

Black Voices Week Newsletter

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A word from Mr Schumm

We have had the most amazing Black Voices Week where we have been learning about the cultural contributions of Black individuals to society and reclaiming their narratives, whilst also addressing the historical and ongoing challenges of racism and cultural misrepresentation. We have enjoyed workshops, parent / carer visits and an abundance of classroom activities to further develop our understanding.

Our aim during our week of Reclaiming Narratives has been to share the most remarkable stories of inspirational Black people that often get distorted or obscured, with their true impact being diminished. At St Stephen's, we will continue to raise awareness of this important topic to ensure that racism is understood and not disregarded, that everyone's voice and story is heard and the whole school community feels truly valued.

During Collective Worship this week, the whole school has been able to reflect on the learning from the week's focus, recognising and giving prayers of thanks for the contribution to society made by the Black community.

Our Diversity and Inclusion Group continues to guide and inform us in the work that we do in this area. A huge thank you for their work in this area so far this year.

Have a wonderful half term.

St Stephen's Diversity and Inclusion Group

At St Stephen's, we proudly have a Diversity and Inclusion Group formed by members of our school community, who meet on a termly basis to discuss the diverse opportunities we offer our children but also how we can ensure that our curriculum is rich in culture.

Do let us know if you wish to join this group.

Luke Faith – DAIG Lead

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Show Racism the Red Card

On Friday 18th October, St Stephen's showed support for the charity 'Show Racism the Red Card' by raising money and wearing something red.

During Collective Worship, we had a conversation around what racism is and how these behaviours cannot be tolerated. We discussed the contribution we can make to ensure society is an inclusive place to be. We all agreed that we need to work hard to respect everyone and stand up to racism when we see it in order to ensure that every single person in this school, and society, feels safe, respected and loved.

This is not a one-off day for us. We know that every single person has a responsibility to help stand up to racism. Next term, every year group will be spending a whole unit in Relationships and Health Education on 'Valuing Difference'.



Bigfoot Education's Hidden Figures Assembly

We kick-started Black Voices Week with a 'Hidden Figures' assembly by Bigfoot Education. The children joined Focus, an entertaining storyteller, on a voyage of discovery. They were transcended through time, where they were told of the fascinating stories of brilliant Black British people, often omitted from National Curriculum history lessons, who have shaped our country. The children were exposed to a dynamic insight into our real British history; a history that includes Black people as fundamental to creating the fabric of our society and the rich tapestry of who we are today.

Along the journey, the children met: Emperor Septimius Severus, John Blanke, Mary Prince, Lilian Bader and Paul Stephenson. Focus' storytelling allowed the children to recognise how these hidden figures' powerful actions and decisions, allow us all to live in a more respectful society today.

Black Voices Week

As mentioned above, this year, we focused on 'Reclaiming Narratives,' with a view to continuing to make significant shifts towards recognising and correcting the narratives of Black history and culture. By emphasising this theme, we shone a brighter light on stories, allegories and histories that have underscored our commitment to correcting historical inaccuracies. This allowed us to showcase the untold success stories, allowing children to understand the full complexity of Black heritage.

See below an insight into who each year group have been learning about.

Nursery have been reading a range of interesting stories, including *Catch that Chicken* which is by one of our favourite authors, Atinuke.

Reception learnt about Lilian Bader, one of the first Black women to join the British Armed Forces. Early in her career she was made to leave the armed forces as her father was not born in the UK. Later in her life, Lilian returned to the British Armed Forces and worked for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. To remember her, we decided to make toilet roll aeroplanes and fly them around our Early Years garden.

Year 1 have been learning about the work and life of Reverend Sybil Phoenix. She is a community leader from Lewisham who fostered over 100 children, set up a Youth Club, and was the first Black woman to receive an MBE. She created a garden for children and adults to enjoy full of ceramics that she had made herself, many of which were inspired by her childhood in Guyana. Year 1 designed their own gardens for them to play in, planting seeds of Sybil's favourite flowers.

Year 2 explored Amanda Gorman, the poet who read one of her own poems at Joe Biden's inauguration as President of the United States in 2021. We listened to Amanda recite her poem at the inauguration. Based on Amanda's poem, we shared our hopes for the future with each other. We worked with our partners to complete a comprehension all about Amanda. On Wednesday, both Year 2 classes were lucky to have Seun (Gabrielle's mum) come to visit and tell us all about the life of Ruby Bridges. The children really enjoyed listening to Ruby's life and the brave choices she made and the positive changes that came as a result. We also enjoyed to the amazing story 'Sulwe' read by the book's fantastic author, Lupita Nyong'o.

