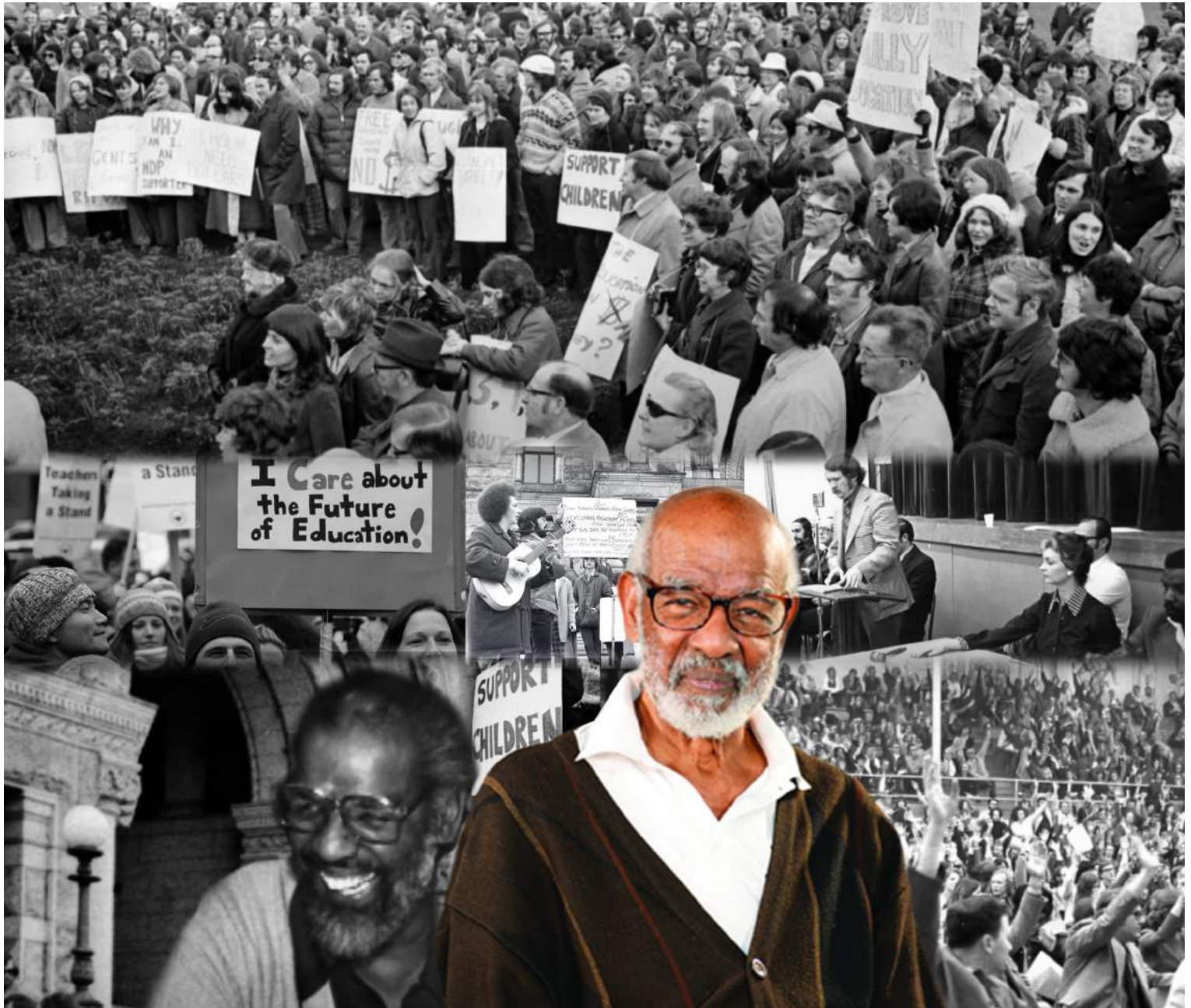


SURREY  
TEACHERS'  
ASSOCIATION

# The Advocate

BLACK HISTORY MONTH EDITION • FEBRUARY 2022



In spring 2022, in the 81st year of the Surrey Teachers' Association, we will be renaming the STA building after Lloyd Edwards, the first Black president of the STA who in 1974 led teachers in a job action to protest increases to class sizes in Surrey schools.

# Message from the President

**Jatinder Bir, STA President**

Friends,

Anti-oppression is one the themes of this edition of The Advocate which is being published during Black History month. I hope that the articles inspire you to join in the work that needs to be done to root out racism wherever it exists in our schools and communities. I also hope that the district's adoption of the recommendations of their Racial Equity Environmental Assessment means that there will soon be visible changes within all organizational structures in the district.

While structural changes are crucial, personal reflection is also important. It's only in adulthood that I've spent time considering the impact of racism on my identity and personal journey.

I was born in India in 1971 and immigrated to this beautiful country in 1974 along with my mom, Bakhshish Kaur and older brother, Raminder – my dad, Dilbag Singh Badh was already here. As we settled in Canada, our family grew by two, my younger sisters, Varinder, and Rupinder, both born here in Surrey Memorial Hospital.

In getting to know this country, I found myself stuck between two worlds, two cultures especially at school. As a child, I was integrated into Canadian culture, but I always knew in my heart that I was different and always strived to fit in, to be like the kids around me. When joining in activities that were new to me, I really thought I was just like my friends, until I was shown that I wasn't. I recall an incident where I was not selected for a lead role in a Christmas play at school, instead, they made me the Egyptian Pharaoh. Looking back at this, I now recognize this was indeed covert racism.



Fast forward many years and I remember standing up at a BCTF Bargaining Conference I attended and saying something like: "I love Christmas. I love everything that goes with it. But I love Vaisakhi and Diwali too. Why can't they be included in the list of school and statutory holidays like Christmas is?"

