

African Americans in Pittsburgh: First Stop, Homewood
Merrie Luna
Pittsburgh Lincoln K-8

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Overview

The focus of this unit is to look at the lives of African Americans living in Homewood-Brushton as early as the 1800s and taking a look at the people and their community as a whole. Blacks have always been a central part of Homewood's history. Third and fourth grade students will be exposed to reading materials and activities, which will help them become more familiar with the neighborhood right next door to where a lot of them live and/or attend school.

Rationale

The reason I developed this unit is because the third grade social studies curriculum and materials are very outdated. Third grade students are required to learn the history of Pittsburgh. However, a major concern of mine is that the resource materials we are supposed to use and the student book do not do a feasible job of teaching the students how much African Americans have contributed to our city. The books do not include African American history as it was in Pittsburgh, especially when it comes to the neighborhood in which some of them reside today.

The Hill district is an excellent example of an area where African Americans in Pittsburgh exhibited pride and had a respect for their neighborhood. They had a

lot of self-respect and worked hard to have the most comfortable life possible for their families. Education was viewed as a priority for all of the neighborhood children, whether the parents were educated or not. Well, these same morals and values were evident in Homewood as well. Students working through this unit with their teacher(s) will discover that the Homewood-Bruston community that they know today was nothing like it is now back in the 1800s-1950s.

This unit will be appropriate for third and fourth grade students, higher-level grades could also use with appropriate adaptations or extensions based on the ability level of the students. All students can participate in the lessons because grouping can be done and partners can be used when necessary. This unit can fit nicely into the existing social studies curriculum prescribed by the Pittsburgh Board of Education because it will be the extra resource to provide all Pittsburgh third, fourth, and even fifth grade students the opportunity to be exposed to a wealth of information around a well-known community in Pittsburgh identified as Homewood.

Language arts and social studies work very well together in this unit when it comes to planning activities around literature read and discussed during class. For example a great resource used in this unit to read with the teacher is Homewood-Brushton/A Century of Community Making (chapter 2) by, Steven W. Sapolsky and Bartholomew Roselli. The students can create a postcard, which will explain a day in the life of a Homewood-Brushton resident. The students will also use their creativity abilities to describe how their neighborhood and/or surrounding community would actually look based on the reading done in class.

The same resource Homewood-Brushton/A Century of Community Making (chapter 4) will also be used to assist students in a week- long diary project. The students will be given the opportunity to express what they have learned, their views, and feelings around being a Homewood resident. This activity will take place after an extensive discussion during the reading of chapter four with teacher and any other resource, which may be helpful for diary writing.

The annotated bibliography does not entail a lot of materials, however the items used are very important for all lessons to be completed successfully. The biography includes the use of the Internet; this will assist with biography posters created around a list of prominent African Americans from the Homewood area or who are a graduate of Westinghouse High School. The Homewood-Brushton/A Century of Community Making history book is available at Carnegie Library(Homewood Branch). The Blue, Gold & Black 2006 University of Pittsburgh book

is another great resource that should be used before inviting a well-known, important education figure in our school system, known as Dr. Helen Faison. There may be some teacher discretion on chapters being of importance to you for your student population when using the Homewood-Brushton Century resource. There were a lot of great chapters in this book and a lot of different topics could be read and discussed with your students. There are also several videos and documentaries available on Westinghouse graduate Maurice Stokes. Based on the ages of the students being taught the teacher may decide on different types of videos and/or documentaries, which may be of great assistance to any students creating a biography poster on Maurice Stokes.

In this unit learners will participate in a variety of activities, which will allow them to demonstrate what they have learned through reading, speaking, and writing while displaying their individual creativity.

The learners will demonstrate their understanding of the physical appearance, daily life experience, and overall living practices for someone living as a Homewood resident in this community in the late 1800s. The learners will also have the opportunity to articulate by sharing what they have learned with their peers.

The learners will conduct research on selected prominent Homewood residents or Westinghouse High School graduates. The learner will take notes; these notes will enable them to create a persuasive poster. This poster should want all observers to want to learn more about this person.

