

# Classroom Space

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## When Politics and The Olympics Collide

While supposedly the Olympics are apolitical, in reality politics have been woven throughout Olympic history in a variety of ways. The first *recorded* Olympic Games are generally accepted to have occurred in 776 B.C.E. The Olympics, 776 B.C.E. to 393 A.D., were celebrated as a religious festival, until Roman Emperor Theodosius banned them for being a “pagan” festival. i.e., celebrating the Greek god Zeus was abhorred by the Christians. Originally, only free-born Greek men were allowed to compete, no women or foreigners. Obviously politics would later force a change. The games tended to not only be sexist but elitist as well. Men were required to have trained for at least ten months prior to the games, something only the upper class could afford. On a different political note, apparently the various Greece city-states were constantly at war with each other, so when it was time for the games, a truce of a month was called.

The first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896 in Athens, and women were still not allowed to compete. The father of the modern Olympic Games, de Coubertin, is credited as stating that the inclusion of women would be “impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic, and incorrect.” In addition he said, “Women have but one task, that of crowning

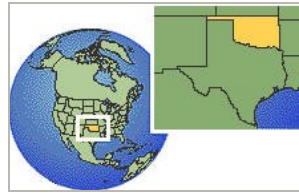
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## The History Behind Oklahoma’s Black Towns

The development of Black towns in America took place predominantly between 1865 and 1920. What constitutes an “all-Black town?” One that has at least two of the following criteria: Black founder(s); governance led by Black officials; predominantly Black population and/or a Black postmaster. During the aforementioned time, about fifty identifiable Black towns and/or settlements were created in Oklahoma, significantly more than in any other part of the nation. By 1890, Oklahoma had over 137,000 African American residents living in all Black towns. Thus, Oklahoma played a somewhat unique part in U.S. History.

Why did Black towns spring up during this time? Obviously the timing implies a connection to the ending of the Civil War. In fact the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the Reconstruction Treaties of 1866 both helped to instigate the founding of Black towns. Initially many of the settlers were former slaves of Indians (or descendants of former slaves) who the Reconstruction Treaty said must be treated as members of the tribe. Thus, starting in 1898, the

former slaves began receiving land allotments from the tribes. In addition, many freed slaves fled from the Deep South to Oklahoma to escape the rigid Jim Crow Laws. That is not to say that Oklahomans were particularly open-minded, but they had not legislated formal Jim Crow Laws at this time perhaps in part because Oklahoma was not yet a state. As a result, African Americans in



Oklahoma/Indian Territory were able to own land and businesses, as well as vote.

Why would they chose to start up an all Black town, instead of just moving into an existing town? Part of it had to do with the former Indian slaves, who often were members of large families or clans, and would choose to take their land congruently, thereby lending itself to a new town. Freed slaves from the South had a different motivation, many wanted to prove that Blacks could successfully settle a town and govern themselves without help from Whites.

Some of the African Americans

took part in the Oklahoma Land Run to secure property and make a homestead. One example of this was Edwin P. McCabe, a former state auditor of Kansas, a land developer and speculator, an attorney, a newspaper owner, politician, and Oklahoma immigration promoter. He was instrumental in founding the town of Langston and providing the initial land upon which Langston University was established.

Sadly, the dreams of the freedman were threatened when “Alfalfa” Bill Murray, a very racist individual, took an active role in Oklahoma politics. He led the Oklahoma’s Constitutional Convention, served as Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, served as a U.S. Representative, and eventually became governor of Oklahoma in 1930. He played a pivotal role in promoting some of the first laws passed by the newly empowered Oklahoma Legislature following statehood in 1907—Jim Crow Laws. Added to this “one drop” of Negro blood rule, and the Grandfather Clause which became law in 1910 most of the Black citizens of Oklahoma were disenfranchised. That

