

**A Report on How Educators in Primary  
Schools Present African History & Heritage**  
at Key Stage 2 and the impact on pupils, parents and the community

***“History is the memory of nations.”***

Joseph Ki-Zerbo

***“...in your homes and everywhere possible you  
must teach the higher development of science to your children;  
and be sure to develop a race of scientists par excellence...”***

Marcus Garvey

**African Heritage Forum**  
e. africanheritageforum@gmail.com



# HOW EDUCATORS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS PRESENT AFRICAN HISTORY & HERITAGE



**at Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) and the impact  
on pupils, parents and the community**



African Heritage Forum

# **A Report on How Educators in Primary Schools Present African History & Heritage**

at Key Stage 2 and the impact on pupils,  
parents and the community



African Heritage Forum

Published by African Heritage Forum 2012



© AHF Copyright 2012

Edited by: Felicity Heywood

Design and Layout by: Cindy Soso

Illustrations: RAMOMAR Inc. | Omar Buckley

Cover Image: Taharqa at Dju Wab / pure mountain

Thanks to BIS PUBLICATIONS and Arthur Torrington for the additional images

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, without the prior permission in writing from the publishers, African Heritage Forum, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and with a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.



African Heritage Forum

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We acknowledge the support, contributions and advice of Robin Walker, Kwame Ofori, Joi Ferguson, Carol Dixon, Emmanuel Amevor, Jacinth Martin, Romelda Williams, Beverley Hillman, Celina Saran Keita, Avril Nanton, Mia Morris OBE, Hazel Ellis and Bobby Forrester.

Forum members are:  
S.Chamberlain, Kandace Chimbir,  
Harry Cumberbatch MBE, Fyna Dowe, Felicity Heywood,  
Cindy Soso and Arthur Torrington CBE.



# CONTENTS



<b>Preface</b>	01
<b>Introduction</b>	03
<b>Theme 1</b>	
What do the teachers themselves know about African Heritage and what do primary schools actually teach?	05
<b>Theme 2</b>	
A rich provision from one particular school	11
<b>Theme 3</b>	
What did the pupils themselves learn about African Heritage from a school showing a particularly rich practice?	13
<b>Theme 4</b>	
What were pupils taught at home by parents, family or friends about African Heritage?	17
<b>Theme 5</b>	
Issues of interpretation	19
<b>Theme 6</b>	
The factors that seem to influence the quality of African Heritage provision	21
<b>Theme 7</b>	
Recommendations	25

## Preface

# With whom should we entrust our children's cultural education?

**This was one of the questions which motivated the African Heritage Forum to investigate how educators in primary schools at Key Stage 2 transfer to pupils knowledge of Africans, Africa and its heritage, as well as the impact on schools, parents and the community.**

We were also propelled towards this study by the fact that a large number of African British young people lack a sense of belonging, and are often confused as to their identity. We wanted to do something about it.

Although the problems were more visible among teenagers, we thought it correct to start at the beginning with primary school-age children. Many parents have told us of the problems their children face at school, and that the education delivered does not fulfil the latter's cultural needs.

Bombarded by negative images and words about Africa, ignoring pre-enslavement and pre-colonial history, and convincingly cutting links between ancient Africa (in particular Egypt) and present-day African Diasporans have been the norm in British life.

Our concern that African Heritage was being sidelined and that people of African descent must play the leading role in how our heritage is presented and preserved that heralded the formation of the African Heritage Forum (AHF). Fittingly, the Forum launched its first project in the United Nations' International Year for People of African Descent (2011).

AHF sees the teaching of history as a prescription for strengthening identity, positive self-esteem and a corrective for self-destructive behaviour. We believe that a good grasp of the meaning of African history and culture will enable the young to develop a sense of accountability, duty and responsibility to contribute their time, talent and resources to uplift others in our community.

AHF engaged with the community through four workshops held in London. At the final full-day debate following the completion of the report, there was a general consensus that parents have the main responsibility to ensure their children are receiving the cultural education they need. Ideas of what parents can do came thick and fast from participants. Some included becoming school governors, and to make use of the plethora of Supplementary or Saturday schools across the UK that teach African history. But while people of African descent in Britain continue to invest in the school system, we must understand what is being fed to our children.