The learners will develop an understanding of daily life for African Americans living in the Homewood-Brushton community during the 1940s up to and including the 19th century. They will use various resources, reading materials, and available photos of this community.

African American Living in Homewood

The reason I chose the title that I did for my unit is because it was hard to complete a unit on all the black history that is relevant to this city. I had to break it down to particular communities. These communities played a major role in the survival, education, and success of many African Americans. The first stop had to be Homewood, Why? Because the population of students in which I teach reside

close to or in that particular area. If they do not live in this area or close, there is a great chance of their having a family member, friend, or friends of the family residing in the Homewood-Brushton community

The struggle for African Americans in Pittsburgh was evident before World War I and continued thereafter. Most northern cities facing struggles were small, they faced racial discrimination, and faced poverty as well, and Pittsburgh was no different. The black community was poor because racial discrimination excluded black men from the city's mainstream economy. During this time the most prestigious occupation for blacks was barbering. Other jobs blacks performed were day laborers, whitewashers, janitors, waiters, stewards, and steelworkers. When we think of steelworkers we think of higher paying jobs. This was not true when it came down to African American's role in the steel industry. Blacks did not have the same opportunities as their white co-workers. Supervisors and foremen made sure that higher paying positions were not available for blacks to try to transfer into.

One community that continued to thrive after World War II was the Homewood-Brushton community. This neighborhood was integrated. The high population of blacks was evident by 1960. Before the 1960's whites and blacks did their shopping, attended church, and had their recreation in Homewood.

Around the 1950's when a number of African Americans continued to move into the Homewood area whites living south of the railroad tracks now had a "new" name for the area in which they lived known as Point Breeze. Sharing a neighborhood with a large number of poor blacks made white residents very uncomfortable.

After World War II there was a huge black migration to the Pittsburgh area due to its successful industry. Unfortunately opportunity for a better living was taking place in Pittsburgh, but this was not the case for blacks migrating to the area for their chance at these jobs. Homewood-Brushton was a community into which black families felt comfortable moving. Homewood was also popular to Lower Hill residents after government agencies claimed eminent domain in the 1950's. The development of the Civic Arena and related projects forced many African Americans into Homewood and a few other areas in the city open to blacks. Homewood-Brushton appeared to be more attractive to those moving off the Hill. This influx of African Americans is what actually frightened white residents of Homewood. These residents and their families began receiving Federal

Government and Housing Administration monies, which help encourage these families to move.

Objectives

The objectives of this lesson are for students to become familiar with African American history in Pittsburgh in particular the Homewood-Brushton community. Students will demonstrate their newfound knowledge after reading and discussing articles and biographies with the teacher. Various activities will follow after students read and discuss articles along with listening to a Westinghouse High School graduate. Dr. Helen Faison would be an excellent choice.

I want the interviewee to get the students enthused about the rich history the Homewood-Brushton section of the city had to offer in the past and am trying to gain back. It is important that the learners are exposed to the many Westinghouse High School graduates who have gone on to make a huge difference in society all over the world and have established success in their many different endeavors. I believe in students being engaged in activities that allow them to demonstrate their individual creativity. A lot of times this can be demonstrated through writing or art work.

This unit can be implemented in language arts, social studies, and math. African American students completing this unit will develop a self-pride and confidence with being a Homewood resident or even just being a student in the Lincoln area, which is a neighbor to this rich community, known as Homewood.

Strategies for Implementing this Unit

This unit has been developed primarily for students in third or fourth grade. Even though students in the Pittsburgh Public School District are to learn about the state of Pennsylvania when they are in the fourth grade I find it of great importance that they know the history from which a lot of them have come as a citizen in this city. This unit can be adapted for students in these particular grades and even at higher-grade levels. It can be taught by one special education teacher or by a

regular education teacher who has the responsibility of teaching language arts and social studies.