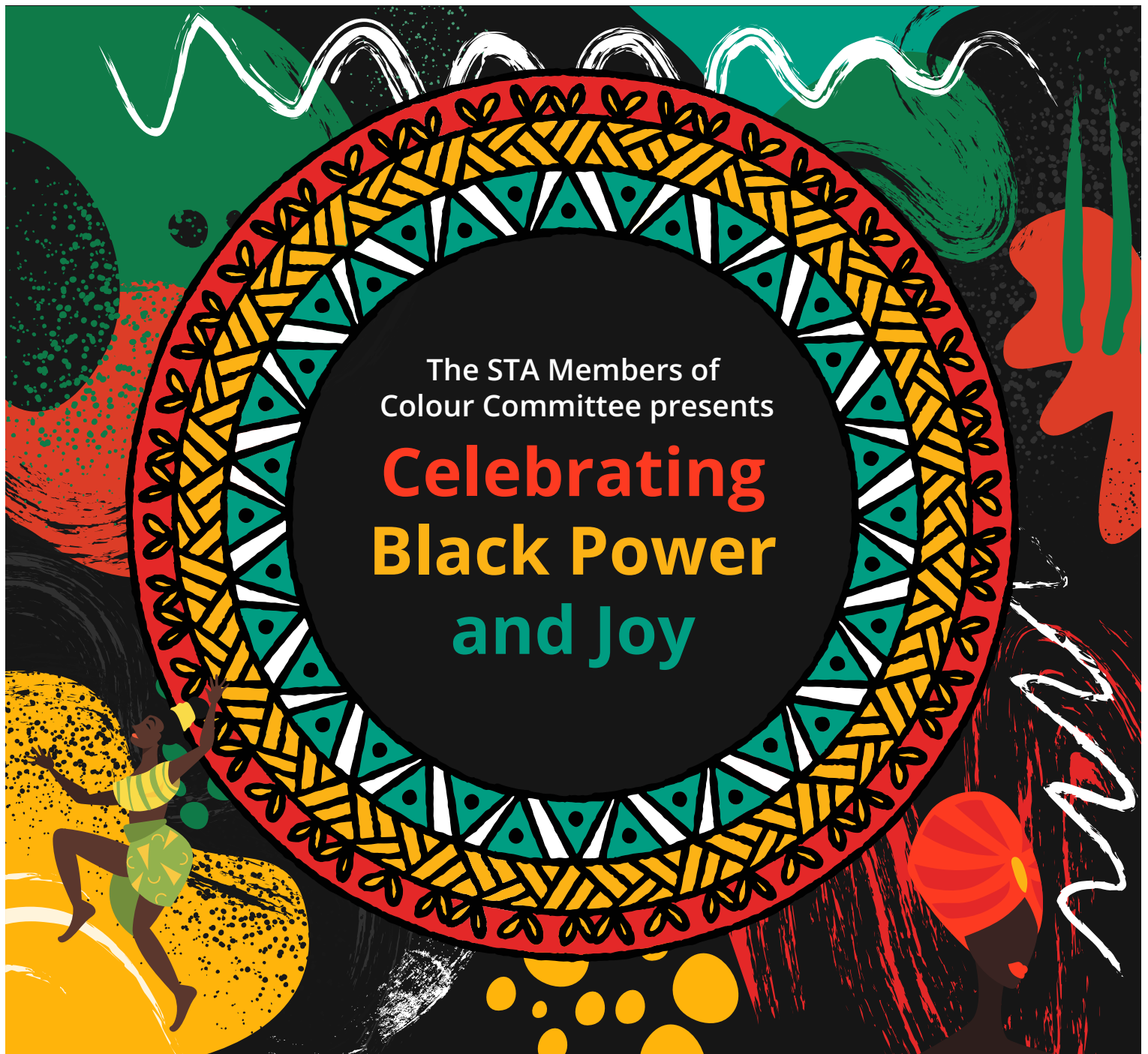
As a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a friend, a teacher, a colleague, and as a leader, I've learned a lot since then about how to make changes happen in our union and in our communities. I believe that we have the power within ourselves to change the status quo by first finding common ground among different interests and then building community from there.

In the city of Surrey over a hundred different languages other than English and French are spoken. Just like me in 1974, many of the students we teach are also straddling two different worlds, trying to fit in, trying to be just like everyone else. As educators, it's up to us to ensure that they do. I hope this edition of The Advocate inspires you in this work.

In Solidarity,

Jatinder Bir  
STA President





The STA Members of  
Colour Committee presents

# Celebrating Black Power and Joy

Virtual Event on  
**February 26, 2022 at 10 am**

Register at  
**[moc-feb2022.eventbrite.ca](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/moc-feb2022)**

Friends and allies are invited to  
join us in celebrating the beauty,  
joy, and power of Blackness  
through artistic performances.

# Lloyd Edwards— A BCTF Antiracism Pioneer

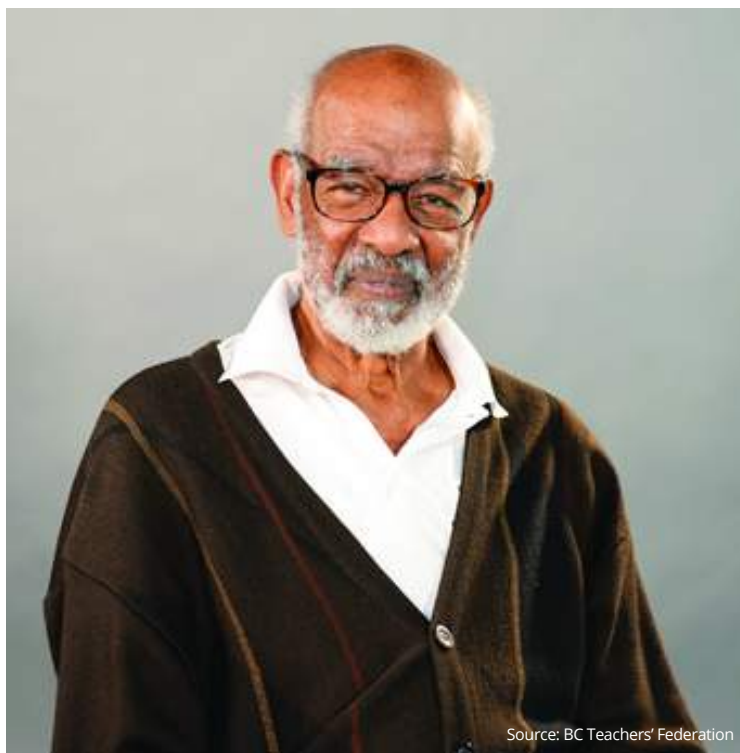
By Ken Novakowski, retired BCTF President

