Queen Nur in *Voices of Courage*

Profiles of 19th Century African-American Women

Queen Nur takes on the roles of several exceptionally strong female African-American pioneers in an indelible tour de force performance. This program of riveting monodramas will feature portrayals selected from the below list:

Sojourner Truth (1797?-1883)

An abolitionist and women's rights advocate with courage and wit. Born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree, she spoke only low Dutch. Eventually Sojourner learned English and delivered powerful speeches, including her landmark "Ain't I a Woman" address. Her songs and lectures quieted riots and were lauded in newspapers. Although she could neither read nor write, she dictated her memoirs, which were published as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*.

Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879)

The first American woman to speak to an assembly of mixed gender. Inspired by the Bible, Stewart spoke about the discrimination of race and women as she lectured within the Black community. Maria pronounced Ma-rī-yah.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911)

An abolitionist, suffragist and writer. Known to some as the mother of African-American journalism, Harper is also the first African-American woman to have a short story published, and is among the first Black women in the United States to have published a novel.

Cathy Williams (1844-1911)

The only documented female Buffalo soldier in the United States Army. She disguised herself as a man and enlisted under the name William Cathay. She served in the 38th U.S. Infantry from 1866 to 1868.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)

An anti-lynching activist, and suffragist. Wells-Barnett wrote about the problems the nation faced in the reconstruction era and delivered civil rights lectures in the United Kingdom. Her column, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett Abroad," was published in a mainstream Chicago newspaper, making her the first Black woman to be a paid correspondent to a white newspaper.

Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954)

Internationally known women's and civil rights activist. An educator by profession, Terrell was appointed to the District of Columbia's Board of Education, becoming the first Black woman to hold such a position. Active until her 80's, she led the charge to integrate restaurants and theatres in Washington DC.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955)

Educator, entrepreneur and civil rights leader. Bethune was the founder of the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Girls, which eventually became the traditionally black Bethune-Cookman University. She was instrumental in the formation of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet," advising the president on issues affecting the African-American community.

Vocabulary

1. Review the following terms prior to the performance:

AFRICANISM	Those elements of culture found in the New World that are traceable to an African origin.
ETHNOBIOGRAPHY	The autobiography of one who does not write.
FOLKLORE	Traditional customs, beliefs, dances, songs, tales or sayings preserved orally among a people or a group. The term immediately signals a particular understanding of the relation between history and culture.
HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT	A type of role play in which participants attempt to recreate some aspects of a historical event or period.
ORAL TRADITION	The verbal arts of a society and the creative activities that surround their production.
PINKSTER FESTIVAL	A holiday that was celebrated over several days by African and Dutch New Yorkers throughout the 1700's and early 1800's. A folkloric celebration of food, stories, games, songs and dances. The holiday gave enslaved Africans the opportunity to reunite with loved ones who often lived some distance away.

2. Have your students research the following social studies terms, and report their findings to the class:

ABOLITIONIST
ACTIVIST
ANTEBELLUM
BUFFALO SOLDIER
EMANCIPATION
JIM CROW
LYNCHING
ORATOR
RECONSTRUCTION
WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE
YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC

Discussion

1. Observe how Queen Nur uses vocal tones, facial expressions, body movement and carriage to create the historical profiles.

2. How does storytelling preserve cultural heritage and influence contemporary art?

3. Proverbs are an integral part of the African Oral Tradition. Discuss how this 19th century Ashanti proverb relates to the 19th century African-American women depicted in the show:

   "IF NOTHING TOUCHES THE PALM LEAVES, THEY DON'T RUSTLE."

Activities

Letters and newspaper articles were the predominant mode of correspondence during the 19th century. Even Sojourner Truth, who was unable to read or write, had her words transcribed. Many of her letters are archived at the Library of Congress.

1. Choose a recent candidate for national office who, until the 2008 election year would have been an unlikely candidate for President or Vice President (for example, Barack Obama, Sarah Palin, or Hillary Clinton). Write a letter to the candidate explaining how your favorite historical character depicted in this show paved the way for their candidacy. Think about an issue that the candidate has voiced: do you believe that your historical character would agree or disagree with their position. Why or why not?

2. Write a letter to your favorite figure from *Voices of Courage* inviting her to speak at your school or in your community about a cause you deem important. Explain how you intend to make your voice heard and how you think they can help make a difference.