Year 3 learnt about Claudia Jones, the 'Mother of the Notting Hill Carnival'. We began the week by hearing about her early life in Trinidad and then America and how she was passionate about equal rights for all. Claudia Jones wanted to celebrate the culture, music, dancing and food from the Caribbean and launched the first Caribbean Carnival in 1959. We then created colourful carnival masks - complete with feathers and sequins - to celebrate her legacy.

Year 4 researched the life of piano maestro Winifred Atwell, and the huge, yet often unheralded (at least in this day and age), role she played in opening doors for future Black artists in Britain. Atwell was a big name in the music scene in post-war Britain and despite being classically trained and a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, she shunned the elite and played her Boogie-woogie and Ragtime tunes for the 'ordinary people'. The children made posters celebrating her life, reminding everyone of all her incredible achievements.

Year 5 explored the life of Sarah Forbes Bonetta, who at the age of five, after being born into a Royal, West African dynasty, was taken to England and presented to Queen Victoria as a "gift" from one royal family to another. The children created a timeline of the significant events through Sarah's life and then wrote a diary entry in first person, detailing the challenges she overcame alongside describing all her success. The children discovered what a unique and admired figure in history she is, spending her life between the British royal household and her homeland in Africa.

Year 6 explored the life and legacy of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, a renowned composer, conductor and political activist. Working in groups, we researched his life and created digital fact files, which we then presented to the class. To finish, we had the chance to listen to some of his compositions, we really enjoyed experiencing his music!

Staff Training

On Monday 7th October, many of our staff attended a hands-on Unconscious Bias training session led by friend of the school Kat François. During this interesting and thought-provoking event, we learned about various types of unconscious biases we can have and reflected upon ways we can 'check' ourselves, and each other, as part of our teaching practice. We plan on having follow-on sessions with Kat in the coming months... Watch this space!

From next half term and beyond, Kat will be joining us to lead workshops with the children teaching them about unconscious bias (in an age-appropriate manner), racism and how our choice of words we use affect people's lives.

Book Recommendations - Supporting Black Authors and Illustrators

Recommended by our School Librarian, Mrs Pereira

<https://www.waterstones.com/booklist/555799/childrens-books-by-black-writers-and-illustrators>

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<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2021/august/10-must-read-childrens-books-by-black-authors-and-illustrators-chosen-by-sharna-jackson/>

<https://www.puffinschools.co.uk/book-lists/all-ages-new-books-by-black-authors-and-illustrators/>

Check out the bookshop here... <https://www.storymix.co.uk/>

Pupil Voice

'Black Voices Week is important because there are lots of Black people who have worked very hard to fight racism so we can live in a safe, kind society.'

'I loved the Black Voices Week assembly. It was entertaining but also educational. I learnt a lot about Black British people that I had never heard of before, for example, John Stephenson. He protested to allow Black and Asian people to have the right to be bus drivers.'

'This week, we have learnt about lots of interesting people. One of those people was Sarah Forbes Bonetta. She is not very famous but a very interesting women. We have learnt a lot about The Victorians recently but it was very interesting to hear of a women who came from Africa and spent a lot of time with Queen Victoria, who was very fond her!'

'I think Black Voices Week is great for those of us who don't know much about Black, inspirational figures. We learnt about the life of Lilian Bader, who was a lady who successfully joined the Women's Air Force and John Blanke, who was a musician of African descent in London during the early Tudor period.'

'It is important that we take the time to learn about these people so we can understand what Black British people have accomplished.'

'We learnt that Winifred Atwell had two pianos, one she got from a junk shop for £2.50 and another one that was very fancy. She played 'Boogie-woogie' on the junk shop piano. On her good piano, she played 'The Poor People of Paris', which was her number one hit.'

'Black Voices Week is important because we do not want to forget these people as there is a lot we can learn from them.'

'During Black Voices Week, I learnt about Claudia Jones and how she started Notting Hill Carnival. We made colourful masks with feathers to remember how she started Notting Hill Carnival.'

Thank you parents and staff for your continued support.

Mr Schumm