This unit will fit well into a block schedule time frame because of the amount of reading required by the teacher and students. The extended time block will allow for in-depth discussions, questions to be answered, and processing of information in the concept. A lot of the information read in class and discussed with the teacher will be new to most if not all of your students. The extended block of time will provide success for all students especially when it comes time for your students to work on activities within the unit. This is definitely a unit that can be easily modified to meet the needs of all students. If necessary, the mainstream teacher and learning support teacher may even choose to co-plan and co-teach this unit.

I would suggest no less than two months for this unit. This is a unit, which could be conducted over an entire grading period. This would allow thorough instruction and full student participation. Completing the reading of chapters, oral presentations, and research conducted will help the students get a true understanding of African American life in the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood.

Classroom Activities

This unit contains three activities using the following books, resources, and the Internet: Homewood-Brushton/Community Making, Blue Gold & Black 2006, A Legacy in Bricks and Mortar: African-American Landmarks in Allegheny County, On the Street Where I Lived, African Americans in Pittsburgh. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and *Google* are also great resources which are helpful in instructing this unit successfully.

Week 1

Objective: The student will gain an understanding of how the Homewood-Brushton community looked physically through readings and photos. This will

help the learners be able to visualize this community and display their work through, writing and art work done in the form of a postcard.

Materials: Large index cards, pencil, markers, crayons, paper or journal for rough draft, colored pencils, Homewood-Brushton/ A Community book pages 25-27.

Anticipatory Set: Questions the teacher may want to ask students are:

- **Where the Homewood-Brushton area is located**
- **What they know about this area, and how would they describe it.**

These questions will give students the opportunity to share what they actually do know about this community. These questions also give the teacher the chance to clear up any misconceptions the students may have about this neighborhood.

Activity 1:

1. The teacher and students will read chapter 2 of Homewood-Brushton: A Century of Community- Making aloud (pages 25-27). The teacher should stop and elaborate when necessary. This is done based on knowing your students. The learners will need a clear understanding of what it meant to be a resident in the Homewood community from around 1890-1930's.
2. The reading of chapter 2 along with any additional photos from other resources, and teacher prior knowledge will assist students with being successful with creating a visual display of how Homewood probably looked during this time period.
3. The teacher should create a model that will demonstrate how all space on the blank side of the index card should be used and is colorful. The students must create a message to someone of their choice that will talk about their experience or life, as it is as a Homewood resident.

Closure: The students will show understanding of what it means to be a resident in Homewood. The learner will also demonstrate an understanding of what the community probably looked like based on their illustrations they create for their postcard. The students will share their message and postcard decoration with the class during presentations.

Week 2-3

Objective: The students will understand chronological thinking and distinguish between past, present, and future time through diaries created around living through the Homewood experience after World War II.

Materials: Paper with holes, color oak tag paper, string scissors, markers, colored pencils, crayons, and a pencil.

Anticipatory Set: The students will be asked what they think a good community is made up of. **To prompt students ask questions like:**

- **What are some important buildings or people that make up a good community? What makes these buildings and/or people important to the neighborhood?**
- **What does entertainment mean to you?**
- **What are some things people do in a community for entertainment?**

- **The students will preview the copied resource that will be used for this lesson and write any predictions, thoughts, or questions they may have before reading and discussing with the teacher.**

- **A few students should be given the opportunity to share their journal response on the reading material being use.**

Activity2:

1. The teacher and students will continue to read from the same resource, Homewood-Brushton: A Century of Community-Making, Chapter 4, pages. This chapter should be used when completing activity 2 of the unit.
2. The teacher will discuss the title and heading of chapter 4 with the students. **The teacher may want to pose the open-ended question around, what they think it means for Homewood-Brushton to *Become a Black Community*.** This is a great opportunity for the teacher to give background knowledge to those who are not aware of the racial make-up of Homewood around the 1950s, 60s, and even early 70s.
3. The students will begin reading and discussing, Strong Traditions and Revitalizing Efforts: A Diverse Black Community, 1950-1987, pages 31-32 with the teacher. The teacher should elaborate when and where they find it necessary during the reading. This is an excellent section for students to practice using context clues, inference, and even fact and opinion.
4. The reading of pages 31-32 over at least a 2 day span of 1 period or block schedule of periods will help prepare students for their first diary entry. After the completion of reading these 2 pages the students will write their first diary entry based on what was read and discussed about Homewood

becoming a Black community. Their entry should represent the reading and discussion held in class thus far. Some students should be selected to share their diary experience on Homewood with the class.

