The largest independent organization dedicated to Canadian history, identity and citizenship, The Historica-Dominion Institute is committed to bringing the stories and experiences of Canada into the classroom. This innovative Education Guide explores seminal events and personalities in Black Canadian history through engaging discussion and interactive activities. It was made possible with the generous support of TD Bank Group, whose commitment to Black history and culture has been celebrated. The purpose of this Guide is to enhance your students’ knowledge and appreciation of the Black Canadian experience, drawing from Lawrence Hill’s award-winning historical fiction, The Book of Negroes, the remarkable journey of Aminata Diallo and the historic British document known as the “Book of Negroes.” Structured around themes of journey, slavery, human rights, passage to Canada and contemporary culture, this Guide asks students to examine issues of identity, equality, community, and nation-building in both a historical and contemporary context. The tools provided here are supplemented with additional activities and resources at the Black History Portal blackhistorycanada.ca. We hope this Guide will assist you in teaching this important aspect of Canadian history in your English, Social Studies, History or Law classroom.
"I must earnestly entreat your assistance, without servants nothing can be done … Black Slaves are certainly the only people to be depended upon … pray therefore if possible procure for me two Stout Young fellows … and buy for each a clean young wife, who can wash and do the female offices about a farm, I shall begrudge no price…”

These lines come from a letter written in 1763 to John Watts in New York. Who do you think wrote the letter? Perhaps a farmer in Barbados, South Carolina, or Virginia? Actually, this urgent request for slaves came from James Murray, Governor of Quebec.

The average sixteen-year-old in Canada can tell you something about slavery and abolition in the United States. Many of us have read American novels such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin, To Kill a Mockingbird, and Roots.

But have we read our own authors such as Dionne Brand, Afua Cooper and George Elliott Clarke? Do we know that the story of African-Canadians spans four hundred years, and includes slavery, abolition, pioneering, urban growth, segregation, the civil rights movement and a long engagement in civic life?

I wrote the novel The Book of Negroes to remove the dehumanizing mask of slavery and to explore an African woman’s intimate experiences and emotions as she travels the world in the 18th century. I like to think that there is a novel for every one of the 3,000 Black Loyalists whose names were entered into the British naval ledger known as the “Book of Negroes” and who then — as a reward for service to the British on the losing side of the American Revolutionary War — were sent by ship from Manhattan to Nova Scotia in 1783. Imagining Aminata Diallo’s life helped me appreciate the struggles of the 18th century Black Loyalists as they travelled back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, touching down in colonial America, early Canada, West Africa and Europe in pursuit of freedom and home. Luckily for writers and readers, fiction helps us see where we have been and who we are now.

Synopsis: The Book of Negroes

Abducted as an 11-year-old child from her village in West Africa and forced to walk for months to the sea in a coffle—a string of slaves—Aminata Diallo is sent to live as a slave in South Carolina. Years later, she forges her way to freedom, serving the British in the Revolutionary War and registering her name in the historic “Book of Negroes.” This book, an actual document, provides a short but immensely revealing record of some 3,000 Black Loyalists who left the United States for resettlement in Nova Scotia. A trained bookkeeper, Aminata is enlisted to record the names of these African-Americans travelling to Nova Scotia in pursuit of land and a new way of life. But when the Loyalists arrive in Canada in 1783, they find that the haven they’d been seeking is steeped in an oppression all its own.

Aminata is among the pioneers of Nova Scotia to settle Shelburne and the neighbouring Black community of Birchtown. Her journey from slavery to liberation, and her struggle against a world hostile to her colour and her sex, speaks to the experience of a founding generation of African-Canadians.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you feel to be taken from your homeland, never to return?
2. How is the concept of dislocation central to servitude in the experience of enslaved Africans like Aminata?
3. Consider the meaning of freedom. Is it signified by the absence of physical captivity, or are there other requirements to true freedom?
**1605**

**FIRST BLACK IN CANADA**
The first Black person thought to have set foot on Canadian soil was Mathieu Da Costa, a free man who was hired as a translator for Samuel de Champlain’s 1605 excursion.

**1709**

**LOUIS XIV AUTHORIZES SLAVERY IN NEW FRANCE**
King Louis XIV formally authorized slavery, when he permitted his Canadian subjects to own slaves, “in full proprietorship.”