When Lloyd Edwards emigrated from Trinidad and Tobago in the 1950s, he had racist comments directed at him in the community. In the 1970s, Edwards, then a Surrey teacher, noticed incidents of racism in his school directed at recently arrived students of South Asian descent by White students. He decided to act, setting up a school Committee Against Racism, and engaging students in discussions about racism. Success at the school level prompted him to raise the issue of racism at the 1975 BCTF AGM, seeking to involve the BCTF in antiracism work. This resulted in the Federation's Antiracism Program and significant contributions of teachers to combating racism in schools in all parts of the province. Edwards was active in the program, delivering workshops for teachers in districts across BC.

Edward's activism went beyond his antiracism work; he also proved to be an effective leader of teachers in his local. In February, 1974, as the president of the Surrey Teachers' Association, he led over a thousand Surrey teachers out on a one-day strike/protest to the legislature in Victoria. As a result of the action, the BCTF was able to negotiate a deal with the Premier that over the next three years saw a dramatic reduction in class sizes all over BC and the hiring of close to 4,000 additional teachers province-wide.

Now long retired, Edwards, despite observing the rise of White supremacy and increased racism not only in North America, but around the world, remains optimistic that solutions can be found. He believes that strong leadership is required to move us in a more inclusive and understanding direction, for the health of the world's society. With respect to the Black Lives Matter movement, Edwards hopes it evolves into a broad social movement that can successfully challenge open acts of racism, as well as existing and emerging racist attitudes. Edwards still believes teachers and schools play a crucial role in the fight against racism. "Students in elementary schools need to discuss these issues in the classroom and come to understand and support the values of social justice and equality." His hope is that the antiracism work that he and others in the BCTF initiated over 40 years ago, will continue to move us toward advancing social justice and equality.

Reprinted from Teacher magazine, Volume 30, Number 1, September/October 2017



Source: BC Teachers' Federation



Source: BC Labour Heritage Centre



Source: BC Labour Heritage Centre





## 48th Anniversary of the 1974 Strike for Class Size Limits

By Moira Mackenzie, past STA President

I can still picture it today. I was a young teacher, just in my second year of my career. I was sitting up in the bleachers in the Queen Elizabeth Secondary School gym in a packed emergency general meeting, hearing the impassioned speakers, understanding that we had to act, and knowing that we were together in our resolve—teachers and administrators alike.

That year, in line with other teacher arbitration awards, Surrey teachers were granted a 10% increase along with scale shortening in one category. Feeling some taxpayer pressure, the NDP government of the day asked school boards to find economies and the very conservative Surrey School Board did so by voting to increase class sizes and eliminate vice-principal positions.

After first meeting with trustees to no avail, the leadership of the STA Executive Committee quickly formulated a plan and brought it to the membership, and we voted to walk out the very next day and take our case directly to Victoria.

After the motion was passed in a very near unanimous vote, we were asked to check if anyone from our staff had not been able to make the meeting and, when we got home, to phone them to let them know not to go to work the next day. The BCTF president of the day, Jim MacFarlan, had attended the meeting and was absolutely incredulous, wondering no doubt how on earth the STA would pull it all off.

In fact, what our Executive Committee organized overnight was nothing short of amazing. Protest signs were readied, busses organized, radio coverage arranged, a meeting venue in Victoria booked, and plans put in place for rallying at the legislature. The ferries were full that morning, not just with teacher passengers, but with the solidarity and courage of teachers taking a stand. We were excited to be sure, it was a heady experience, but we were also serious and determined.

In Victoria we rallied at the legislature and met in the too-small auditorium at the museum next door. I can still picture the dramatic stand taken by Surrey principal Wes Janzen in response to a patronizing message delivered to us in person by Surrey MLA Ernie Hall. Wes leapt to the stage, reminded Ernie that teachers had worked to get the government elected, whipped out his NPD membership card and threatened to tear it up. Wes, a very collegial and much-admired principal, certainly underscored the message that we all had come to deliver.

By the end of that day, our stand had achieved an agreement with government. As the rally was winding down, Eileen Daily, then Minister of Education, invited the BCTF president to talk with Premier Barrett and the upshot was that we were no longer facing class size increases; in fact, we had secured class size reductions not just in Surrey but throughout the province. Our strike was a resounding success and led to improved learning and teaching conditions in all of BC's public schools.

As a young, new teacher, it truly was a watershed experience for me. What did I learn? It taught me in no uncertain terms, that when we stand together, we can resist the attempts to push our students' learning and our working conditions backwards. When we are determined, we find out courage. And, as we know about ourselves as teachers, we can organize great things virtually overnight.



## Reflections of a Black Educator in Surrey

By Marilyn Ricketts-Lindsay



If you had told me twenty years ago that I would journey from the tropics to a temperate rainforest to take up teaching in the Pacific Northwest, I would have told you that you are mistaken. Not only was teaching not my initial career choice, but at the time, I had very little knowledge of British Columbia and the education system of this part of the world. My initial career was in the airline industry in my island home of Jamaica, a small Island south of Cuba and north of Central America, with a population similar to that of Metro Vancouver alone. Although I travelled internationally—a perk of working with the airline— I had never travelled to British Columbia. I became interested in teaching while living in Nunavut when I accepted a position to teach literacy at a local elementary school in Rankin Inlet. I loved working with children so much that I trudged daily through extreme cold to teach Inuit students not only literacy skills but also how to develop confidence as capable learners.



Fast forward five years later, I find myself living in Vancouver, armed with a BC Teaching Certificate, and a Master's degree in Education from the University of Toronto and an eagerness to delve into a promising teaching career on these beautiful Coast Salish territories. What I did not know was the challenges I would face navigating different schools as a Black teacher. The microaggressions were almost a daily occurrence initially as a Teacher-on-Call. Staff rooms were always a place of dread for me to navigate while keeping my sense of identity intact. I was always in survival mode and wondered what it would be like to not always be on guard, not knowing when the next seemingly innocuous comment would assault my sense of pride and my confidence as an educator. Those comments made me question whether I belonged. I would often have an inner monologue questioning why I was there.

