

BLACK IN NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

About the Exhibition

Black in Natural History Museums is an exhibition celebrating 300 years of Black scientists in natural history, past and present. The exhibition explores the contributions that Black scientists and naturalists have made to the field at museums and beyond.

The exhibition features the following Black scientists and naturalists:

Anthropology

Dr. Fatimah Jackson (1950–present)

Botany

Graman Quassi (1692–1787)

John Tyley (late 1700s)

Majoe (late 1700s)

Edmond Albius (1829–1880)

Ecology

Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant (1985–present)

Entomology

Dr. Charles Henry Turner (1867–1923)

Sophie Lutterlough (1910–2009)

Dr. Margaret Collins (1922–1996)

Dr. Jessica Ware (1977–present)

Ichthyology

Dr. Henry “Hank Bart” (1953–present)

Mammalogy

Dr. Brandon Kilbourne (1983–present)

Marine Biology

Dr. Ernest Everett Just (1883–1941)

Dr. Roger Arliner Young (1899–1964)

Paleontology

Cameron Muskelly (1998–present)

Taxidermy

John Edmonstone (late 1700s–1800s)

Carl Cotton (1918–1971)

Why is this exhibition important?

Natural history museums and the science they showcase are products of their time and place. Colonialism—the domination and exploitation of a people, their land, and their resources by another group—is a central part of the story of natural history, including natural history collections and museums. Many individuals of color, including Black people, have made important contributions to natural history. Yet even when they have done a majority of the labor and study, their contributions often have been co-opted, intentionally unacknowledged, and forgotten. Decolonizing natural history means investigating the Black and underrepresented individuals who studied, collected, and preserved the organisms in natural history museums today. It also means acknowledging how racism has played and continues to play a role in diminishing their contributions and dominating their stories.

Black in Natural History Museums is a non-profit organization devoted to building a community of Black professionals in natural history museums around the world as well as informing others about the history and experiences of Black individuals in natural history museums and in collection work.

At the Museum & In the Classroom

Overview of Student Worksheets

Students will use the worksheet as a recording tool as they explore the stories of Black scientists and naturalists past and present, choosing two to focus on. They are encouraged to discuss their thoughts, observations, and questions with their peers, and to visit Museum areas where they can learn more about the topics of interest to their chosen Black scientists or naturalists. Students can be creative in their use of sketching and writing to take notes.

Pre-Visit Extension Ideas

Invite students to name scientists or naturalists (people who are curious about the natural world) who are celebrated in books or media. What do they notice? What questions do they have?

Then have students name scientists or naturalists that they know personally (e.g. family members, people who work in a local community garden). Invite them to name as many as they can.

Post-Visit Extension Ideas

■ **Class discussion:** Students can have a guided discussion to process and synthesize what they learned. Suggested discussion prompts:

- How did you feel visiting the exhibition?
- How do the stories relate to your own story or stories of people you know?
- If you could live a day in the life of one of the people you chose, who would it be, and why?

■ **Research and share:** Students select one featured individual from the exhibition (or visit the websites listed below to research an individual from another STEM field, such as space exploration, engineering, or medicine) and create a poster, short presentation, digital slideshow, or mini-exhibit highlighting that person's contributions to their field.

Recommended Resources

Black in Natural History Museums Organization

blackinnhms.org

An organization of Black museum professionals committed to diversifying the stories told and the research done in natural history museums, celebrating the contributions of Black scientists and naturalists, inspiring Black professionals to reimagine their relationships with the natural world, and highlighting career opportunities in natural history and related areas.

Schomburg Center for Research

nypl.org/locations/schomburg

This research library in Harlem is a world-leading cultural institution devoted to the research, preservation, and exhibition of materials focused on African American, African Diasporic, and African experiences.

New York Historical Curriculum Library

nyhistory.org/education/curriculum-library

This collection of classroom materials examines the contested efforts toward full citizenship and racial equality for African Americans that transpired in the 50 years after the Civil War.

National Museum of African American History and Culture

nmaahc.si.edu/learn/educators/resources

This collection of educator resources is designed to help students interpret African American history through multiple lenses and engage in conversation around the nuanced history.

I Teach NYC

iteachnyc.net

I Teach NYC is an ongoing collection of professional learning and development opportunities for New York City educators inside and outside the sciences. Many have an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching methods and civics.

Black in X Network

[instagram.com/blackinxnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/blackinxnetwork)

[youtube.com/hashtag/blackinxnetwork](https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/blackinxnetwork)

A coalition that addresses racial equity and systemic bias.

Correlation to Standards

This activity supports the following Social Studies Framework:

The C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards

D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

D2.His.3.6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

D2.His.5.6-8. Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.

D2.His.15.6-8. Evaluate the relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.

D4.6.6-8. Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

D4.6.9-12. Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.