Celebrating Black History Month in the early years

Acknowledging and celebrating Black History Month as a special time of year is an appropriate way to approach the themes of African-Caribbean history, achievement and experience with young children. Offering opportunities to engage in relevant first-hand experiences can help children make connections between different lives, cultures and experiences and offer starting points for discussion around similarities and differences.

It is important to note however that valuing and celebrating diversity should be an integral part of our everyday practice in the early years, not something that is just focussed on at certain times or dates. October can be a time to celebrate, review planning for equalities and organise some extra special events but practitioners should avoid a once-a-year-only approach to these activities.

This pack contains ideas and activities, which will allow children to explore different aspects of African-Caribbean experience in a meaningful way, through purposeful play. Ideas have come from early years practitioners. It contains a case study describing how one Children’s Centre approached the issue of making BHM as inclusive a time as possible and an example of a completed Black History Month planner.

Role play

If you have the space available, add an additional role/dramatic play area or adapt the existing one. Cooking utensils e.g. Dutch pot, African print fabrics, recipe and menu cards, photos, pictures and greeting cards depicting people of African – Caribbean heritage can be permanent items in the home corner.

- Set up an African-Caribbean hairdressers. Ask parents and staff to bring in empty hair and styling product containers or visit your local A-C hairdressers. Include magazines depicting different hair-styles, invite a parent in to demonstrate braiding, add toy heads with long hair for the children to try it out for themselves.
• Include some traditional costumes in the dressing up clothes (beware though of encouraging children to believe that all people from a certain place wear certain clothes). Have a fashion parade with parents modelling traditional clothes and children more modern varieties. Make some dolls clothes (the EY EMAS team has patterns).
• Set up an African or Caribbean café – ask parents to come and help out with cooking (dumplings are always popular). Take photos and make a book.
• Develop some drama work based on familiar stories, e.g. So Much by Trish Cooke, Handa’s Surprise by Eileen Browne, Not so fast Songololo by Niky Daly

Art and Craft

• Use books, pictures and artefacts (the Education Library has a wide collection) for inspiration for activities such as mask making, jewellery, clay work, sculpture and fabric printing (e.g. batik type printing using flour and water as a resist).
• A is for Africa by Ifeoma Onyefulu has a great picture (under ‘M’) of a full body mask which children could make with flour sacks or large paper bags.
• One nursery made a kiln with bricks in their outside space and fired children’s clay pots (with help from an expert).
• Children could paint self-portraits (ensure there are adequate colours for mixing to make skin tones).
• Explore and display patterns used in different cultures e.g. Nigerian Kente cloth. Weave your own patterns with different coloured cloth on the railings or fence. You can Google ‘Kente patterns’ to get examples.
• Display pictures of different buildings and homes from African and the Caribbean in the block and workshop areas.
• Find out from art galleries whether there are any exhibitions by artists from African-Caribbean heritage.
• Focus on relevant flags. Make and decorate hats, wrist bands etc in flag colours

Food and cooking

As well as using the recipes included in this pack, practitioners could make a display or set up an activity using traditional African-Caribbean fruits, vegetables and foodstuffs (e.g. make ‘dumplings’ in the tactile area out of playdough then follow up with a simple counting activity using the ‘Dumpling’ song). Invite parents in to share their expertise. Visit Ridley Rd market in Dalston, walk along Stroud Green Rd or visit local supermarkets to see a wide variety of African-Caribbean produce. Try some sugar cane!
Stories and storytelling

Books and stories are a very powerful way of representing the world for young children, allowing them to explore different aspects of people’s lives. Some of the books relevant for a BHM theme will be familiar to the children already but it is worth visiting your local library for a wider range including traditional tales (Anansie stories), folk stories, poetry and non-fiction. Some stories lend themselves really well to being told rather than read e.g. Give me my Yam, Jan Blake, Abiyoyo, Pete Seeger (a wonderful, very exciting folk tale) What’s in the Pan Man, Pauline Stewart. The stories can be taped and kept in the listening corner. A particular story could be the starting point for planning activities over the month, incorporating all areas of the curriculum. Many early years settings join together and pay for a storyteller or author to come in to the setting at this time to carry out an interactive session with children and parents. There is a list of recommended artists, storytellers and performers in the Equality and Diversity Pack.

Music and dance

Use libraries, parents and staff to build up a collection of different styles of African-Caribbean music and allow the children space to dance. Have a display of musical instruments and make some with the children. Thumb guitars are good fun. Look out for events where children could go and see different instruments being played or invite a steel band in and have a party.

Displays

Ask parents and staff to bring in special objects. Display a world map and pinpoint on it the places where your children and families originate. Use lots of photographs. Put up some flags.

