

Classroom Activity

Juneteenth National Freedom Day

Overview

In this activity, students will learn about the significance of Juneteenth by planning their own Juneteenth National Freedom Day learning fair. Students will also learn about local African American leaders. Students will work in pairs to research topics and create exhibits that they will present at a Juneteenth learning fair.

Materials

Poster board, art supplies

Objectives

- Students will explain the importance of Juneteenth in relation to emancipation from slavery.
- Students will understand the significance of Juneteenth in relation to present-day celebrations by planning a Juneteenth learning fair.
- Students will assess the impact of local African American leaders, past and present.

Procedure

- 1 Focus activity:** Explain to students that President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all enslaved people in Confederate states beginning on January 1, 1863, was difficult for Union soldiers to enforce. Ask students to hypothesize about why it was difficult to enforce. (Land was not all controlled by the Union soldiers; great distances; slow modes of transportation and communication) Explain that the proclamation was especially challenging to implement in states with little Union presence, such as Texas. That changed when Union troops landed at Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, and General Gordon Granger proclaimed that all enslaved people in Texas were free. Today people across the country celebrate the June 19 holiday, known as Juneteenth National Freedom Day, with picnics, parades, festivals, and family gatherings. African Americans who migrated from Texas originally brought Juneteenth celebrations to Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, Juneteenth is celebrated each year on the third Saturday of June. Juneteenth festivals, fairs, and celebrations often have an educational component to them and lift up the importance of African American leaders in the community. Tell students they will learn about the significance of the holiday by creating an educational exhibit for a Juneteenth learning fair. Ask students what they think would be good to learn more about for the Juneteenth learning fair.
- 2** Organize students into pairs to conduct research for their Juneteenth exhibit. Assign each partnership one of the following topics, or allow each pair to select their topic:
 - The history of Juneteenth celebrations
 - The history of Juneteenth becoming an Oklahoma state holiday
 - Current Oklahoma Juneteenth celebrations
 - Historical and contemporary African American leaders in science and medicine from Oklahoma
 - Historical and contemporary African American leaders in journalism from Oklahoma
 - Historical and contemporary African American leaders in education from Oklahoma
 - Historical and contemporary African American leaders in politics from Oklahoma
 - Historical and contemporary African American leaders in civil rights from Oklahoma
 - Historical and contemporary African American leaders in the arts from Oklahoma
 - Any of the topics they listed in the Focus Activity that you think are appropriate and relevant

Students could conduct research during class if resources such as a library and Internet access are available. Alternatively, you could assign the research as homework.

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- 3** Have students work with their partners to create posters, presentations, or other exhibits to explain Juneteenth or highlight African American leaders from Oklahoma during the Juneteenth learning fair. Pairs who researched leaders should be sure to include the achievements and impact of the leaders in their exhibits. Students should practice explaining their exhibits and what they learned through their research. You may want to invite younger students from nearby schools to take part in the fair. If you choose to do this, let students know so they can tailor their exhibits appropriately. Assign each group of students a location in the room to set up their work.
- 4** Hold the Juneteenth learning fair for pairs to share their posters, presentations, and exhibits. Welcome students to the fair and remind them that one way that Juneteenth is celebrated is by sharing knowledge. Have students take turns with their partner so that each student has time to examine other groups' exhibits and each student has a chance to present to classmates in other groups. If visitors are coming to the fair, allow students to share with the guests what they have learned about the significance of Juneteenth and the impact of important African American leaders from Oklahoma.
- 5** As the fair is ending, ask students to write a brief reflection about what they learned and why and how Juneteenth is celebrated.