5. After the teacher has had students share their Homewood experience through their diary entry focusing on the section previously read and discussed. Everyone will begin reading aloud, chapter 4, Roots: Family and Church, pages 32-33.
6. After reading and discussing this section of chapter 4 the students will be required to write an entry which focuses on their family life and/or church engagement as a resident in Homewood when Homewood African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, one of the first churches was founded in the community.
7. Some of the students who did not share a previous diary entry should prepare themselves for sharing of entry the following day before the next reading takes place.
8. The students will continue with the Homewood-Brushton: A Century of Community-Making resource to complete their weekly diary entry project. The teacher and students will read the section titled: “Community-Making on the Urban Frontier”, pages 36-37.
9. This section will probably take a 2 day span if read for only one period each day. After a thorough discussion around the other community organizations were popular with African Americans besides the church. The students will then complete their diary entry on day 5 of this lesson. Their entry will focus on their lives during the 1960s-70s as a Homewood resident being involved in activities, clubs, organizations, or any other affiliation they may have gained an interest in during the reading of the material.

Closure: This activity will demonstrate their understanding of being more than just a resident in the Homewood neighborhood because they now have to show what involvement they would have in their community groups, clubs, or organizations. The students will share their final diary entry with the class. The final sharing session will give the students who have not yet shared an entry get the opportunity to share any one they have written from any of the three sections read and discussed.

Week 4,5, and 6

Objective: The students will create a biography poster after becoming familiar with some influential Westinghouse High School graduates first through a field trip to Westinghouse to observe and receive information in the Famous Westinghouse Wall of Fame. The second way students will become familiar with some very prominent Westinghouse alumnus is by reading the research they find and note-taking skills.

Materials: Index cards, pencils, highlighters, Internet, poster board or large construction paper, markers, crayons, or colored pencils.

Anticipatory Set: The teacher will open up lesson with the following question:

- **Do you know any friends or family members, or know of anyone that has graduated from Westinghouse High School?**

The students will share if they know of someone as the teacher waits to share an example with the class of Westinghouse alumni, Dr. Helen Faison, a member of the Wall of Fame.

Activity 3:

1. The teacher will share how George Westinghouse's accomplishments were the reason for the naming of Westinghouse High School. The children will get a brief background of when the school was built and any other important information the teacher might want to share about the school. Facts about the school can be found at www.google.com, with a search for Westinghouse High School (Pittsburgh).
2. The teacher will then explain the model for the assignment, which will be a poster of Dr. Helen Faison. The teacher should model preferably by using the Smart Board, how to look up their Westinghouse graduate. The use of google should be sufficient when locating the Wall of Fame graduates. This is why the teacher should have an idea of the people they want their students to actually research. The students will see from the demonstration that once the alumni's name is typed in several links will be presented, a lot of them being articles written about that person.