**1776**

**“FREE NEGROES” REACH NOVA SCOTIA**
The British promised land, freedom and rights to slaves and free Blacks in exchange for service during the American Revolution, 1775-1783.

**1784**

**26-27 July 1784**

**CANADA’S FIRST RACE-Riot ROCKS NOVA SCOTIA**
The Black Loyalists were among the first settlers in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. On its fringes they established their own community, Birchtown. When hundreds of White, disbanded soldiers found themselves competing for jobs with Black neighbours who were paid less for the same work, hostilities caused a riot.

**1790**

**IMPERIAL STATUTE**
The Imperial Statute of 1790 effectively allowed settlers to bring enslaved persons to Upper Canada. Under the statute, the enslaved had only to be fed and clothed.

**1794**

**15 January 1792**

**THE BLACK LOYALIST EXODUS**
The difficulty of supporting themselves in the face of widespread discrimination convinced almost 1,200 Black Loyalists to leave Halifax and relocate to Africa (Sierra Leone).

**1796**

**22 July 1796**

**THE MAROONS LAND AT HALIFAX**
A group of 600 freedom-fighters called Maroons landed at Halifax. These immigrants came from the Jamaican community of escaped slaves, who had guarded their freedom for more than a century and fought off countless attempts to re-enslave them.

**1812-1815**

**THE "COLOURED TROOPS" & THE WAR OF 1812**
Thousands of Black volunteers fought for the British during the War of 1812.

**1815 - 1860**

**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD**
Canada’s reputation as a safe haven for Blacks grew during and after the War of 1812. Between 1815 and 1860, tens of thousands of African-Americans sought refuge in Canada via the legendary Underground Railroad.

**1833**

**28 August 1833**

**BRITISH PARLIAMENT ABOLISHES SLAVERY**
Slavery was abolished throughout the British colonies by an Imperial Act which became effective 1 August 1834. Many Canadians continue to celebrate August 1 as Emancipation Day.

**1854**

**26 February 1854**

**FORMATION OF CANADIAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY**
The number of abolitionist sympathizers grew in Canada in the 1850s-1860s. The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada was formed, “to aid in the extinction of Slavery all over the world.”
16 November 1857
William Neilson Hall
Wins Victoria Cross
William Hall served aboard the frigate Shannon in Calcutta during the 1857 Indian Mutiny. He was awarded the Victoria Cross, the first Canadian naval recipient, the first Black and the first Nova Scotian to win the prestigious medal.

1866
First Black Politician in Canada
Mifflin Gibbs was elected to the Victoria Town Council in 1866, the first Black politician in Canada.

18 January 1958
Willie O’Ree Breaks the Race Barrier on the Ice
Scouted from the Quebec Aces, Willie O’Ree was the first Black player in the NHL. He played for the Boston Bruins, and his first game was against the Montreal Canadiens.

25 September 1963
First Black Elected to a Canadian Parliament
Leonard Braithwaite became the first African-Canadian in a provincial legislature when he was elected as the Liberal member for Etobicoke, Ontario in 1963.

18 April 1946
Jackie Robinson Plays His First Game for the Montreal Royals
When he joined the Montreal Royals, Jackie Robinson became the first Black player in modern “organized” baseball. To view a Heritage Minute on Jackie Robinson, visit blackhistorycanada.ca.

October 1971
Prime Minister Trudeau Introduces Canada’s Multicultural Policy
Canada’s multiculturalism policy grew partly in reaction to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

1974
Oscar Peterson Wins Grammy
Jazz pianist Oscar Peterson won his first Grammy in 1974. He went on to win seven others, including the coveted Lifetime Achievement Grammy in 1997.

6 August 1995
Canadian Sprinter Becomes “World’s Fastest Human”
Oakville’s Donovan Bailey assumed the title of “World’s Fastest Human” by winning the 100-metre sprint at the World Track Championships at Göteborg, Sweden. Bailey went on to win gold at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, setting a new world and Olympic record (9.84 seconds).

27 September 2005
The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean Sworn in as Governor General

Discussion Questions
1. In your opinion, what were the most important developments in the movement toward equal rights?
2. What does it mean for Canada to be a multicultural country?
3. Many important events and persons are not shown here. Choose one and provide an argument for its inclusion.
"Africa is my homeland. But I have weathered enough migrations for five lifetimes."

