PIONEERS in the Classroom:
African American Achievers in Education

Education is the first step to freedom. The Newspapers in Education program “Pioneers in the Classroom: African American Achievers in Education” has been created to help students explore the history and significance of African American accomplishments in education. The program’s classroom supplement and Teacher Guide also are designed to demonstrate how the newspaper can be an effective teaching tool.

This Teacher Guide will extend the lessons of the supplement by offering activities that explore education and African American history through the daily contents and stories of the newspaper. Each activity is followed by a convenient reference line that details the standards and skills addressed by the activity. A series of 8 1/2 x 11 activity sheets are included, which offer ready-made materials that may be photocopied for students.

The “Pioneers in the Classroom” supplement and Teacher Guide have been made possible by a generous contribution from Ford Motor Company Fund. Take a moment to thank Ford Motor Company Fund by having students write thank you notes. Mail your students’ thank-you notes to “Pioneers in the Classroom,” Ford Motor Company Fund, c/o PCG Campbell, 3200 Greenfield Road, Suite 280, Dearborn, MI 48120.

Ford Motor Company Fund
1. Education & History
Carter G. Woodson, who is sometimes called the “Father of Black History,” believed that African Americans needed to understand their past to become leaders in the present. As a class, discuss how newspapers record the history of events and issues of the recent past. Then have students find a story reporting recent history about education, teaching or schools. With the “Education & History” activity sheet, have students write out two things they learned about recent education history by reading the story. Then have them write why each is important for education or school leaders, as they try to solve problems or choose a course of action for the future.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Acquiring information from multiple sources and then evaluating it; using written and visual texts to identify and research issues of importance to adolescents and their community.

2. Determination
As an athlete and Mumford High School graduate, Detroit School CEO Kenneth Burnley learned the value of determination and hard work in overcoming obstacles. As head of Detroit’s public school system, he hoped to instill those values in all students to help them succeed. In today’s newspaper, have students find an African American newsmaker in education or another field. Ask them to write out three ways this newsmaker would have to use determination and hard work to succeed. Finish by challenging them to use one of the reasons as the opening line of a poem or rhyme on “Being Determined.”

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Identifying and explaining how individuals in history demonstrate good character and personal virtue; explaining how issues and events affect various people and societies in different ways.

3. Overcoming Adversity
As a child in a poor, single-parent family, Lansing, Michigan, School Superintendent E. Sharon Banks had to overcome adversity to learn and succeed. Now one of the nation’s leading African American educators, she works to help today’s students overcome obstacles. As a class, discuss obstacles students think African American and other students face in gaining the skills they need to succeed in life. Then challenge each student to pick an obstacle that he/she feels is most significant. Challenge each student to write a newspaper editorial outlining why the obstacle is significant and how it can be overcome. As a follow-up, discuss some obstacles that students think schools have done a good job overcoming.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Engaging each other in conversations about issues pertaining to local and state policy; understanding our diverse culture.

4. Five Great Points *
Every year, more minorities are entering education careers. Yet school districts and universities would like to attract even more. As a class, discuss the advantages of careers in education. Then have students find a school or university in the ads or stories of today’s newspaper. Using the activity sheet titled “Five Great Points,” divide students into teams and have each team draw up a five-point message for a school assembly to attract African American students to a career with this school or university. Have each team explain the importance of each point to the class.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Responding to a variety of texts by making connections to students’ personal lives and the lives of others; identifying issues important to the community.

*Includes activity sheet for students.
FIVE GREAT POINTS

Every year, more minorities are entering education careers. Yet school districts and universities would like to attract even more. As a class, discuss the advantages of careers in education. Then find a school or university in the ads or stories of today’s newspaper. Divide into teams and in the spaces below draw up a five-point message for a school assembly to attract African American students to a career with this school or university. Be prepared to explain the importance of each point to the class.