By undertaking this piece of research, we have only touched the surface. The report uncovers more than anecdotal evidence. It magnifies real practice, both positive and negative at a selection of London primary schools. We believe this report is representative of the picture across the nation, but more time and depth would be needed to prove this conclusively.

We hope the report will assist our understanding and appreciation of the importance of African History and Heritage.



African Heritage Forum



Frederick Douglass / An African Woman

## Introduction

# How do educators present African History and Heritage in primary schools?

The term 'African Heritage' is used throughout this report.

**We consider that African Heritage includes the histories, contributions to world civilisation and the experiences of African people over the past thousands of years, and also includes Africans in the Diaspora.**

To answer the question of how African Heritage is presented in primary schools at Key Stage 2, the African Heritage Forum commissioned Robin Walker to conduct the research. He talked with headteachers, teachers, learning mentors, pupils, parents and community workers in a selection of London primary schools.

### Methodology

To obtain detailed answers on the question of African Heritage provision in primary schools, he prepared a document called Questionnaire for Educators. In three parts consisting of a total of sixteen questions, the questionnaire required teachers and learning mentors to state what they thought African Heritage actually was.

He wanted to know what content they thought was covered by the term 'African Heritage.' Moreover, he wanted the educators to spell out how this concept applied to history, literature, technology and invention, music, art or any other area they thought relevant. Secondly, he wanted the educators to spell out exactly what the schools actually taught in these same areas. Thirdly, he asked the educators to give details of what African Heritage content was taught or delivered by outside speakers or trainers brought into the school.

Walker prepared a second document called Questionnaire for Key Stage 2 Pupils (Years 5 and 6). In three parts consisting of a total of eighteen questions, the questionnaire required the pupils to repeat what the school taught them about Ancient Egypt,

Africa in general, the Caribbean, Black people in British history, and Black people in the development of science, literature, music, art and religion. Secondly, he wanted pupils to say what they were taught

about any of these things by parents, family and friends. Thirdly, he wanted to gauge the level of interest that the pupils had in certain subject areas – Ancient Egypt, Mary Seacole, mathematics or science, literature or writing, music, art and religion.

He wanted to see if there was any obvious correlation between Black children being taught of Black contributions in these areas and whether their interest in the subject increased.

For the record, he could find no obvious correlation and therefore abandoned further analysis in this area.

This report illustrates his findings. Theme 1 addresses what the teachers themselves know about African Heritage contrasted with what the schools actually teach. Theme 2 details a school that had a particularly rich African Heritage provision. Theme 3 bursts the bubble a little by investigating what the pupils themselves actually learned about African Heritage from that school with the rich practice. Theme 4 looks at what pupils were taught at home by their parents, family and friends concerning African Heritage. Theme 5 addresses the need for a nuanced and subtle interpretation of the information given to Walker by the Year 5 and 6 pupils. Theme 6 contains Walker's analysis on the factors that seem to influence the quality of African Heritage provision. Theme 7 contains recommendations on ways schools (and parents) can improve on the provision that primary schools offer pupils in the area of African Heritage.



African Heritage Forum



## Theme 1

# What do the teachers themselves know about African Heritage and what do the schools actually teach?

**A**s may be expected, most of the teachers and headteachers the researcher Robin Walker contacted knew very little about African Heritage provision. In such cases, they would simply decline to be interviewed or to complete the questionnaire. None of the teachers were impolite about this. They simply used stalling tactics that produced the same result.

The most enthusiastic teachers willing to engage with Walker were the few who were the most informed about African Heritage provision. Walker documented what these teachers had to say below.

## What do the teachers know about African Heritage in history?

Many of the informed teachers mentioned Ancient Egypt. One of them saw this as the key to understanding the position of Black people in world history. Other teachers mentioned Great Benin, slavery (European enslavement of Africans), abolition, African-American inventors, John Archer, the first Black Mayor of Battersea, and Mary Seacole.

One teacher saw great value in teaching 'Our Heritage' which involved getting all the school children to link their families back across generations. This would result in African and Caribbean pupils linking themselves to Africa through their parents, and their parents going back many generations. Another teacher argued that all areas of history should reflect all the heritage's of the pupils in the classroom.

