

Black History Month

October is Black History Month in the UK. It recognises black people's achievements and teaches people about black history.

Tasks

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises to check your understanding.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. diversity
2. a doctorate
3. belonging
4. migration
5. an empire
6. self-esteem
7. cohesion
8. enslaved

Definition

- a. when large numbers of people go to a new area or country to live
- b. the fact that there are many different types of people in a particular place
- c. a group of countries that is controlled by one country, person or government
- d. the feeling of being comfortable because you are in the right place
- e. the highest university qualification
- f. forced to work for someone without freedom and other basic human rights
- g. belief and confidence in your own value
- h. a sense of connection and togetherness between people

Black History Month

The history of our world is a story of migration, diversity, empire and belonging. But these topics are not often taught in schools. Black History Month is about teaching ourselves fully and fairly about our history, and not just looking at it from one point of view. Black History Month challenges racism and promotes understanding by making sure that black people's achievements and stories are not forgotten.

How did Black History Month begin?

It started in the USA with the work of Carter G Woodson. He was a brilliant historian and in 1912 he became the second African American to get a doctorate from Harvard University.

His parents had been enslaved and taken from Africa to America. But he saw that American history lessons did not include the history of people like his parents. He started 'Negro History

Week' to teach people about black history. He wanted to give African Americans a sense of pride and identity and to protect them within wider society.

When did it come to the UK?

This was in 1987. It was organised by community activist and London council worker Akyaaba Addai Sebo after a colleague told him that her son had asked her, 'Mum, why can't I be white?' Addai Sebo was sad to learn of the young boy's lack of self-esteem and identity. So he helped organise an event to promote self-pride in African and Afro-Caribbean people through positive teaching of their histories and culture.

What's happened recently?

After the killing of George Floyd in the USA in 2020, there has been huge international support for the Black Lives Matter protests for racial justice. People want to talk about racism in schools, workplaces, sports and other parts of society – and how we can stop it.

This includes thinking about how we learn about history. In 2020, anti-racism protesters in the UK took down the statue of Edward Colston – a man who bought and sold enslaved people – and pushed it into the water in Bristol Harbour. Some people say acts such as these destroy our history. Others argue that the protesters have actually helped to teach history – the ugly story of a man who transported 84,000 enslaved individuals from Africa to the Americas, 19,000 of them dying on his ships. The debate about what to do with statues like this continues.

Is one month enough?

The Black Curriculum is a group of young people who want black British history to be taught in UK schools. They say that learning about empire, movement and migration helps young people build a sense of identity and improves social cohesion. Black history is an important part of British history, and learning about it is necessary for understanding diversity and fighting racism. The Black Curriculum and groups like it are asking the UK government to include black history in lessons all year round, not just in October. This will make sure students get lessons that are relevant to them and that give them a positive sense of belonging.

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

- | | Answer | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------|
| 1. The movement and mixing of different people in the world is a new thing. | True | False |
| 2. The idea for Black History Month came from an African-American historian. | True | False |

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| 3. Carter G Woodson started Black History Month because of a child's comment. | True | False |
| 4. Akyaaba Addai Sebo started Black History Month in the UK. | True | False |
| 5. To stop racism today, we need to understand more about the past. | True | False |
| 6. Everyone agrees that we should take down statues of people who enslaved and sold other humans. | True | False |
| 7. People who want black British history to be taught in schools say that it would bring many benefits. | True | False |
| 8. Some people think more than one month is needed to learn about black history. | True | False |

Task 2

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in **CAPITALS**.

- Black History Month makes sure that black people's and stories are not ignored. **ACHIEVE**
- Carter G Woodson was a brilliant **HISTORY**
- Woodson believed that teaching black history was essential to give African-American people a sense of pride and **IDENTIFY**
- There has been huge international support for the Black Lives Matter protests for justice. **RACE**
- People want to talk about in society and how to stop it. **RACE**
- Anti-racism in Bristol pushed the statue of Edward Colston into the water. **PROTEST**
- Learning about black history is necessary for understanding and challenging racism. **DIVERSE**
- Learning about black history gives students a sense of **BELONG**

Discussion

What do you learn about in your history lessons in school?

Answers

Preparation task

1. b
2. e
3. d
4. a
5. c
6. g
7. h
8. f

Task 1

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. False
7. True
8. True

Task 2

1. achievements
2. historian
3. identity
4. racial
5. racism
6. protesters | protestors
7. diversity
8. belonging