

Diversity & Inclusion *in History*

Case Study

2020

1948

1066

1215

Deputy Head of History, Joshua Garry, shares his passion and experience when it comes to building a diverse and inclusive history curriculum.

Joshua Garry: Connecting students to the curriculum

When it comes to history, I believe that every learner should be able to see where they fit in, connect with the past, understand their contribution and make sense of the world they're in.

The curriculum should represent Britain and the different groups within it, whether that's women, black people, working class people or people from the LGBT+ community.

As a black history teacher at a diverse London school and as someone who went through the whole of my own school education struggling to see how and where I fitted in, building more diverse people and topics into the history curriculum is something that I'm really passionate about.

History is the third most unpopular subject for children from an African and Caribbean background to study at university. It's incredibly unpopular and yet it's really popular at a community level. For example, when I'm at the barber's shop they love it when I talk about a historical story, but students often say they don't study history because they can't see where they fit.

If you deliver history that they feel connected to, they are more likely to be engaged and more likely to do well.

Joshua Garry,
Deputy Head
of History

They can also be more likely to go onto the study of history at an academic level or become teachers and what starts to happen is new research, and through new research new stories come into the classroom. It's this cycle that can help us all to challenge what we once knew.

In my opinion, black history is British history. You can't accurately teach British history, without teaching black history.

When it comes to actually doing this, and doing it well, there are amazing thinkers and teachers out there who are leading the way and have helped me on this journey. While I don't have it all figured out, I'm committed to learning and trying, so here are a few of the different themes, topics and approaches that we've tried to introduce and implement in our school.

The story of migration

We look at the story of migration, right from the fourth century to modern day. Yes, students are able to encounter black history, but they're also able to encounter the history of so many other minority ethnic groups that came to Britain.

What's so important about this topic is that it lets students understand that being British isn't inextricably linked to being white. By studying migration in Britain you can see right the way back over 2000 years that we've always had different groups and different ethnicities.

As the writer Peter Fryer said, 'there were African's in Britain before the English came'.

Thinking about the order of what we teach

If you only teach from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, you are potentially reinforcing that black people amount to nothing but slaves. So, way before we teach our students about the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, we explore African civilisations. I like to teach them about Mansa Musa and the Mali Empire. There's the well-known story about how wealthy he was, but students are also able to see how globalised and connected the world was at that time. Mansa Musa wasn't only known in West Africa, he was also known in the Middle East, with stories starting to emerge about him in Europe too.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade

When I teach the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, I borrow a title from scholar Walter Rodney to explore how far the Trans-Atlantic slave trade contributed to under-developing West Africa.

They start by exploring Kingdoms such as Benin and Kongo and then we work right the way through, looking at what the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was and the resistance. For example, I get the students to understand that resistance took place in West Africa from the moment it started. We then look at abolition and how important the African's were in this. We also push it further and get students to explore not just the negative impact it had on West Africa's development, but the contribution it had to Britain developing – from the West India dock and why that was created, to the development of cities like Liverpool and Bristol.

British Empire

As part of this we explore the Aboriginals in Australia, the Raj in India and the Industrial Revolution. We get students to explore the hugely important part cotton had to play in this, and how this was imported and came from enslaved people in the American deep south.

Black Tudors

While most students have learnt about Henry VIII, very few could name a black tudor.

We use historian Miranda Kaufmann's book, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*, as a springboard to help students understand that racism was not always a fixed mark in Britain. Slavery was not the beginning of African's presence in England, as her book explores, they were present at the royal courts of Henry VII, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and James I, and in the households of Sir Walter Raleigh and William Cecil.

Why the World Wars were world wars

When teaching WWI and WWII, we really try to get students to understand why there were 'world wars'. For example, in one of my lessons, I introduce my students to Alhaji Grunshi, known as the first soldier in British service to fire a shot in WWI. Where students are used to watching war films that focus on the British effort, with predominantly white actors, exploring figures like Grunshi disturbs the psyche and challenges their preconceived ideas.

It's not an add on. There is so much more that can be done.

Ultimately, incorporating more diversity into history should not be viewed as an add on. It needs to be weaved in thoughtfully, accurately and as part of a multi-faceted picture of the past, so that students can deconstruct big themes and come to their own judgements.

This is of course easier said than done. And there is so much more that can be done.

While we have more flexibility at KS3, we need more diverse qualifications, textbooks and resources to choose from at KS4 and beyond, as well as greater support for teachers so that they can feel more confident delivering these topics and helping every student to feel included in what they learn.

My own personal experience of learning history

The first time I encountered someone like myself in the history curriculum was when I studied the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. I hated it. It was so painful because for such a long time I had been presented with historical figures who were powerful and who made significant changes and then I was suddenly presented with people who looked like me, but were nameless, and it seemed like they had no agency or power. It didn't give me anything to be proud of.

It was during my teacher training that my mentor, hero and legend, someone called Martin Stafford delivered a training session on diversity and he just completely blew my mind with all of these different stories about African Romans and African Tudors, African Pilots flying for the RAF in WWII so when he introduced me to all of that it kind of set off a spark and I think from that moment on I just continued to learn.

To find out more about Joshua follow him on Twitter

 [@JoshPreyeGarry](https://twitter.com/JoshPreyeGarry)

Take a look at [Pearson's Diversity and Inclusion in History webpages](#) for more great content.