3. The students will be given a list of names to choose from in which they will begin to research this person with the assistance of a partner, or small group of (3) would work well. A few names the teacher might want to consider are: **Naomi Simms, Helen Faison, Jake Milliones, John E. Wideman, Billy Strayhorn, Robert Ratcliff, Ahmad Jamal, Maurice Stokes, Bev Smith, John Brewer,** and **Ophelia “Cookie” Coleman**. Teachers should make sure that students would find an adequate amount of information on the people you select for their choices.
4. An entire list of many names from the Westinghouse High School Wall of Fame can be found under www.post-gazette.com The teacher will model appropriate note-taking by using the Smart Board to point out important accomplishments Dr. Helen Faison has made. This should be information that can also be found on the teacher model of the biography poster.
5. The teacher will also demonstrate how to use index cards appropriately to take notes while on the computer gathering information on their selected person. Some students may prefer to use a reproducible found in the *appendices* (page 16), which ask specific questions they can answer for facts to place on biography posters. The class should be given several class periods in the computer lab to locate their Westinghouse alumni, begin taking notes, and printing out needed facts on their person they may want to use on their poster. The students are to work with a partner or in a group of (3) for extra support in note taking.
6. After note-taking has been demonstrated the teacher explain the importance of only highlighting the valuable information from the printed biography, article, or anything else they found useful during their research to use on their biography poster.
7. After notes are collected and edited by self and then at least one peer the students should then get a final approval on notes they would like to share on their poster by the teacher.
8. Once the teacher has approved notes, the student should select a sheet of poster board or large construction paper to begin their final copy of their biography poster. The poster can contain illustrations, clip art, photos from the Internet, and anything that makes the project appealing to the eye.
9. The final step for this activity is for the students to be prepared to begin sharing their poster with the class, which will allow them to practice good public-speaking skills once more.

Closure: The students will display an understanding of research skills being used successfully based on their poster demonstrating a knowledge of someone new to

them along with information being gathered on that person through reading, note taking, and highlighting skills that were used.

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Homewood-Brushton: A Century of Community-Making. Steven W. Sapolsky and Bartholomew Roselli. For this unit chapter 2, “Streetcar Suburb: The New Middle Class Attains Their Good Life, 1890-1930” was used. Chapter 4, “Strong Traditions and Revitalizing Efforts...1950-1987” was also used. This is a great resource for sharing the development, growth, and decline of Homewood over the years. This resource cannot be taken out of the Homewood Branch Carnegie Library. Educators may want to copy chapters necessary for the instruction of this unit, along with any additional information they may want to share about this community.

A Legacy in Bricks and Mortar: African-American Landmarks in Allegheny County, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation. This is an excellent resource for important people and sites linked to the Homewood community. For example, accomplishments of John Wideman can be found on pages 29-30. You can also find import sites to the Homewood community from pages 57-60 along with page 17.

African Americans in Pittsburgh, from the Black America Series. John M. Brewer, Jr. with photographs from the (*Pittsburgh Courier*) and the Carnegie Museum of Art. The photographs and captions are extremely important for classroom discussion. They will give the students a better understanding of who some notable people and places are from this community. Some pages of interest are 77-81, 62, 127, and 123.

On the Street Where I Lived. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981. This book shares information about the childhood experience in the Belmar School, which is located in the Brushton area.

Blue, Gold & Black 2006, University of Pittsburgh. Courtesy of University of Pittsburgh Archives, Archives Service Center. This is a great resource for exposing students to one of Pittsburgh’s influential educators and a former graduate of Westinghouse High School.

A History of the Point Breeze and Homewood-Brushton Areas of Pittsburgh.
James Wudarczyk, 1986 an unpublished work. The history of businesses, people, and the development of Homewood-Brushton and the Point Breeze communities can be found in this unpublished work.

Web Sites

<http://www.postgazette.com/> This site is excellent for students when researching most, if not all, Westinghouse alumni that have been influential people in society.

<http://www.google.com/> This is also a site, which can help students find out about important people from the Homewood-Brushton community along with powerful events that may have taken place in Homewood as well as another part of the country.

Appendices

Content Standards

Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Citizenship

Communications

- All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
- All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
- All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication and separating fact from opinion.

- All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

Citizenship

- All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.
- All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating, and cooperating with others.
- All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
- All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing communities, the United States, and other nations.

Name _____ Date _____

My Important Notes for my “Wall of Fame” Biography Poster

Westinghouse Graduate: _____

What year did they graduate? _____

Where were they born?

What are his/her major accomplishment(s), Why are they on the Wall?:

What do you admire about this person?

A special fact for my poster