Another held the view that world history should be taught but was insistent that teachers should research what Black people were doing at each stage of world history giving the examples of Black Romans, Black Tudors and Black Victorians. She believed that teachers should link slavery (European enslavement of Africans) to, migrations from the 16th century onwards, the attempt by Queen Elizabeth I to expel Black people from Britain, and to anti-slavery campaigners such as Equiano.

She further believed that teachers should link the Black Victorians to discussions of the Chartist Movement and William Cuffay, and the African American inventors of the same period.

One teacher was insistent on the need to teach Moorish Spain. Another mentioned the Timbuktu history preservation project.

A number of teachers mentioned Black contributions to World War II. The main finding, however, was that as well informed as those teachers were, what they brought to the table was very much a jigsaw. In other words, a particular teacher might be knowledgeable on Ancient Egypt, another might have detailed information about Mary Seacole, yet another might be expert in the Black Tudors – but few teachers knew detailed information across the breadth of the topic areas. The weakness here is that the quality of African Heritage provision in a school is therefore fragile.

The provision is at risk of knowledgeable teachers leaving the school and moving on, taking their piece of the jigsaw with them.

## What did the schools teach about African Heritage in history?

We must, of course, remind ourselves that most schools taught very little and in some cases the little that was taught was not actually recognised as African Heritage. For example, most of the schools actually taught Ancient Egypt but not all saw this as African Heritage.

The most popular themes that the schools taught included the 'Our Heritage' approach, Mary Seacole, using Black History Month or Science Week to teach about Black people in science, poetry, music and dance, also political figures such as President Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One school taught Abolition 2007, a major project on carnival, the role of Black people in World War II, and the Windrush years.

Another school did a project on Africa and the Caribbean in geography looking at the history of places. One such place of focus was St Lucia.

Another school taught the Tudors, European enslavement of Africans and the growth of empire. The same school taught the history of Great Benin and Olaudah Equiano.

**Many of the teachers Walker spoke with, however, were disappointed with their school's provision. One teacher was disappointed that the school taught Ancient Egypt but not as an African culture. They concentrated instead on later periods when invaders became dominant.**

## Theme 1

### What do the teachers know about African Heritage in literature?

One teacher was particularly clear about content. She recommended oral literature and folk tales such as Anancy, poets/writers James Berry, John Agard and Grace Nichols, Floella Benjamin and Malorie Blackman. This teacher was adamant about the need to remove African-American dominance from the teaching of Black-British school children.

Another teacher mentioned names such as Jubilee Books, Benjamin Zephaniah, Tamarind Books, and Letterbox Library publishers, whom she saw as a source of inclusive books to do with African Caribbean history & authors, fiction and non-fiction.

Another saw the Bible and the Egyptian Book of the Dead (correct title Coming Forth By Day) as being important sources of African literature.

One teacher had read the biography of Jupiter Williams by S.I. Martin to her class. The same teacher believes that reading teams should be named after Black writers as compared with Roald Dahl.

Other teachers mentioned Beverley Naidoo, and African and African-American writers and poets.

### What did the schools teach concerning African Heritage in literature?

One of the schools taught stories from Malorie Blackman's books, Anancy-type folktales, Benjamin Zephaniah, picture books that contain Black faces such as A for Africa, counting books, books on African and Caribbean fruits, and books by sympathetic white writers such as Ann Cameron who writes books in Black settings such as Gambia and Nigeria.

In another school, the writings of John Agard, Malorie Blackman, S. I. Martin and Benjamin Zephaniah were studied. Another school taught Grace Nichols and Bob Marley's lyrics.

However in another school, a teacher reported that she knew of numerous Year 4 pupils who could not name a single Black writer. That teacher rectified the situation by using some of the same names already mentioned such as the writings of Grace Nichols and sympathetic white writers such as Mary Hoffman

and Caroline Binch. These writers produced "very positive books" such as An Angel Just Like Me and Princess Grace. This same teacher used Fly Eagle Fly, a Ghanaian tale, also Colour of Home which are favourites of Somali children.