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UNIT 2

PIONEERS OF EDUCATION

From earliest times African Americans saw education as a valuable tool. The activities in this unit look at some people and institutions that were Pioneers in the Classroom and examine how their achievements are relevant today.

1. W.E.B. Du Bois

W.E.B. Du Bois was the first great researcher of African American culture and life. Studies he conducted more than a century ago are still used as the basis for new research. Ask students what additional or new things they would like to learn about the African American community in your area. Then challenge them to think as W.E.B. Du Bois might have and to use the newspaper to find ways to study their chosen topic. Have them write the beginning of a news story describing what they want to study and why such a study would be important for the community.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Generating questions about important issues or topics about which students are curious.

2. Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was one of America’s first great African American journalists. In the columns of his newspaper The North Star he argued for the abolition of slavery and for the rights of African Americans and women. For many years there were few African American newspaper columnists. Today almost every major city has one or more. Have students find an African American columnist writing for the newspaper. Ask them to read a column. Direct them to write a sentence summarizing the point of the column. Then challenge them to write a short paragraph analyzing whether the African American experiences of the columnist shaped the opinions expressed in the column—and if they did, how.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Constructing meaningful understanding of our diverse cultural heritage; acquiring information from multiple sources and then evaluating and communicating it.

3. Higher Education *

Morehouse College was founded in Augusta, Georgia just two years after the Civil War ended. Today, Morehouse College is the nation’s largest, private liberal arts college for African American men with alumni ranging from the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to filmmaker Spike Lee. At what institutions can African American students in your area gain higher education? Do some institutions draw more African Americans than others? Have students use the newspaper and other resources to examine the most popular places African Americans go for higher education today. Then have them choose one and design a newspaper ad showcasing reasons the school would be a good choice for African American students.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Locating information about local and state cultures and communities from a variety of sources.

4. Be Prepared *

It was hard for African Americans to get teaching jobs when John Porter graduated from college in 1953. So at first he took a job as a school janitor while he worked on his master’s degree. Within a year, a job opened up and he was teaching junior high English and social studies. “You have to be prepared when the door opens,” said Porter, who later became president of Eastern Michigan University. As a class, discuss ways people can be prepared for opportunities when they open up, and what role education can play in that. Then have them find a newsmaker in the newspaper who was prepared when he or she got a chance. Have them write a paragraph describing what the person had done to be prepared and how he/she put that preparation to use. Finish by asking students to write about an occasion they were prepared for an opportunity, and to explain how.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Responding to a variety of written, visual and electronic texts by making connections to students’ personal lives and the lives of others; identifying how individuals in history demonstrate good character.

*Includes activity sheet for students.
Morehouse College was founded in Augusta, Georgia just two years after the Civil War ended. Today, Morehouse College is the nation’s largest, private liberal arts college for African American men with alumni ranging from the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to filmmaker Spike Lee. At what institutions can African American students in your area gain higher education? Do some institutions draw more African Americans than others? Use the newspaper and other resources to examine the most popular places African Americans go for higher education today. List them below and discuss as a class. Then choose one and design a newspaper ad on the back of this sheet showcasing reasons the school would be a good choice for African American students.
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Newsmaker How He/She Was Prepared

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Time You Were Prepared—and How

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REWARDS OF EDUCATION
Throughout U.S. history, African Americans have used the skills and knowledge gained through education to overcome barriers and achieve success. Successes have come in many fields and have taken many forms. The activities in this unit are designed to introduce students to the many kinds of success African Americans have achieved through education.

1. Black Achievers
Opportunities for African Americans were once greatly limited in education and other fields. But from Benjamin Mays and Kenneth Burnley to Ruth Simmons and E. Sharon Banks, African Americans have become leaders at all levels of education. Have students search the newspaper today or for several days for African Americans who are achieving success. Ask them to list these successful and influential people on a sheet of paper. For each, have them write what the person is doing to achieve success, and how education plays a part in that career.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Acquiring information from multiple sources and then evaluating, organizing and communicating it; constructing meaningful understanding of our diverse cultural heritage.

