

FESTIVALS & CELEBRATIONS · GRADES 3–6

Black History Month

Why we have it, what it celebrates

Quick facts

USA	February — since 1976, building on 'Negro History Week' started in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson.
UK	October — since 1987, founded by Akyaaba Addai-Sebo in London.
Canada	February — recognized federally since 1995.
Why	To celebrate Black achievements that have often been overlooked in history teaching, and to ensure they're known.

Why a whole month?

Until the late 1900s, much school teaching of history barely mentioned Black contributions to science, art, music, sport, politics, or invention. Carter G. Woodson noticed this and started 'Negro History Week' in 1926 — choosing February because it includes Frederick Douglass's and Abraham Lincoln's birthdays. The week became a month in 1976. The goal was never to limit Black history to one month — it was to make sure it gets taught at all.

Eight figures worth knowing

Name	What they did
Harriet Tubman	Escaped slavery, then led 70+ others to freedom on the Underground Railroad.
Frederick Douglass	Born enslaved, taught himself to read, became one of the great writers and speakers of the 1800s.



Name	What they did
Mary Seacole	Jamaican-British nurse who set up a 'British Hotel' in the Crimean War to treat soldiers.
Madam C.J. Walker	First self-made female millionaire in the US — through a hair-care business in the 1900s.
George Washington Carver	Born enslaved, became a scientist whose discoveries changed American farming forever.
Maya Angelou	Poet, author, civil rights activist whose autobiography was banned then taught.
Stormzy	British rapper using his fame to fund Black students through Cambridge University.
Mae Jemison	First Black woman in space (1992). Doctor, astronaut, engineer, dancer, scientist.

Discuss

1. Why might a school choose to teach about these figures all year, not just one month?
2. Pick one. Find out one more thing about them.
3. Who else should be on this list — from any country?