Unhappily to report, one teacher saw no evidence of literature reflective of African Heritage being used in his school.

### What do the teachers themselves know about African Heritage in science?

One teacher stated that the Ancient Egyptian contribution to time and measurement was a key area of science.

Another spoke of the importance of African contributions to astronomy and geometry.

One teacher mentioned the role of African Americans in the evolution of electricity and invention in general. That individual recommended the books by BIS Publications, which specialises in the Black people in Science books.

Another mentioned the role of African Americans in space such as Christine Darden.

Several teachers mentioned Africans and African Americans in medicine and alternative medicine. One person mentioned the role of Charles Richard Drew and his research on blood and blood preservation.

However, in speaking to the teachers, Walker found that their science knowledge was by far the weakest and therefore the jigsaw approach was most likely to fail in this area. Several teachers told him that they just didn't know anything on this subject.

### What did the schools teach concerning African Heritage in science?

In one of the schools, pupils were encouraged to do research tasks as homework projects along with their parents. They would choose a Black scientist or inventor to study, such as Garrett Morgan.

Another school encouraged research into the great astronaut Mae Jemison. They also studied Christine Darden and some of the other African Americans in space science. Unfortunately in two of the schools, the teachers reported that there was no evidence of

African Heritage being represented in science. What made things worse, was that those teachers were the most informed on African contributions to science that Walker spoke with, but were not in an institutional position to decide what is taught in school.

### What do the teachers themselves know about African Heritage in technology and invention?

One of the particularly well-informed teachers saw the Pyramids of Egypt and the monumental 9th century Nigerian city of Eredo as premier examples of African Heritage in technology.

Another teacher spoke of African masks as examples of technology. (This teacher may well have been referring to the metallurgical art coming from Mediaeval Nigeria that are technological masterpieces.)

Another well-informed teacher mentioned Black contributions to the evolution of computer technology and the mobile phones.

All the well-informed teachers spoke of the African-American inventors and their contributions to household inventions including the ironing board, the traffic signals, the mobile phone, refrigeration, the gas mask, and names like Lewis Latimer and Elijah McCoy. However, one teacher called on all the teachers to do research into this area to remove the African-American slant and replace it with information from the books by Tamarind publishers.

### What did the schools teach concerning African Heritage in technology and invention?

In one of the schools, Tamarind Books on Black non-African-American scientists were used. The same school also taught African-American inventors. They taught some of this in Science Week.

In another school, the approach was to include Black innovators linked with other stories. For example in teaching about World War I, they included Garrett Morgan and the gas mask. In teaching about the Crimea, they included Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole. In addition, in teaching about electricity, they included Thomas Edison and Lewis Latimer.

Unfortunately in two of the schools, the teachers

reported that there was no evidence of African Heritage being represented in technology or invention.

### What do the teachers themselves know about African Heritage in music?

One of the teachers was particularly clear about content and saw it as teaching the roots of jazz, the roots of Latin American music, reggae, and some European classical music. She also saw the link between Calypsonians and Griots.

Another teacher went further and saw African music as the basis of all music. For content this meant reggae, mento, ska, blues and how blues influenced pop, great jazzmen like Courtney Pine, saxophonist Yolanda Brown, classical artists like Sir Willard White and Dame Jessye Norman and the former London composer of Sierra Leone Heritage – Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

Another teacher felt it was important to stress the importance of the drum. She spoke of the need to study African musical instruments, also folk songs by enslaved Africans.

A learning mentor suggested that Africa had the first musical instruments and that some of the classical musicians were of mixed ancestry, citing the example of Beethoven.

### What did the schools teach concerning African Heritage in music?

In one of the schools, musical instruments and their origins were studied, folk songs from all over the world were sung, pupils were encouraged to participate in gospel groups and even participated at a competition at the Royal Festival Hall, London. A specialist in steel pans came into the school as an outside expert and taught steel pans on a weekly basis. The pupils were also taught African drumming and also rapping.

In another school, pupils were taught about role models in music. The teachers set projects that allowed the pupils to choose and research their favourite musicians.

In another school, African Heritage rhythms were taught as part of poetry.