- Aminata Diallo

Aminata’s experience, like that of many African-Canadians, is defined by her migration—to America, Canada, Africa, and finally England. Uprooted by the triangular slave trade which brought captives from Africa to Europe, the Caribbean and North America, Aminata became part of the African Diaspora.

This passage describes the beginning of Aminata’s first ocean-crossing as a captive bound for slavery in America.

“I dreaded the big boat up ahead, growing larger with each oar stroke. In size, it dwarfed a twelve-man canoe, and it stank worse than the pen they had put us in on the island. The boat terrified me, but I was even more afraid of sinking deep into the salty water, with no possibility for my spirit to return to my ancestors... I clenched my teeth and looked out over the water at all my people tied in canoes and being pushed, prodded and pulled up a long plank rising along the great wall of the ship. I turned back to see my homeland. There were mountains in the distance. One of them rose like an enormous lion. But all its power was trapped on the land. It could do nothing for any of us out on the water.”

**Discussion Questions**

1. In what ways is the lion mentioned by Aminata a metaphor for the experience of Africans like her?
2. What different forms of human servitude were African captives subjected to?
3. Examine the above engraving of the interior of a slave ship from 1788. Conduct some research about these conditions. What were the conditions like aboard slave-trading ships?
4. How important do you think the experience of slavery is to the Black community in Canada today?
5. Visit the Statistics Canada website (statcan.gc.ca) about the contemporary African immigrant population in Canada. What conclusions can you draw from the data? Does anything surprise you about this data?
SLAVERY and HUMAN RIGHTS

"That, I decided, was what it meant to be a slave: your past didn’t matter; in the present you were invisible and you had no claim on the future."

- Aminata Diallo

Enslaved Africans existed in Canada since at least 1628. By 1759, when New France fell to the British, there were more than 3,000 slaves in Canada. In 1807, the slave trade was banned by the British. By 1834, slavery itself was abolished in Canada and the rest of the British Empire. On the famous Underground Railroad, Canada accepted escaped American slaves between 1815-1860, bringing some 30,000 refugees into this country. Yet even after abolition, Blacks in Canada faced considerable challenges because of racism and prejudice.

DISCUSSION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the existence of slavery in Canada is overshadowed by the existence of slavery in the United States?

2. Investigate conditions in Nova Scotia as well as the exodus of Black Loyalists who returned to Africa (Sierra Leone) in 1792. What was the experience of Black Canadians after slavery was abolished?

3. The story of the Underground Railroad is one of the best known in Canadian history. Why do you think it is so well known? To view a Heritage Minute on the Underground Railroad, visit blackhistorycanada.ca


5. Choose from one of the following people and organizations instrumental in the abolitionist cause in Canada. What was their contribution to the movement? Why was it significant?

- Harriet Tubman
- George Brown
- William King
- Anti-Slavery Society of Canada
- Mary Ann Shadd
- Underground Railroad

A good website to begin is found at: collectionscanada.gc.ca/anti-slavery

6. In 1948, the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The document includes the following rights:

   **Article 1**
   All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

   **Article 4**
   No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

How close is the world to upholding these articles? In what ways is the spirit of these articles both maintained and ignored in our world today? Provide examples.


UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
A secret network of routes, safe houses and persons that aided in the escape of African-American slaves into Canada during the 19th century.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
A declaration adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, expressing an unprecedented global standard for basic human rights. The Declaration was influenced by the events of the Second World War.
PASSAGE to CANADA

“No place in the world was entirely safe for an African, and...for many of us, survival depended on perpetual migration.”

- Aminata Diallo

The voyage of Aminata from New York to Nova Scotia is based on the actual passage of about 3,000 Black Loyalists from the newly formed United States into Canada in 1783. After the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, an exodus of Black Loyalists to Nova Scotia (as well as to Quebec, West Indies, England and Belgium) began.

The names of the passengers sailing to Nova Scotia in 1783 were recorded in the “Book of Negroes.” The list included physical descriptions along with each person's status as slave or free. Of the 3,000 Black Loyalists who arrived in Nova Scotia, about 1,200 left after 10 years because of the difficult conditions and discrimination they faced. They sailed in 1792 from Halifax to found the new colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone, forming the first major back-to-Africa exodus in the history of the Americas.