Name: _____

Match the Quote

During the course of the performance Queen Nur profiles the character of each of the below women. Draw a line matching each quote with the woman who spoke those words.

1. Sojourner Truth
2. Mary Church Terrell
3. Mary McLeod Bethune
4. Ida B. Wells Barnett
5. Cathy Williams
6. Maria W. Stewart
7. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

A. "When knowledge begins to flow, the chains of slavery and ignorance will melt like wax before flames."

B. "Make me a grave where'er you will.
In a lowly plain or a lofty hill.
Make it among earth's humblest graves.
But not in a land where men are slaves."

C. "As we have been extended a measure of democracy, we have brought to the nation rich gifts. We have given you Paul Laurence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, Marian Anderson and George Washington Carver. But even these are only the first fruits of a rich harvest."

D. "I wanted to make my own living and not be dependent on relations and friends."

E. "I am women's rights. I have as much muscle as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that?"

F. "One had better die fighting against injustice than die like a dog or a rat in a trap!"

G. "In myself I am nothing, but with the loyal support of conscientious, capable women, all things are possible."

Seven Degrees of Separation

Frances Harper said, "We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity." Many of the women in Voices of Courage share commonalities. Place the letters below on the line connecting two women who share that characteristic. (For example: what do Mary Church Terrell and Sojourner Truth have in common?) Each letter must be used. Only one combination completes the circle.

A. Born in the North

B. Officers of the National Association of Colored Women

C. The name "Iola" played a key role in their lives

D. Known by more than one name

E. Orphaned by the age of five

F. Spoke more than one language

G. Received government pay

Bibliography

Alexander, Amy. *Fifty Black Women Who Changed America*
Duster, Alfreda M., Ed. *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*
Green, Richard L. *A Salute to Historic Black Abolitionists* (An Empak "Black History" Publication Series, Vol. V)
Green, Richard L. *A Salute to Historic Black Women* (An Empak "Black History" Publication Series, Vol. I)
Harper, Frances E., *Sketches of a Southern Life*
Logan, Shirley Wilson, Ed. *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth Century African American Women*
Logan, Shirley Wilson, Ed. *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of 19th Century Black Women*
McMurry, Linda O. *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells*
Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*
Sterne, Emma Gelder. *Mary McLeod Bethune*
Stewart, Maria. *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*
Swain, Gweneth. *Civil Rights Pioneer: A Story about Mary Church Terrell*
Terrell, Mary Church. *A Colored Woman In A White World*
Titus, Frances W., Ed. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*
Tucker, Phillip Thomas. *Cathy Williams: From Slave to Female Buffalo Soldier*

Series: The Black Achievement Series, Chelsea House Publishers

Web Resources

Library of Congress: *www.loc.gov*
African-American Women Writers of the 19th Century: *http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/*
Images of African Americans from the 19th Century: *http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/images_aa19/*
An Internet Activity: Webquest on 19th Century Artists & Writers
http://oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/education/projects/webquests/women/#task

Queen Nur

Queen Nur is a nationally renowned storyteller and teaching artist. Sharing her gift, she has performed in venues from the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. to Equity theaters on Broadway, from the National Black Storytelling festival to the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesboro. She has been the recipient of MidAtlantic Artist as Catalyst grants for her work with teens-at-risk and women's shelters.

The mother of three and grandmother of one, Queen received her BS from Northeastern University, a certificate in Dispute Resolution from Harvard Law School, and has taken post-graduate courses in African American studies and Folklore at Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. She teaches Storytelling at Rutgers Camden's Artist/Teacher Institute.

Queen has recorded two CDs: *Sweet Potato Pie and Such* which is an IParenting Media Golden Award-winner; and *Live and Storified* for teens and up which was recorded at the Walt Whitman Cultural Arts Center in Camden, NJ.

Queen's seven degrees of separation with the women featured in the show is the fact that as a professional storyteller, she orated in each of their birth states, beginning in Maria W. Stewart's hometown of Boston, Massachusetts.

For questions and further information, email tellintales@comcast.net.

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Answer Key

Match the Quote:

1. Sojourner Truth: E
2. March Church Terrell: G
3. Mary McLoed Bethune: C
4. Ida B. Wells-Barnett: F
5. Cathy WIlliams: D
6. Maria W. Stewart: A
7. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper: B

Seven Degrees of Separation: