resources and collections are numerous and the academic enhancement that our students would gain from accessing these resources is profound. For more information or assistance with navigating these resources, please see your school librarian……

This year, students enrolled in English I will read The Other Wes Moore as their central text for the fourth quarter. The novel, written by Wes Moore is about two boys who share the same name but make different choices that lead to very different lives. The author becomes a Rhodes Scholar and the other Wes Moore is convicted of murder and receives a lifetime jail sentence. The novel will give students an opportunity to explore and analyze critical societal concepts and make connections to their own world.

The novel has been the selection of many book clubs and college courses for the provocative questions it raises about making choices, the people who influence choices and the ramifications of those choices. The author makes a strong claim in the novel that one of the most important ideas to focus on is in the word “other.” He believes that this novel can open up a dialogue about the many “others” in our society – kids who are only looked at as a finalized conclusion. Individual choices, societal expectations and community support all play a part in how “others” get to certain circumstances in life. Students will be grappling with difficult questions focused on the complex implications raised by the author.

Both boys in the novel are searching for help. One boy gets help and one doesn’t. The author’s mother moved her children to New York so she could have family support for her children. The author details how each of the people who supported reached out a hand and would not let him fall. His grandparents, extended family, teachers and officers in the Military Academy each play a part in influencing the author to take advantage of opportunities and determine his own future. The author’s mother created an environment to support her son through the challenges he experienced. The other Wes Moore does not have such a consistent support system. While his mother tried to move her son to a neighborhood that would open additional opportunities, there was not enough support from the school and community. Throughout the novel students will bear witness to societies attention or apathy as each Wes Moore experiences the challenges of growing up.

A CLRT strategy stressed during training is to have high expectations for students. Children know when teachers do not expect them to achieve at high levels and so often, that low expectation is internalized. The long lasting effects of low expectations is a critical theme in the text. Wes Moore focuses on the expectations placed on both boys in the novel:

Do you think that we’re products of our environments? I think so, or maybe products of our expectations. Others’ expectations of us or our expectations. I mean others’ expectations that you take on as your own. I realize how difficult it is to separate the two. The expectations that others place on us help us form our expectations of ourselves.

Students engaged in reading the novel will analyze the expectations for each of the boys in the novel. Students will examine how the expectations others had for each Wes Moore impacted their future and think about what that means for them.

The author, during a book talk at the Harvard Campus Bookstore, stated:

*This book is about more than just two kids. It is about all of us. It asks us to think about how we can get involved and how can we help kids think differently about their lives? Wes Moore’s fate seems to be sealed from the beginning but as a society, we can, if we choose to, use our power to make changes in the lives of others.*

The text is important for both students and adults in our community to study. The author uses his narrative as a call to action for society to understand the responsibility we have to use our power to ensure our students’ fates are never sealed.

For additional informational and instructional resources:

The Other Wes Moore Resources
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“Learning styles, like the language we speak and the skin we wear, are not separate entities to be ‘fixed’ but part of the essential nature of any human being. If we can see all of the children we teach—skin color, culture, learning styles, income level notwithstanding—as complete, deserving, brilliant human beings, then perhaps we will manage to create the educational system we need” (p. 103). When you read those words, what do they mean to you? What would happen if students’ differences were seen by the educational system not as something that needs to be fixed or changed? What would be the impact of using the phrase “differently abled” instead of disabled?

In Chapter 5, “Skin Deep Learning: Teaching Those Who Learn Differently,” Lisa Delpit passionately writes about the negative impacts of labeling, specifically the labels of learning disabled, remedial classes, and special education. She intersperses research with classroom observations and her own personal experience with her daughter to provide a comprehensive look at the ramifications of labeling children. A key concern with labeling is that labels in education tend to be permanent. This coincides with the concept of “stereotype threat” and the problem that students internalize these labels as being “not good enough.” This is of particular concern with students of color who are often already stereotyped by society with negative labels.

One of the most important takeaways from this piece of Delpit’s work is the notion that all children have strengths and gifts. Focusing on their positive attributes is a gateway for providing them with what they need and improving the areas they are having difficulty with. As she states, “Education for all children should be ‘special’—that is, specifically designed to discover the strengths and accommodate the needs of each child” (p. 103). An example of this is found at Renfroe Middle School in Decatur, Georgia. At this school, special education classes are called “Critical Thinking” courses. By excluding “special education” and “remedial” from the course title, there is interest from all groups of students in the building. And, students who truly need to take these courses are not internalizing the idea that there is something “wrong” with them.

In conclusion, Lisa Delpit emphasizes that “All children do learn” (p. 101). What does that statement mean to you? As you think back to the beginning of the year, how have the students you worked with progressed? What are their strengths and gifts? And how can you use those to move them forward even more?

Reflective Question:

• Reflect on this quote from page 97, “Since we are all on a continuum of performance, how can we identify one specific point that determines a ‘disability’?”
• In honor of African American History Month, how can you connect your students’ strengths and gifts to the legacy of African Americans? What prominent figures, both nationally and locally, can be highlighted to inspire and motivate your students to succeed and mark their own place in history?

Source:
“¡Muchas gracias!” Thank you Dual Language Education teachers at Olmsted Elementary School 64 for an amazing rendition of “El Día de los Reyes,” or Three Kings’ Day. Dual Language Pre-K through 4th grade students were the key actors and storytellers for the interactive play. They delighted the audience by acting out, singing and teaching us about the story of the Epiphany, a cultural and religious event celebrated each January 6th in most Latino homes around the globe.