Discussion & Research Questions

1. Do you think the promise of freedom made to enslaved Africans in the American colonies was a genuine one?
2. In what ways was the decision to send Black Loyalists to Nova Scotia a significant one for Canada?
3. Many Black Loyalists faced prejudicial treatment and hardship in Nova Scotia and other settlements in Canada. Research one of the following topics or persons and present your findings to the class:
   - The burning of Guysborough
   - The Shelburne and Birchtown riots
   - Sir Guy Carleton
   - Thomas Peters

For information on other historic Black settlements in Canada, visit the early settlement page at blackhistorycanada.ca.

Evaluating Sources

The experience of slavery has been documented in a number of primary resources, including the “Book of Negroes,” which are available online. Former slaves like Olaudah Equiano wrote memoirs while others like British slave ship surgeon Alexander Falconbridge also wrote accounts. Visit the passage to Canada page at blackhistorycanada.ca for a list of primary resources and related activities.
Evaluating Sources: Discussion Questions

1. What is the importance of primary sources to the study of history? What makes them particularly valuable in the study of the experiences of slaves?

2. What may be missing from the primary accounts?

3. Conduct research based on one or two primary sources available at blackhistorycanada.ca and present what you have learned to the class.

4. In the above excerpt from the “Book of Negroes,” several names including that of abolitionist Thomas Peters are recorded. Choose one of the names listed. Based on the information provided, write the first page of this individual’s memoir.

5. Does an author have an obligation to be truthful to the facts when he or she writes a historical novel?

6. Does it matter that there are imagined scenes in this or other books of historical fiction? When does accuracy matter?

7. Is a historical novel of value to history students? Explain.

Passages to Canada: Modern Stories of Migration

1. Choose two or three testimonials from the Passages to Canada Digital Archive (passagестtocanada.com) and compare the experiences of immigration. How were they similar and how were they different?

2. For any immigrant to Canada there are push and pull factors. Push factors drive the migrant away from his or her home country. Pull factors attract the person to Canada. Search through the Passages to Canada Digital Archive and find two examples of both push and pull factors.

3. In what ways have immigrants added to Canada’s diversity? How does this benefit Canada?

4. Imagine you are to welcome a new Canadian to your community. Write a 250-word letter in which you give the prospective Canadian some advice about adapting to Canada. Also, ask the new arrival two questions you would like to learn about his or her homeland.

5. Conduct some research to discover what countries most of Canada’s immigrants come from today. Examine how this has changed as compared to 30 years ago (or across a period of time). Suggest reasons for the change.

6. Many who live in Canada come from other countries. Do some research to determine what the push and pull factors were for your family. For a genealogical activity on ancestry.ca including free access for your school, visit blackhistorycanada.ca.
In remembering and reaffirming the historic contribution of the Black Canadian community in the building of Canada and Canadian identity, we affirm and celebrate the building of a plural Canadian community and culture, one in which, in the words of Martin Luther King, people will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

- The Honourable Irwin Cotler, Member of Parliament, House of Commons, February 6, 2009

Cultural Touchstones

Today’s Black population is made up of individuals from a range of places across the globe including the United States, South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and Canada. Black Canadians have played an essential role in nation-building and many have become indelible parts of Canada’s modern culture. Celebrated jazz pianist Oscar Peterson, writers Lawrence Hill, Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke, and new Canadians such as Michael “Pinball” Clemons are well known. Others, such as pop musician K’Naan are just starting to make their mark.

Mr. Peterson was celebrated by having a postage stamp issued in his honour in 2005. Which other Black Canadians should be honoured on a postage stamp? Conduct some research on a modern day Black Canadian personality and make a case for him or her gracing a postage stamp.

Optional: Design the stamp.

For a collection of contributions and profiles of Black Canadians throughout history, visit the contributions and arts & culture pages at blackhistorycanada.ca.

Creating a Canadian History Card

Choose one Canadian personality from the Black community and create a “history card” of that person. Each card should contain the following:

- a photograph of the personality (browse pictures at blackhistorycanada.ca)
- a brief description of that person’s background and achievements
- a quotation either by the person or about the person
- an interesting piece of information about the person that goes beyond basic information

Your research can be presented on a 3 by 5 index card. Cards can be traded among classmates and mounted in the classroom.