I wanted to be my authentic self and not have to code switch. I definitely did not have a sense of belonging because I was continuously reminded in very subtle ways from many different angles that I did not belong. It took a lot of internal work to overcome these messages which led me to worry about how students who are in similar situations with very different power dynamics fare.





One would argue that my experience was simply that of any early career teacher but I know it was more than that. It was the sense of being othered, the stares that lasted a little longer than they should, the questions with the subtle messages that I was different and that I didn't belong. Unsolicited statements that they don't see colour always stung the most because it conveyed the message that they did not see me, they did not see my identity, that they were ignoring the explicit and implicit racism that individuals who look like me experience.

As an immigrant settler whose ancestors were enslaved for four hundred years in the Americas, I am acutely aware of, and can relate to, the challenges that Black students face. Their individuality and sense of identity are scrutinized and viewed as suspicious, strange, abnormal, and not belonging here. We know how these experiences can negatively affect children's mental health causing trauma and affecting behaviour and academic achievement.

Black students need a culturally responsive education that is not only accepting of their whole self but also acknowledges their lived experiences, and explicitly teaches the history of their ancestors before and after enslavement. They need to learn how colonial social constructs continue to impact their lives through conscious and unconscious bias. The experience of Black students in schools should matter. My hope is that all educators will learn how to be antiracist so that they can support and appreciate all students equitably.

“

Black students need a **culturally responsive education** that is not only accepting of their whole self but also acknowledges their lived experiences, and explicitly teaches the history of their ancestors before and after enslavement.

”



# Action on racism in Surrey Schools a long time coming



By Michael Aaku  
and Carlyle Beach

“

Before we as a society can liberate ourselves from the grip of racism, **we have to acknowledge that it exists and that it is not something which has been blown out of proportion:** neither is it the figment of some people's imagination.

Adrienne Shadd, in McKague, 1991

”

For those of us who have been painfully aware of all the ways that racism in the Surrey School district has impacted our lives, the Environmental Assessment Report on racism in the Surrey School District is not shocking. It tells us nothing that we didn't already know.

Racism, direct or indirect, harms profoundly, is utterly painful and has lasting effects on victims. Systemic racism directed at target groups, normalized, and practiced consciously or unconsciously over generations, degrades and dehumanizes. It is a scourge that must be eradicated. But the Environmental Assessment Report does not give us much confidence that this will happen soon in the Surrey School District. The report fails on many fronts:

- The report acknowledges no victims: many who felt discriminated against have imagined that no one would believe them. There is no apology for victims in the report.
- The report does not acknowledge a need for compensation to anyone. It is just like saying 'like it or leave it, we have no apologies to offer'.
- Where is the fear of litigation for the perpetrators or demands for reparations for the damage and hurt endured by the victims?
- With no one taking responsibility, no forced resignations or firings, the report just becomes a

perfunctory perusal of racism within the District.

In an article in the Surrey-Now-Leader newspaper of November 24, 2021, [Racism exists, without a doubt in Surrey schools: superintendent](#), trustees acknowledge the report as "honest." Trustee Allen adds that the district hasn't "tried to hide anything." We hope that this means that Trustees will ensure that the motions passed by the [Board on 17 November](#) will lead to significant changes. The motions are:

THAT the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to establish a policy on racial equity and educational justice; and

THAT the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to establish plans to build capacity district-wide for promoting racial equity in all

Surrey Schools and that those plans be considered during the 2022-2023 budget process; and

THAT the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to develop an implementation plan designed to promote racial equity across the Surrey School District based on the recommendations of the Racial Equity Environmental Assessment

We hope that these motions lead to the explicit teaching of anti-racism, the provision of anti-racism educational materials to students, and in-service training on how to be anti-racist.

Together we have had over 60 years of teaching experience in the Surrey School District. We hope that over the next 60 years, acts of racism in classrooms, on playgrounds, and in staff rooms will not go unaddressed.





1975

# A Rocky Start for BCTF's Anti-racism Program

By Wes Knapp, retired BCTF staff

Racist taunts, textbook bias, widespread neglect of First Nations students, and teachers ill-prepared to deal with the increasing diversity of the student population were the examples cited by Surrey teacher Lloyd Edwards at the 1975 AGM. Delegates called upon the Federation to take action. We struck a task force to engage classroom teachers in finding solutions. I was assigned to work with this task force. Our first project was to create a visual presentation on racism in BC, which gave a stark picture of BC's shameful history. It called on teachers to join with students in finding a positive path forward.

Incredibly, the visual presentation was met with hostility by the Surrey School Board and the BC School Trustees Association. In fact, the Surrey School Board banned its use in schools, arguing that "to talk about racism creates racist practices." Ironically this led to widespread support for the presentation and its message. In fact, the Federation couldn't keep up with requests for its showing. The media in BC and across the country had a field day with the issue. We probably couldn't have orchestrated a better beginning for the Antiracism Program.

In reflecting on the Anti-racism Program within the BCTF, I have tremendous admiration for teachers' determination to make our schools better places for all students. Teachers are undoubtedly proud of their efforts and for the opportunity the Federation has given them to speak out about a problem of immense significance. Imagine what it would be like to work in an environment that turns a blind eye to racist practices. Of course, we didn't always win the day with our Anti-racism Programs but we didn't give up either.

When the BCTF launched a program to combat racism in our public schools, it was moving into new territory for a teachers' organization. Looking back some 40 years to the start of the Anti-racism Program, we have set in motion many positive attitudes and strategies to tackle racism when it surfaces. Clearly our job is far from over but I'm very optimistic that the strategies now in place will help us reduce the devastating effects of racism.

Reprinted from Teacher magazine, Volume 29, Number 2, January/February 2017

2005



Surrey / North Delta Leader, Sunday, March 13, 2005

## Multicultural committee dissolved

**Vision now  
'embedded' in local  
schools, says trustee**

**SHEILA REYNOLDS**  
*Staff Reporter*

**A GROUP FORMED** about a decade ago to address multicultural issues in the Surrey School District has been dissolved.

The multicultural advisory committee was originally struck by district staff in the mid-1990s to establish a focus on the diverse cultures in Surrey and their effects on the

school system. Teacher and parent representatives sat on the committee along with two school district administrators.

Trustee Kim Evoy said while it was a valuable group, it has served its purpose.

"The committee has been successful in creating awareness and policy," said Evoy. "They have created that foundation, but it's time to move on."

She said out of the committee came initiatives such as the district's anti-discrimination, human rights, and safe and caring schools policies.

"Individual schools have picked up that vision," said

Evoy. "All schools have multicultural initiatives ... there are myriad programs. That whole multicultural aspect is embedded in our district."

But the head of Surrey's District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) disagrees.

"We don't want to see it dissolved," said Lawrence Pang, also criticizing the district for its lack of consultation before axing the committee. "We do need to keep apprised of the multicultural needs of the community."

The school board receive a report summarizing the initiatives of the now-defunct committee in the coming weeks.



# Teaching Aché

By Thais Cabral

In December 2020, the Grade 1 class I was teaching started dancing to the song *Water* by Beyoncé while watching the movie *The Lion King*. I noticed that they picked on one specific word in the song and started repeating it. The word is *asè* or *aché*, a Yoruba word that means the power to make things happen and produce positive change. I was really touched that they picked up the word as my Black heritage is Yoruba and I've been familiar with this word since I learned how to speak.

I took their interest in this word as an opportunity to teach them to value the strengths of Black cultures and embarked on a series of lessons. It was especially important to do this as there were three students of Black heritage in the class and I wanted them to feel proud of their identities.

First, we brainstormed ideas about the continent of Africa. Students knew all the references from cartoons about wild animals, forests. They also knew about the superhero Black Panther so next we watched the film. Students loved the film so much they asked to see it twice!

Afterwards, I showed them the world map and they learned that there are 54 countries on the continent of Africa. They were amazed when they found out that Africa is the ancestral land of all humans.

In the next days we watched more videos from the Kids Black History YouTube channel, and as we did, the Black students in class confidently added to our learning by explaining to us the meaning of their African names.

Students saw images of pharaohs and queens from Ancient Egypt and I told them the story of the Ashanti queen Yaa Asantewaa. They learned about different African music so that they could see how rich and diverse the cultures on the continent are.

One of my students knew about Kamala Harris so I showed them pictures of the Vice President with her parents so that they could see that she is half South Asian and half Black. They were amazed to know that she is a 'big boss now' and that she looks like them. We watched an interview between Kamala Harris and Cavanaugh Bell, a Maryland 7-year-old that used to be bullied and who responded to that hurt by opening a food pantry to help people in need. Students got really inspired by the story.

After understanding the existence of different continents and the presence of oceans in between them, one of my students asked how Black people ended up in the American continent. I said that recently, like many other families or even myself, they immigrated to Canada or the United States. But with the projection of the world map on the whiteboard, I taught them that many Black people in the past were kidnapped to come to the American continents. I asked them if they knew what it was like to be kidnapped and they explained to me everything their parents probably told them.

And then, there was one of those magical moments that makes our teaching life so amazing. A Punjabi girl said when Black people were kidnapped to come to the American





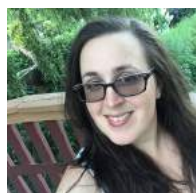
continent, they needed a lot of *asè* to overcome missing their family and friends. Right after, another Punjabi girl said that her colour was brown like Black people and that all Black and brown people are beautiful. I was caught off guard and started to cry in front of my students because they proved to me that kids are indeed amazing!

After learning about the beauty, strength, resilience and AXE of African people, students' responses and reflections showed how meaningful the Black History unit was for them! I encourage everyone to teach Black history and humbly offer my support!

As educators, it's imperative that we incorporate Anti-racist Education into BC's new curriculum by educating ourselves first about our privileges and positionality, and contemporary struggles so that we work to confront and eradicate them. I like the definition of privilege by Trevor Noah when he says that Black people can't fail or succeed on their behalf without pulling out so many loaded ideas, stereotypes and biases that blackness is socially systemic and culturally associated. Aware of this, it is crucial to design lessons that restore individuality, richness, beauty and diversity when approaching Black history.

“As educators, it's imperative that we **incorporate Anti-racist Education into BC's new curriculum by educating ourselves first** about our privileges and positionality, and contemporary struggles...”

# Concrete Entry Points to Teach About Racism



By Melissa Salter

On August 23, 2021, the Komagata Maru Memorial in Coal Harbour was vandalized. This installation memorializes the plight of the 376 passengers from India who were trying to immigrate to Canada in 1914. They spent months trapped on the ship in Vancouver harbour and were refused entry because of racist policies like The Continuous Journey Regulation. The passengers were vilified in the newspapers through racist articles and cartoons. The fact that over 100 years later, the memorial was vandalized, and many people in Canada do not know about the incident, are major problems.

Racism is deeply rooted in our settler identity, and we must keep facing it with our students. Racism is not a thing of the past, as is evident by this incident of vandalism as well as micro-aggressions faced by people living in Canada daily. This article outlines some of the concrete entry points for conversations with students about racist events both past and present.

## Concrete Entry Points

**FIND #OWNVOICE EXPERTS:** When something happens like the vandalism of the Komagata Maru Memorial, I want to teach about it. First, I make sure I have accurate facts to provide context. Next, I look for [#OwnVoice](#) examples I can use. For the Komagata Maru incident, there is a Historica Canada video available called [The Sikh migrants who challenged Canadian immigration law](#). SFU also has a powerful digital collection of primary documents you can use to support teaching about this incident. It is important include the voices of BIPOC when you are teaching about BIPOC.

**COMPLETE MEDIA SCAVENGER HUNTS:** Have your student look for examples in the media of racial language, [racist imagery](#), and possible micro-aggressions. You could look at historical political cartoons and articles, or modern. Helping your students read and consume media in a safe way is an important skill.

**CREATE ART:** Explore different memorials or art by the group impacted by your topic. Talk about the emotions being shared by the art. Brainstorm what emotions your class is feeling and what types of materials they might want to use to express their emotions. Work together as a class to build a collaborative piece



of art to share your learning. Be purposeful in the event and emotions you are trying to share. Display the art somewhere visible and write a collaborative artist statement to teach other people at the school about what happened.

**READ PICTURE BOOKS:** Literature creates windows and mirrors for students. When we read literature, it creates a safe space to start challenging discussions. Reading diverse literature also allows all of our students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Unfortunately, there are no picture books about the Komagata Maru incident-it is something I am working on with help. There are, however, many other amazing books about moments in Canadian history and I encourage you to talk to your teacher librarian or see my website for ideas.

For a comprehensive reflection on the topics in this article, visit the [original blog post](#).



# Teaching Anti-Oppression

Did you know that at the BCTF website, you can find [resources](#) for teaching anti-oppression? One of the most comprehensive resources is the [Show Racism the Red Card](#) booklet of lessons covering a range of topics related to discrimination and prejudice. *I know a culture* is one of those lessons.



## Activity 3: I know a culture

Intermediate to Secondary

Time required: 20 minutes

### Delivery

Copy the “I know a culture” activity sheet provided in Appendix 3 and distribute to students. The sheet describes various cultural rituals and instructs students to decide how they feel about each ritual and asks them to circle the relevant adjective without consulting their peers.

1. “They have a ritual involving the use of certain garments. It is only worn in certain seasons. The robing and disrobing of this garment and the timing of this has great cultural significance in the hospitality ritual.”

Bizarre	Delightful	Interesting	Disturbing	Exotic
Normal	Gross	Amusing	Boring	

2. “They eat a food from a paste made from the seeds of a type of grass, cooked once and then burnt near a flame, which is smeared with fat from an animal. They eat this with the albumen from a bird. Traditionally they can only eat it at certain times of day.”

Bizarre	Delightful	Interesting	Disturbing	Exotic
Normal	Gross	Amusing	Boring	

3. “Almost the entire population is addicted to a plant substance which they drink with water and other animal or plant substances. They speak openly about this addiction apparently without shame and have evolved certain rituals around its use.”

Bizarre	Delightful	Interesting	Disturbing	Exotic
Normal	Gross	Amusing	Boring	

4. “Young people like to gorge on fried disks of slaughtered animals, often consuming bits of blood, bone and muscle tissue in the process. They close their eyes and moan when the juices run down their chins.”

Bizarre	Delightful	Interesting	Disturbing	Exotic
Normal	Gross	Amusing	Boring	

### Discussion

Once all the students have completed the activity, collect some thoughts from the room and ask why they felt this way. Then explain what the statements are actually describing.

- taking your coat off as you enter someone’s house
- eating egg on toast for breakfast
- having a cup of tea
- describing the consumption of fast food hamburgers.

## Were they surprised?

This activity highlights the fact that the way in which we describe customs can make them sound strange and even frightening, but if we take the time to truly understand them, they may be perfectly ordinary.

## Exploring racism and racial inequity

Students may not previously have received any education on issues of race or racism. Before they are able to tackle racism and promote equity in the classroom, they need the opportunity to explore these issues for themselves.

## Objectives

- to empower participants with the knowledge to recognize racial inequity
- to encourage dialogue and engage learners in critical thinking
- to allow participants to evaluate their own attitudes in the context of different situations
- to allow teachers and students to reflect on their place with racial oppression, privilege, and allyship.

## Note to teachers

Before beginning an exploration of racism and racial inequity, teachers are encouraged to explore issues around stereotyping, systemic and individual discrimination and prejudice, anti-oppression, and allyship. Teachers may also want to use activities and/or ideas from the BCTF's antiracism workshop A.R.T. (available through the BCTF workshop booking process) with their students.

## Encouraging teachers to reflect on their teaching

The following activities should help teachers to understand the need to continually reflect on how their teaching impacts different students and to explore ways to make their teaching more inclusive.

## Diversity diary

Adapted from an activity by Heather Smith, University of Newcastle.

Ask teachers to spend some time considering what it would be like for them to move to a different country where they were in the cultural and linguistic minority. Then, connect that to what the experiences might be for different students in their classes, e.g., a Syrian refugee, a Sri Lankan asylum seeker, or a recent immigrant in the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. If you were in their shoes, how would you interpret or experience the posters on the walls, the resources in the classrooms, the messages given out, the content of the curriculum, etc. Ask them to record their thoughts in a journal entry.





# Catch your Language!



By Regie Marie Plana-Alcuaz

## in•grained

/in'grānd/

1. (of a habit, belief, or attitude) firmly fixed or established; difficult to change.
2. (of dirt or a stain) deeply embedded and thus difficult to remove.

"You guys," "Oh boy," "Man!" are so ingrained in our everyday language that we no longer pause to reflect that so much of our language centres men and privileges males. There are many people that don't consider these terms to be offensive because they're quite inured to them, but they aren't gender-inclusive at all. On the other hand, a lot of curse words utilize female terms, including sl\*t, b\*tch, wh\*re, even girl!

Insisting on using male-dominant language is reinforcing a system in which men hold greater value over all other genders. Terms such as mankind, freshman, policeman, chairman are still very much the default in daily speech. How often have you used these words unthinkingly?

I constantly hear people using "you guys" all the time, from presenters in our union workshops to teachers in classrooms. Perhaps a reason why few students come out in school is because there's a perceived lack of receptiveness from a trusted adult they should feel accepted by, given that teachers are people they spend a lot of time with during the day.

Sherryl Kleinman's (2002) thought-provoking essay "Why Sexist Language Matters" notes that it is a symbolic annihilation to subsume women under male-based terms, which makes it infinitely easier to render this group invisible and therefore do with them whatever the dominant group wants. It may not be identified as an act of violence, but it's a slippery slope that frequently leads towards that.