Languages

Focus on different African and Caribbean languages and dialects. Make a display with examples of all the languages your children speak and understand.

Celebrations
One centre focussed on the traditional Nigerian naming ceremony. They put up a display explaining the traditions and beliefs behind it and then used this as a springboard to ask the parents and children about their own names and their significance (the Early Years EMAS team has more information on this if you are interested). Children always enjoy discussion about Christenings, birthdays, weddings and celebrations and how these happen all over the world in different forms. The 'Small World' series of books includes one with a celebrations theme (www.evansbooks.co.uk or www.letterboxlibrary.com).

Photographs

One nursery focussed on the work of Nigerian photographer Seydou Keita. Copies of some of the photographs he took (in the 1930's) of children and adults with objects that were special to them, were displayed. Families from the centre were encouraged to bring in significant photos of their own which were photocopied and enlarged for the children to decorate with inks and pens. You can print off examples of his work from the Internet. Photos of different people from African-Caribbean and other backgrounds can be the starting point for discussion about similarities and differences amongst the children.

Games and numbers

A lovely book with some interesting ways of making different numbers on your fingers is;


Other books, (all available from the Education Library Service at) around the theme of numbers and counting include:

- Emeka's Gift- An African Counting Story, Ifeoma Onyefulu (0-7112 0934 0)
- Island Counting, Frane Lessac (07636 1960-4)
- One smiling grandma, Ann Marie Linden & Lynne Russell (0434 94209-x)
- One Child One Seed - A South African Counting book, Kathryn Cave (0 7112 1848-x)
Recipes from the Caribbean

**Johnny Cakes** (dumplings)

**Ingredients**

- 80z self raising flour
- 2oz sugar
- a little salt
- water
- oil or fat

**What to do**

Put the flour into a bowl adding the salt. Mix well then add the water, a little bit at a time until it is all mixes in. Pour in the sugar and mix well. Put oil in a frying pan and heat. Get a piece of the dough and roll it in your hand, flatten it out but not too flat. Put it in the frying pan and let it brown. Repeat until all the dough is finished. Eat on their own or with a main course.

**Carrot juice**

You can either juice fresh carrots for this or use a tin of carrot juice.

This is a typical drink of many of the Caribbean islands, usually made on a Sunday to have with a special Sunday dinner.

**Ingredients**

- Carrots or tin of juice
- 1 small tin condensed milk
3 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons vanilla
2 teaspoons nutmeg
¾ pint of milk
Ice

Put all the ingredients in a very large jug. Whisk well and serve. Delicious!

Cornmeal pone

Ingredients

150g/6oz cornmeal
50g/2oz plain flour
1 cup of grated coconut
50g/2oz raisins
1 cup of water
150g/6oz brown sugar
½ teaspoons mixed spice
½ teaspoons grated nutmeg
25g/1oz margarine
a pinch of salt

What to do

Toss the raisins in some flour and keep aside. Put the cornmeal, sugar, salt and spices into a large bowl with the grated coconut. Gradually add water to dry ingredients and mix in. Leave the mixture aside for 15 minutes. Add the raisins and mix. Pour the mixture into a deep greased baking tray. Dot the surface with small pieces of butter. Bake for about an hour at 350o F/ Gas Mark 4 until the mixture is set and firm to touch. Turn the oven up for the last 5 minutes to brown the surface. Allow to cool a little and then cut into small slices. Can be kept in an airtight tin.
Recipes from Africa

Akla: Blackeye bean fries (West Africa)

Ingredients

225g dried blackeye beans
110g onions, peeled and chopped
1 tablespoon of scraped and chopped ginger
2 tablespoons of hot water
1 teaspoon of chilli powder
salt and pepper
vegetable oil for frying

What to do

Soak the beans in double their volume of hot water for about 30 minutes then drain off the water. Using both hands, squeeze and gently rub the beans so that the skins slide off. Cover the beans with water again and let the skins float away. Drain the beans and pound (or use an electric blender) with the rest of the ingredients until you have a smooth puree. Heat the oil in a saucepan. Scoop up a teaspoon of the bean puree and drop it into the hot oil. Fry, turning frequently for about 5 minutes until golden brown. Drain in kitchen paper. Serve hot or cold. These freeze well.

H’mbasha - spiced bread (Ethiopia)

Ingredients

300ml warm water
25g fresh yeast
1 egg
1 teaspoon ground fenugreek
1 teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground black cardamom
½ teaspoon of salt
500g flour (you can mix white and wholemeal)

What to do

Dissolve the yeast in the warm water. Add the spices and the egg. Mix well. Add the flour to the mixture a little at a time. Mix and knead for about 10 minutes. Cover and keep the dough in a warm place, allow to rise until almost double in size. Divide into 4 pieces and using your hand, flatten each piece lightly into a round flat loaf. Decorate the loaf with ‘stripes’ using a fork or knife. Place in a heavy heated frying pan. Cover and cook for about 7 minutes. Remove from the pan, brush with warm water or butter and cover with a clean tea towel. Cook the remaining loaves in the same way. Serve hot or cold.