2. Role Models
When African Americans achieve success in a field, their actions may inspire children to go into that field in later life. As a class, discuss the benefits of having African American students choose careers in education. How could this help individual students? How could it help the community? Finish by having students write a short newspaper editorial urging African Americans and other students to choose careers in education. Direct them to the editorial page of the newspaper to see how editorials are written.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Using historical biographies to explain how events affect the lives of individuals and how some individuals influence the course of history.

3. That’s Entertainment *
Television reflects the way Americans live, learn and work. Ask students to look through the television listings of the newspaper and find three shows they have watched. On the “That’s Entertainment” activity sheet, have them list the characters and what they do for a living. Have them write out what kind of education or training the people would need to be successful in those careers. Then challenge them to come up with a plot line for one show that would deal with education or training needs for one of the characters. Discuss ideas as a class.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Responding to a variety of visual, written and electronic texts by making connections to students’ personal lives; establishing standards for critical thinking.

4. Making History
Many African Americans have made history in the field of American education. Who are history-makers in education and other fields today? Direct students to look through today’s newspaper and find someone whom they consider a history-maker. It can be an African American leader or a person of another ethnic background. Have them write a paragraph explaining their choice.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Using written and visual texts to research issues of importance that confront adolescents and their community.

5. Drawing Praise
Editorial cartoons use art to express opinions about people and things. Have students pick an African American they admire from the student supplement “Pioneers in the Classroom: African American Achievers in Education” or from the pages of the newspaper. Ask students to then draw an editorial cartoon celebrating the education achievement of this person, and to give it an appropriate title. Display and discuss editorial cartoons.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Using the craft of the illustrator to express ideas artistically.

*Includes activity sheet for students.
Television reflects the way Americans live, learn and work. Look through the television listings of the newspaper and find three shows you have watched. In the spaces below, list the characters and what they do for a living. Then write out what kind of education or training the people would need to be successful in those careers. Finish by coming up with a plot idea for one show that would deal with education or training needs for one of the characters. Discuss ideas as a class.

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**Plot Idea**

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Bill Cosby
**CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION**

Issues in education are some of the most challenging faced by leaders across the United States. The activities in this unit look at some of the challenges faced by schools and educators in the 21st Century.

1. **Education News**
   Schools and education news get much attention from newspapers because they affect so many families. Have students look through the newspaper today or for several days and find a story about school or education news. Ask them to write a sentence stating the new developments or issues raised in the story. Then have them write a sentence stating whom the news will affect most, and how it will affect those people in the future.

   **STANDARDS/SKILLS:** Acquiring information from multiple sources and then organizing and communicating it; using oral, written and visual texts to research issues of importance to adolescents.

2. **Business & Education**
   What education and training will be required to prepare workers for future careers? In teams, have students read the business section of the newspaper today or for several days. As a class, discuss what goods or services are created locally now and what will be produced in the future. Challenge students to use what they have gathered from the newspaper to predict what kinds of careers will exist in the future and what education and training will be needed to prepare workers. Do the colleges and technical schools of your area have the programs needed to train future workers?

   **STANDARDS/SKILLS:** Acquiring information from multiple sources and then organizing and communicating it; identifying the current and potential contributions of national and world regions to trade.

3. **Affirmative Action**
   Programs of affirmative action helped correct years of discrimination against African Americans. The U.S. Supreme Court confirmed the importance of affirmative action last year when it ruled in two cases involving the University of Michigan and its law school. The High Court ruled that using affirmative action to achieve diversity in universities was a desirable goal, but it voted against using a point system to rank minority and non-minority applicants. The Michigan rulings have sparked debate about whether they should be used for achieving diversity in fields outside education. Challenge students to write editorials expressing their opinions about use of affirmative action to achieve racial diversity and opportunity in colleges or business.

   **STANDARDS/SKILLS:** Explaining how public issues become controversial and why people disagree about them; explaining how culture and experiences shape positions that people take on issues.