I was only made aware of this recently, but studies show that there's a greater likelihood for autistic people over neurotypical folks to be gender-diverse. There are mental health conditions that may be comorbid with autism, including schizophrenia, depression and ADHD. For gender-diverse persons, autism and depression were the most closely related. With this in mind, there is an increased concern for educators and service providers to make ourselves aware of potential mental health impacts that can result from membership in a marginalized group.

Because many humans are biologically hardwired to be efficient - for instance, the schema theory in psychology refers to our ability to navigate novel situations by creating mental shortcuts for us to interpret all the information we are receiving from our environment - we don't tend to think hard about every single quotidian thing we encounter. That makes sense, because we'd be otherwise overwhelmed and unable to function. On the other hand though, challenging ourselves to catch when we use gender-exclusive words are a great way for us to keep our brains limber and stave off memory problems caused by aging.

Another reason for using gender-neutral terms is to put into action the decision to be more considerate of others. Regardless of the fact that it's the correct thing to do, it's good to reflect on how your use of language affects your way of thinking. The most commonly used languages across countries - owing to

colonization - consider the masculine form as a default or higher priority, and this reflects in the percentage of our leadership being men. What's the percentage of women leading multinational corporations? Anyone can name the CEOs of Amazon, Tesla, Apple, or Virgin, but how about the heads of GMC, Citigroup, Best Buy, and Nasdaq? As of August 2021, women hold only 6.0% of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies.

If we think about the variety of genders that have become more visible these days, more effort should be made to communicate in ways that are gender-inclusive. "No homo," "That's so gay" are also phrases that unintentionally (or intentionally) harm. Using those words signals to gender-nonconforming people in your vicinity that they aren't welcome or can't be themselves.

In Surrey, the first time the name plate for my classroom door came in, the title was "Ms." because apparently, whoever took the order from our secretary might have assumed that "Mx." was a typo. Thankfully, however, this was corrected after a couple of weeks. I have a student who insists that there are only two genders and says I must be a girl because I look like a girl. I identify as a non-binary woman, because although my gender expression is non-binary, I identify more, am coded and socialized as a woman, and experience all the issues associated with that.

In essence, the effort to try to be more inclusive in your language may take some time but is totally worth it. There are many gender-neutral terms to address a group: folks, you all, people, team, friends, scholars, buds, epic humans - take your pick. Personally, I like theydies and gentlethems, because it's punny. But whatever your preference, that's a step towards gender equality that you could make right now and influence your students to do so as well. Also, whenever you can, please do gently assist your colleagues in being aware of this as well. At the same time, be forgiving - it takes a while for people to break the habit (and I experience the occasional slip myself) but persist without being unpleasant. Folks are more apt to change if it affects a person towards whom they have positive feelings.



# The Healing Power of Music

By Kawal Varpaul



Imagine living in a world where music does not exist. The thought is incomprehensible. Our inherent relationship to music is as ancient and primal as the connection to the moon and tides.

An integral component in the amazing design of human biology is how we naturally respond to music. It starts in the womb with the soothing rhythm of a mother's heartbeat. Play a song and, much to the delight of adoring parents, a child's instinct is to bounce to the rhythm. Try to refrain from tapping your foot [or big toe] to the pulse of a song. Try to resist from floating away on the wings of an enchanting melody. Try not to dance, hum or bop your head to the beat. Try to remain absolutely still. Resistance is futile. As an Arts Education and English teacher who has taught elementary,

secondary, college and adult education on three continents, there is no denying how the use of music, dance and drama in the classroom is a game changer.

## A PERSONAL VIBRATION

As a child, I revelled in the soundtrack of my childhood that brought joy and tuned out the sounds of dissonance. My soul resided in that point between dreams, fantasy and reality. I was enveloped in music from the moment I woke up to the song of prayer in the morning, and to the last refrain of my mum's evening meditation suspended in time and space. Then there were other tunes, such as the hum of the sewing machine, orchestra of nature, crash of broken dishes, and thunderous tropical storms.

At family gatherings I would eagerly wait for the moment when dusk unveiled its glorious canvass of tropical evening colours, bellies were full, and inhibitions liberated with spirits. A hush would descend, like when one is seated in a magnificent theatre, waiting in anticipation for the curtains to open. Then, on cue, someone would start drumming on buckets, and rowdy singing would follow. The musical imprint from my childhood was everlasting.

## EMOTIONS, RESONANCE AND FREQUENCIES

In the classroom, I observe how students respond to the arrangement of musical patterns in negative and positive ways. I understand that it is linked to the soundtrack of their childhood. As an educator, my methodologies have evolved. The



search to connect with students through music, conduct open conversations in relation to positive and traumatic emotions, and initiate healing is constant.

Music weaves a spellbinding tapestry of images and emotion through the arrangement of sound. We celebrate joy, reflect on loss, reminisce on time gone by and orchestrate ceremony with music. A song triggers agony or longing. It is all-consuming and compels the most heart-wrenching memory of grief to resurface. When the anguish of life's sorrows is still in various stages of healing, the nostalgic melody of a song provokes a torturous response. Yet, music has the power to galvanize the masses, empower the oppressed, motivate and energize.

One's preference to certain genres of music is unique. It is subject to an individual's evolution of growth and based on the brain's response to different resonance and frequencies found in musical arrangements: pitch, rhythm, melody, harmony and volume. This combination creates a vibration in the body that effects mental, emotional and spiritual consciousness.

## THE EVOLUTION OF MUSIC THERAPY

The healing properties of music is deeply embedded in meditation, spirituality and prayer. Humming on a single note creates a frequency that vibrates through the whole body. Its effect relaxes facial muscles, increases oxygen intake, regulates blood flow and slows down the heart rate. Many rituals centred around music are designed to unite through the shared experience of singing, chanting and listening.

Centuries ago, Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras (c. 570-C. 495 BC) discovered that music therapy facilitates mental and physical rehabilitation. This is linked to entrainment: the ability of the body's internal rhythms to synchronize with external pulses or beats. Pythagoras would prescribe different musical scales and modes to cure physical and psychological ailments. Over time, the study and practice of music therapy has become more sophisticated.