Case study

Gilles Shewell – currently Head of Bemerton Children’s Centre

The project arose out of our desire to celebrate Black History Month in a creative and inclusive manner. We felt it was important from the start to adopt a participative, whole team approach to the project to ensure the involvement of all. An INSET on the first day of autumn term focussing on Black History Month offered us the opportunity to share what we aimed to achieve and to plan together. Members of the team prepared for this by researching different aspects linked to Black History Month and presented their findings and ideas to the whole staff team.

Issues covered on the INSET day included the origins of Black History Month. The research led by one of the practitioners in the team showed that these were in the United States, initiated by Dr Carter Goodwin Woodson in 1926. Carter believed that such a month was necessary to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements of African Americans in keeping alive their traditions, heritage and history.

As a group we reflected on the importance of celebrating black achievement and the contribution made by black men and women to our world. We also felt that celebrating black achievement should not be limited to one month in the year but should constitute part of our anti-bias approach throughout the year.
We considered and discussed how to best make Black History Month a meaningful experience for under-fives and decided that a project that explored our children and families identity and what is precious to us, would provide the best approach.

Every object tells a story and our children love stories. For the 'Every object tells a story' project we invited parents and carers to bring an object to the centre and tell us its meaning or its story. Parents, carers and members of staff brought objects to the centre that related to their own history.

For example, Sarah brought us a wall clock shaped as Africa. This is her story:

'I love Africa. I wanted to reflect this in my home. When I saw this clock I thought it would be a wonderful way of doing this. It sits proudly in my sitting room and reminds me of that wonderful continent where my family live in Nigeria'.

Other parents brought objects that had originated from their families’ countries of origin or were linked to their family's history. Sam brought a gourd from Kenya. This is her story;

'The Masai people wear gourds like this around their neck to take drink with them on their travel. You can fill it up with milk or water'.

As the project developed, more objects and stories appeared and were displayed in the centre. It was felt that the project had been successful in helping all involved to learn about each other's cultures and backgrounds and has given our children opportunities to 'find out about past and present in their own lives and in those of their families and other people they know'. (K&U, QCA, 2000 p.94).

A programme of activities and events was devised that included a visit to the British museum to look at the masks in the Africa gallery. This first-hand experience of masks and all the pictures that were brought back to the centre informed the children's creative process when they made masks of their own.
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Visit Tate Britain to see '13 Macaque monkeys' exhibition by Chris Offily</td>
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<td>Focus on Abiyoyo (South African folk tale)</td>
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<td>2pm Visit from author Pauline Stewart. 'What's in the Pan Man'</td>
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<td>Make tropical fruit salad (follow up from Handa's surprise story)</td>
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<td>16 a.m. - parent story telling</td>
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<td>a.m. trip to fishmongers for mackerel p.m. fish stew with Caribbean spices</td>
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<td>23 Di D &amp; Maxine-Bananas &amp; Yam</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>a.m. Oledi's mum cooking</td>
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<td>30 2 p.m. dancing session</td>
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<td>Spice island - sensory activity</td>
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|     | Janet T - Focus on Abiyoyo (South African folk tale) | A.M Frank & Cat - Musical Instruments  
P.M Adrian - Storytelling | Shirley - cooking fried plantain | Di - hair activities in home corner  
p.m Anita - make Jalof rice |
| 9   | 10   | 11  | 12    | 13  |
| 2pm Visit from author Pauline Stewart. 'What's in the Pan Man' | Bianca & Hulya  
Make tropical fruit salad (follow up from Handa's surprise story) | a.m Janet T - Abiyoyo  
11am - visit from Ade - police officer  
p.m Alison - jewellery making | Di P - display of African cloths and prints  
OPEN DAY | Di P - making different scent bags from African cloths |
| 16  | 17   | 18  | 19    | 20  |
| a.m - Story telling | | A.M - Cat & Alice - African mask making  
P.M Dayna & Eunice  
Tropical fruit salad | A.M Lipika - Pumpkin Soup | Celebrate UN Day - focus on flags |
| 23  | 24   | 25  | 26    | 27  |
| Di D & Maxine-  
Bananas & Yam | A.M. Oledi's mum cooking | A.M Cat - African jewellery making  
P.M Louise - Tropical Punch | p.m Marylin - making fishcakes | Visit Islington Museum (Town Hall) for BHM display |
| 30  | 31   |     |       |     |