# Superintendent’s Memo #024-21


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: January 29, 2021

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Black History Month Resources

As our nation observes Black History Month, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is pleased to provide school divisions with Black History Month resources that honor African Americans and celebrate their achievements and contributions to America.

Black History Month is a time of celebration that honors the experiences, achievements, and contributions of Black people. As educators, we have the privilege to exchange knowledge with young people and we must do so with great care. In preparing to celebrate Black History Month 2021, I hope that you will join me in reflecting on our duty to affirm students and create engaging learning environments. To ensure that Black history is taught across subject areas with cultural competence, sensitivity, and depth, educators and leaders are encouraged to review Virginia’s [Equity Framework](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/edequityva/navigating-equity-book.pdf) and [webpages](https://www.virginiaisforlearners.virginia.gov/cultural-competence/), which outline the tenets of culturally responsive practice. We encourage you to embody the true spirit of this celebratory time through meaningful and engaging lessons that extend beyond the month of February and beyond history and social science.

In 1925, Carter G. Woodson and the organization he founded–the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH)–conceived and announced Negro History Week. Woodson's project for the "New Negro History" had a dual purpose of giving Black Americans a history to be proud of and to ensure that the overlooked role of Black people in American history was acknowledged.  Expanded to a month in 1976, ASNLH, now the [Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)](https://asalh.org/about-us/our-history/), continues to promote the study of Black history all year.

Each year, the ASALH establishes a Black History Month theme that emphasizes important developments relevant to the Black experience; the [2021 theme](https://asalh.org/black-history-themes/) is The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity. While the role of the Black family has been described by some as a microcosm of the entire race, its complexity is the “foundation” of African American life and history. The family offers a rich tapestry of images for exploring the African American past and present. Local school divisions are encouraged to seek and develop instructional and community programming that highlights Black history not only during February but also throughout the entire year. For greater understanding and deeper connection, activities should aim to:

1. Engage students, teachers, parents, and the community at large;
2. Align with the national theme for Black History Month; and
3. Provide opportunities for ALL staff to enhance their understanding of the role of African Americans in helping to build America.

Lending credence to the theme, the materials enclosed emphasize an interdisciplinary approach that extends Black History Month and the Black narrative beyond merely twenty-eight days of highlights to creating inclusive, year-round lesson plans. The resources below support local school division’s instructional programming.

* The [National Museum of African American History and Culture](https://nmaahc.si.edu/) is the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture established by Act of Congress in 2003, following decades of efforts to promote and highlight the contributions of African Americans.
* [Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)](https://asalh.org/about-us/our-history/), publishing several scholarly works and establishing Negro History Week, the precursor to Black History Month.
* National resources including the [Library of Congress](https://www.loc.gov/), [National Archives and Records Administration](https://www.archives.gov/), [National Endowment for the Humanities](https://www.neh.gov/), [National Gallery of Art](https://www.nga.gov/), [National Park Service](https://www.nps.gov/index.htm), [Smithsonian Institution](https://www.si.edu/), [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](https://www.ushmm.org/), and collaborative projects including [February is African American History Month](http://www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov/) and the [National Archives: Black History](https://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/black-history.html)
* The Library of Virginia focuses on topics in Virginia history and includes a listing of [African American History Sites](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/vhr/afam.htm).
* The [Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia](https://www.blackhistorymuseum.org/) mission is to preserve stories that inspire.
* The [Virginia’s Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/) website includes the following resources:
	+ [Emancipation Proclamation Sesquicentennial](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/lincoln/projects.html)
	+ [Resources from the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/mlk/resources.html)
	+ [Resources from the Abraham Lincoln Subcommittee](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/lincoln/resources.html)
	+ [Resources from the 50th Anniversary of Public School Closings in Virginia](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov/va_school_closings/resources.html).
* Virginia’s [2019 America Evolution™ commemoration](https://www.americanevolution2019.com/) - highlights the significance and modern relevance of several important events that occurred in Virginia in 1619. Explore the 2019 commemoration’s [education resources](https://www.americanevolution2019.com/education/), including primary source materials, videos, and innovative lesson ideas to use in your classroom all year long!
* [Civil Rights and Racial Healing](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/teachingwithhistoricplaces/civil-rights-racial-healing-feature.htm) - Classroom discussions about Civil Rights struggles in historic places can help communities toward racial healing. In honor of the American pursuit of justice, the National Park Service highlights Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans that focus on Civil Rights and Racial Healing. These resources/lessons, created by interpreters, preservation professionals, and educators, are free and ready for immediate classroom use and are adaptable for most grade levels.
* The [Educating for Democracy Curriculum Website](https://educatingfordemocracy.education.virginia.edu/) offers a range of teaching tools, including developmentally appropriate lessons that interrogate issues of race, justice and human welfare in the U.S. by connecting the full story of the past with current events.
* [African American History Video Series](https://emediava.org/lo/2800003358) - WHRO created this video series in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education. These videos are part of the African American History online course content.

For more instructional support and information, please contact Department of Learning and Innovation via email at instruction@doe.virginia.gov or call (804) 225-2034.

JFL/CBB/lh