Music is processed on both sides of the brain. Hearing music releases feel-good endorphins and promotes higher recall accuracy because neurotransmitters

connect in new and different ways. When the brain's reward system is engaged, dopamine and oxytocin is released. These are the same chemicals released when we taste delicious food, see something beautiful or fall in love. A study conducted by Dr Daniel Levitin of McGill University in 2013 discovered that music triggers the opioid receptor cells in the brain to reduce and distract from pain. With the right stimulation, the body has the ability to produce natural pain relievers. If it were a drug, it would be similar to morphine. This effect decreases discomfort from pain and motivates movement.

The power of music is incredible when one listens to music that resonates with one's frequency. Which resonance and frequency do you connect with? Whether it's meditating on Om, heavy metal, classical, or a little bit of Rock & Roll, music is there to transport and heal you. So, go ahead. Connect with your vibration.





# Queering Black History Month

For Black History month 2022, we raise awareness of the various intersectional identities within Black Queer and Trans communities. We acknowledge the struggles of Black Queer and Trans folx who are frequently erased from mainstream narratives. Honouring Black History Month means also including Black Queer and Trans history in our classrooms and celebrating Black Queer and Trans culture and communities.

## RESOURCES

- [Queering Black History Month](#)
- [Black Pride roots](#)
- [Queer, Black and making Canada proud](#)
- [Black Voices in history](#)
- [Canada's queer rights exists because of Black people](#)
- [Queer Canadian artists](#)
- [Three Black Canadians inspiring the next generation of queer leaders](#)
- [Black, Bold, Queer and Beautiful](#)

## An artful evening with the Members of Colour Committee



By Amrit Sanghe



A few weeks ahead of the winter break, the [Members of Colour committee](#) held a “Racial Trauma and Reclaiming Identity” art therapy workshop led by Registered Clinical Counsellor Linda Lin. My co-chair, Thais Cabral, and I sought Linda out after hearing our committee members lament the lack of space and support to process the racism we experience and witness in our personal and professional lives. Though there is a greater awareness of systemic racism as a result of the 2020 racial justice uprisings, far too many people continue to underestimate and

downplay the harmful impacts of racism in the workplace. Combined with the everyday stresses of teaching in the midst of a pandemic, racism and other forms of oppression add an extra burden for members who are already struggling with mental health and burnout.

One of the things I enjoyed most about Linda’s workshop was the opportunity to discuss internalized oppression and how it shapes our lives without being conscious of it. Some of the manifestations of internalized

racism that Linda highlighted included imposter syndrome, code-switching, overworking, assimilation, shrinking, self-gaslighting and racial inferiority. These are topics BIPOC people seldom have the space and emotional support to unpack, yet they permeate so much of our lives. The artwork produced in the workshop and shared by members who felt comfortable spoke to the masks and personas we adopt in White spaces to shield ourselves from feelings of alienation and hostility. We spoke of ways to bring our most authentic selves into workplace and strategized about how we can challenge racism in schools without jeopardizing our own mental health and well-being. To this end, Linda astutely underscored the importance of community, labelling it as a form of “power with” which is built on respect, mutual support, shared power, solidarity, empowerment and collective decision-making. It is with this understanding of our collective power that our committee hopes to build an organizing framework to challenge systemic racism in our schools and community.

If you’d like to join the Members of Colour Committee, all you have to do is to submit a completed CV to [reception@surreyteachers.org](mailto:reception@surreyteachers.org).





Source: UBC's Museum of Anthropology

# Sankofa: African Routes, Canadian Roots



By Annie Ohana

I recently visited the [Sankofa: African Routes, Canadian Roots](#) exhibit at UBC's Museum of Anthropology. I was very moved by what I saw and wondered how teachers could help students find that "permission to exist as a living ancestor". The word "Sankofa" comes from the Ghanaian Akan language and means to bringing with you the lessons of your past and heritage as you move forward in life and is symbolized by the image of the [sankofa bird](#).

This exhibition shares stories, histories and projects focused on African and Black affirmation. It also integrated local connections through both historical and modern contributions of Black Canadians in Vancouver. It is a powerful showcase of different ways of understanding the world through the lenses of African and Black communities, the wealth of their cultural and art practices, and their inspiring legacy.

I strongly recommend a class field trip to the exhibit or a visit as part of professional development. My visit opened up new ideas about the exploration of ideas suppressed by colonialism. As a descendent of Sephardic Jewish Moroccans, I also wondered about how much of my own family history in Africa there is to explore.

Themes that students could explore include restitution and repatriation, exploring connections between past and current identity, Black experiences on these unceded lands, the power of reclamation, and activism through multiple forms of expression.

The exhibit is up until March 27, 2022.



Source: UBC's Museum of Anthropology



Source: UBC's Museum of Anthropology

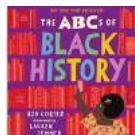
# Resources for Teaching Black Excellence



[International Decade for People of African Descent](#)



[International Decade for People of African Descent \(Canada\)](#)



[Northwest African American Museum](#)



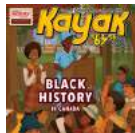
[Black History Month \(Government of Canada\)](#)



[Canadian Encyclopedia \(Black History\)](#)



[Black Pioneers in BC](#)



[Canada's History Website](#)



[Black Scientists in Canada](#)



[Remembering Black Loyalists and Communities](#)



[Facing History and Ourselves](#)



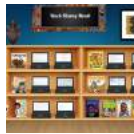
[A Kid's Book About Racism](#)



[New Black History Exhibit at the BC Royal Museum](#)



[Netflix: Bookmarks](#)



[BHM SD42 Virtual Room \(Leah: Kitamura/Yin Tsia\)](#)



[Learning for Justice](#)



[Unlearn Poster Pack](#)



[Classroom Connection - Black History Month](#)

## Local Black Organizations



[BC Black History Awareness Society](#)



[Hogan's Alley Society](#)



[Black Lives Matter Vancouver](#)



[Black Strathcona](#)



[Ethos Lab](#)



[Afropositive Canadian Network](#)



[Black Boys Code](#)



[Black Business and Professional Association](#)



[Solid State Cooperative](#)