4. **African American Issues**
   What are the top issues in education for the African American community? Have students search the stories, editorials and columns in the newspaper and list three issues involving education that are important to African American parents and community leaders. Ask them to write a sentence for each explaining why the issue is especially important to black residents.

   **STANDARDS/SKILLS:** Describing how issues and events affect various people and cultures in different ways; locating and describing diverse kinds of communities and explaining their characteristics.

5. **Story Boards**
   Film and TV directors sometimes sketch out their stories on what is called a “story board.” This is something like a comic strip that shows what kinds of action would take place at different points. Have students pick an education issue from the newspaper that involves African Americans. Direct them to read the story. Then challenge them to draw a story board for a TV special examining the issue they selected. Share story boards as a class.

   **STANDARDS/SKILLS:** Using the craft of the illustrator to formulate and express ideas artistically; using varied techniques to influence an audience.

*Includes activity sheet for students.
What are the top issues in education for the African American community? Search the stories, editorials and columns in the newspaper and list three issues involving education that are important to African American parents and community leaders. Write a sentence for each explaining why the issue is especially important to black residents of your city or state.

**Issue No. 1.**


**Reason Important**


**Issue No. 2**


**Reason Important**


**Issue No. 3**


**Reason Important**
Film and TV directors sometimes sketch out their stories on what is called a “story board.” This is something like a comic strip that shows what kinds of action would take place at different points. Pick an education issue from the newspaper that involves African Americans. Read the story. In the spaces below, draw a story board for a TV special examining the issue you selected. Share story boards as a class.
The Newspaper In Education supplement “Pioneers in the Classroom” and this Teacher Guide have explored the achievements and contributions of African Americans to education, culture and society. But more can be done. The activities below are designed to extend the lessons of “Pioneers in the Classroom.”

1. Adopt a Leader
Have students “adopt” an African American leader in education who is often in the news. Have them create a scrapbook of clippings from the newspaper and other publications that feature this person. Follow this person for a month, a semester, or a year. Write the person and see if he/she can visit. Finish by having students use the collected material to write a short report on the person’s achievements for a year.

2. Education Lunches
Invite community leaders from different careers to lunch in twos or threes to talk about the education and training they needed to become successful. Or invite parents in to discuss the most important and memorable things they got from education. Challenge students to brainstorm a list of careers they consider especially exciting or fun for future guest lists. Make your Education Lunches an ongoing series. Invite other classes to join you.

3. Art Contest
Sponsor a school or class art contest on the theme of “Pioneers in the Classroom.” Have students create artworks celebrating African American leaders in the field. Mount an exhibit of artworks and invite local African American leaders to judge. Alert newspapers and TV stations about the project.

4. Book List
Compile a class list of books about African American leaders in education. Encourage students to write short, signed “review blurbs” of the books to let others know who liked them and why. Add to this list as students read additional books. Pass the word to other classes that you have this resource and share its contents.

5. Meet a Professor
Contact an African American professor at a local college and invite him/her to speak with your class at lunch or in the classroom. Have students prepare questions to ask about how this person decided to specialize in his/her field, day-to-day activities at the university, as well as books to read and enjoy.

6. Many Ways to Learn
Education can take many forms, and there are many places where it can take place. Have students create a list of all the places students could learn skills, values or direction for the future. Remind them that learning may not just take place in a public school or university. It could happen at a church or recreation center, too. Finish by having students pick 10 places and create a poster showing how people learn in them. Challenge them to show the advantages of each “setting for learning. Share and discuss posters as a class.

7. Make a Movie
Explore the life of an African American who has succeeded in education by researching, planning and shooting a video documentary. Make it a class project or divide the class into teams for different projects. Host a “premiere party” to show the class videos. Contact local cable TV networks to see if they would be willing to air the videos for the community.

This Teacher Guide was created by Hollister Kids for Detroit Newspapers In Education. The writer was Peter Landry.