Some teachers may be skeptical about celebrating and teaching about traditions that epitomize the intersection of religion and culture. However, in promoting a culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy we must come to terms with the idea that religion is a deeply rooted aspect of culture. So how do we teach about and celebrate our students’ religious holidays and traditions? “The general rule of thumb is to do this carefully,” say Lundgren and Lundy-Ponce (http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/culturally-responsive-instruction-holiday-and-religious-celebrations). These authors advise teachers to follow the guidelines set forth by The First Amendment Center, which recommends to approach learning about religions from an academic rather than a devotional standpoint.

This is exactly what was done at School 64. Teachers approached the religious celebration from an academic perspective. The students learned that “El Dia de los Reyes” is a religious tradition in most Latino homes. They learned vocabulary centered around the story, helped to create and acted out the story, and then shared a meal associated with the tradition with their parents and friends. Key to the success of this activity was the idea that friends from different cultures can come together in respect and understanding. Please visit http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/ to learn about ways to celebrate our diverse students’ cultures and traditions and to nurture not only tolerance but respect for the beliefs of all the members of our multicultural society.
It is February and here we go again! Another solitary confinement to wear Kente Cloth, sing the Black National Anthem, and print 20,000 copies of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for kids to color. But how does celebrating Black History in the shortest month of the year better America if systemic borders consistently limit knowledge and structural walls restrict freedom? For a people that has demonstrated a superior strength in the face of a long-established diabolical force, this month’s agenda to celebrate Black History is nothing short of a camouflaged repeated offense. Why? Because, African-American history is unlike any other and the overdue honor it deserves, especially for their contributions to building this country is still being withheld from them. An apology for ancestral iniquities will not justify peace, but a total annihilation of the current systems that deprive, oppress, and serve to dispose of a people is the answer. Listen to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the following video, https://vimeo.com/313876396.

America is still in a crisis and so is our educational system. Yes, in 2019, if you must ask, educational oppression continues, and fencing in three weeks every February to talk about the same few Blacks, contributes to that. Year after year, the children we serve remain ignorant to the truth of African-American History. Many students, including black students believe that Black history began with slavery. But, nothing is further from the truth. Black people are a distinguished people, whose regal legacy is one of spirituality, agility, and resilience. This knowledge, delivered through Culturally and Linguistically Responsive teaching can render a paradigm shift that will dismantle identity confusion derived from visual and audio negativity in the media, as well as the under-currents of implicit biases in our schools.

If educational equity was a reality, then there would be a fair fight against the school to prison pipeline. Disproportionality in our schools is a calculated set up. In order for every student to succeed, we must implement a system of equity that holds every aspect of the school system accountable. Without such a system, children of color will continue to be conditioned and positioned for stereotypical statistics.

According to James A. Baldwin, “People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.” America clearly has a problem with its history. Maybe that’s because it was (and still is) built on innocent blood.
Systemic Injustice has become more manipulative and sophisticated. When a white couple can
dress up as an old black couple for the town’s Halloween party and win 1st place; or when a
world renowned fashion designer creates offensive products to degrade a people, then it is true,
people are trapped. Behaviors such as these remind us that slavery was just four generations
ago, but it still critically affects us today, whether you’re White or Black.

As we all walk out each day
of this month, I ask you to
stop and SEE the truth. No
one can tell anyone that
their pain is not real. There
is a reason why the cries for
social justice are so loud. The
cries of African Americans
are real. And now, it is bleeding over to other races of
color. When will it stop? When will the healing begin?
When will YOU, yes you, do something to contribute to
the healing? No ulterior motives. No hidden agendas.
No, “what can I get out of this.” Change the agenda
this month in your schools, in your departments, and
in your communities. Demonstrate real genuine love
for humanity. See everyone as your brother, your sister,
your friend. After all, aren’t we?

Effectively listen to the daughter of the late Dr. King as she carries the legacy of her father. America is bleeding. What
are we going to do to help? https://vimeo.com/313876439

Peace Until We Meet Again,
By: The Voice for the People
Current Events:

CLRT Work Group, February 4th, @ East Community School Library, 10:00am

CLRT Districtwide Teacher Training for Teachers in grades PK and K(Day 2):
    February 5th, 6th, & 7th @ East, 8:15 am-3:30pm

MBK Male Academy: February 2, 2019 @ McKinley High School, 9:00am – 3:00pm

Our Story Project Saturday Academy, (East, Middle Early College, McKinley)
    All @McKinley

MBK Male Academy and Our Story Project: Albright Knox Black History Art Installation
    and Participation in August Wilson Monologue Competition at Buffalo State College:
    February 9th, @McKinley High School, 9:00am-3:30pm

MBK Male Academy Social Justice Workshop- The Hate U Give, Dr. Jevon Hunter:
    February 2nd, @ McKinley High School, 9:00am – 12:00pm

Buffalo Black History Bee with Legislator April Baskin and Historian Eva M. Doyle, in
    conjunction with East Community High School and the Department of Social Studies:
    Saturday, February 9, 2019 @ East Community High School,
    10:00am-1:00pm, Grades 5-12

National African American Read-In of the Buffalo Public Schools:
    February 15th, @ Emerson High School,
    featuring The Hate U Give, Sponsored by the Student Achievement Committee of the
    Buffalo Public Schools, under the leadership of Dr. Theresa A. Harris-Tigg