

Questions About Black History Education Programming at Grey Roots Museum & Archives

Lisa Plante

Why does Grey Roots Museum & Archives offer Black History programming?

Grey Roots has five major thematic zones as represented by our logo: forests (green), rocks (grey), people (red), farmland (green), and water (blue). The logo symbolizes the stories of the strength of the Grey County peoples and their interaction with these elements. We are blessed to have a rich Black heritage in this county and it is important to share this story with our local community as well as with visitors from beyond our boundaries.

How long have you been offering school programming in African Canadian History?

The Interpretive staff at the former Grey County Museum liaised with our Black community members to design and develop the exhibit and accompanying gallery guide, *From Slavery to Freedom: African Canadians in Grey County*. A program was developed to supplement the Grade 7 & 8 History curriculum. Of course in the ensuing years the program has grown and expanded allowing us to offer programming for younger and older audiences than originally designed.



How have you done this?

We now offer three levels of this program. Along with our original offering we have adapted the program to support the Grade 3 Early Settlers curriculum, as well as Grade 10 Local History/Canadian Settlement after World War II curriculum.

Has this increased attendance for this programming?

Indeed it has. We have had classes from these three levels visit to take part in the program here at Grey Roots. Also, with the growing awareness of Black History month many teachers of other grade levels are finding ways that they can tie it into their students' studies. We have had classes from grades 3 to 10 take part in this program. Although the majority of classes come from Grey County we have offered this program to students as far away as Toronto.



We have also offered programming for adult classes from Georgian College, from areas of study such as Police Services and Early Childhood Education.

Interest in Black history certainly is growing.new for 2008, the Waterloo Historical Society booked 8 buses of 45 people each to study local Black history. After touring the exhibit, the groups viewed *The Last Stop*¹ film and received a lecture presentation on local Black history.

What does your program consist of?

Interpreters provide a broad introduction about slavery - what it is and where it was practised historically. Classes then focus on North America and the slavery of African people. Through role playing and active imagination, we take students for a trip back in time to experience what life as a slave was like. They board a slave ship to sail across the ocean to a new land where they imagine being a part of a slave auction and life on a plantation. This exercise is followed by the film, *Voice of the Fugitive*², which shows a family escaping to freedom in Canada. The elementary students then go to our multipurpose room to discuss the symbolism of the hidden quilt codes and then create a craft to take home with them.



Harriet Tubman



Running Man

¹ *The Last Stop* is a City of Owen Sound 2004 production. Also see osblackhistory.com for more information.

² *Voice of the Fugitive* is a 1996 National Film Board of Canada production directed by René Bonnière.

The program for secondary students also begins with a broad introduction to the topic of slavery, followed by a visit to our Archives to view primary and secondary resources. Students are divided into small groups to research questions about key issues regarding our Black community and then prepare presentations of their findings to the class as a whole. This is followed by *Speakers for the Dead*³, a film which examines Priceville, a small town in Grey County, and its quest to restore the history and dignity of its Black descendants. This is accompanied by a question sheet to help the students fully understand the issues around this investigation.

If anyone is interested in bringing their students for this program what should they do?

Teachers can visit our website www.greyroots.com/programs-events/school-programs/ and download a copy of our Teacher's Guide. They can also visit our giftshop to purchase a *From Slavery to Freedom* gallery guide which has contains extensive Black history in Grey County information. To discuss further the program and/or to book a class, teachers should call Lisa Plante, Heritage Interpretation, 519-376-3690, extension 128. And remember that teachers are always admitted free of charge at Grey Roots! Self exploration is wonderful, however we encourage teachers to book their visit so that we can discuss each class's specific needs.

³ *Speakers for the Dead* is a 2000 National Film Board of Canada production directed by David Sutherland and Jennifer Holness. To learn more about *Speakers for the Dead* also see *CFHA ~ An Evening with the Canadian Friends Historical Association* review by Naomi Norquay in this same volume of *Northern Terminus*.