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## *Olympic Trivia*

2010 being the year of the Olympic Winter Games held in Canada, it seems an appropriate venue to look at Olympics Trivia. See how many of the following facts you can match up with their correct answer. Not all answers are used, and some could be used more than once. Check answers on page 4.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ___ 1. This was the first event in which women competed.  | A. 0<br>B. 1<br>C. 2<br>D. 3<br>E. 4<br>F. 55<br>G. 60<br>H. 65<br>I. 70<br>J. 75<br>K. Britain<br>L. France<br>M. The Netherlands<br>N. USA<br>O. Croquet<br>P. Equestrian<br>Q. Rowing<br>R. Sailing<br>S. Swimming<br>T. Tennis<br>U. 500m<br>V. 800m<br>W. 1000m<br>X. Abebe Bikila<br>Y. Constantin Henriquez de Zubiera<br>Z. Dimitrios Loundras |
| ___ 2. In 1900, he was the first Black athlete to compete at the Olympics.  |  |
| ___ 3. Charlotte Cooper was the first woman to win an Olympic event, and did it in this event.  |  |
| ___ 4. This Ethiopian barefoot marathon runner was the first Black African to win a gold medal in this year.  |  |
| ___ 5. This Greek gymnast was the youngest ever modern Olympian.  |  |
| ___ 6. Winner of the triple jump, the athlete from this country was the first Olympic champion of the modern Olympic games.   |  |
| ___ 7. In 1928, women were allowed to compete for the first time in track and field events, but so many collapsed at the end of this race that the event was banned until 1960.   |  |
| ___ 8. While women competed in swimming events for the first time in 1912, this country was not represented as it would not allow its female athletes to compete in events without long skirts.   |  |
| ___ 9. There are this many Olympic sports which allow men and women to compete against each other.  |  |
| ___ 10. At age 30 this woman won four gold medals (three individual and a team) for this country in the 1948 Olympics. She also held world records in two other events (high and long jumps), but was prohibited in competing in more than 3 individual events. |  |
| ___ 11. Lorna Johnstone, at this age, was the oldest woman ever to compete at an Olympic Games.   |  |

(Politics and The Olympics—cont'd from page 1)

the winner with garlands.” Politics would soon intervene, not only in terms of *who* could participate, but *who would* participate.

Boycotts and other political events have happened several times in the last fifty plus years. The 1956 Olympics in Australia were boycotted by 1) Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq as a result of the Suez Crisis; 2) Lichtenstein, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden over the Soviet invasion of Hungary; and 3) The People's Republic of China because The Republic of China (Taiwan) was allowed to participate. In 1964 the International Olympic Committee banned the participation of South Africa because of its apartheid regime. Ten days before the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, Mexican students protested their government resulting in 267 students killed and over a thousand injured. During those games an unrelated event, the raising of their fists by two American athletes in support of black power and the Civil Rights Movement, led to their expulsion. The taking in 1972 of eleven Israeli athletes at Games in Germany by Palestinian terrorists, ended in the death of all eleven hostages and 3 of their captors. The 1976 Games in Montreal were boycotted by 26 African countries when New Zealand was allowed to compete after participating in a rugby tour of segregated South Africa. Taiwan withdrew from those games when they were ordered to compete as “Taiwan” and not under their name “The Republic of China.” Sixty-two countries boycotted the 1980 Games in Moscow as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In 1984, the USSR and 13 other countries boycotted the games essentially in revenge for the previous boycott. 1988 saw North Korea, Cuba, and Ethiopia, boycotting the games when only *South Korea* was recognized as a host of the games. The 2008 Games in Beijing had limited threats of boycotts due to China's maltreatment of the Tibetan people. The last few years have seen less political protest associated with the games. Perhaps at some point the Olympics will indeed be apolitical.

## The Literature Connection

To start the literature review, a look at a wonderful website is in order. The National Education Association (NEA) has several lists of titles for children K-12. To access the “50 Multicultural Books Every Child Should Read” go to <http://www.nea.org/grants/29510.htm>; for the “African-American Booklist” go to <http://www.nea.org/grants/13542.htm>; for the “Asian-American Booklist” go to <http://www.nea.org/grants/29506.htm>; for the “Native American Booklist” go to <http://www.nea.org/grants/29498.htm>; and for the “Bilingual Booklist-Lectura Recomendada” go to <http://www.nea.org/grants/29504.htm>. You will find a plethora of titles to chose from offering an exciting way to expose children to other cultures.

A great book *Market Days: From Market to Market Around the World*, by Madhur Jaffrey, illustrated by Marti Shohet, ISBN 0-8167-3505-0, is most appropriate for 3rd-6th grade. It is a bold, colorful look at foods, customs, and clothing in the markets of Hong Kong, Egypt, Senegal, India, Italy, and Mexico. Another globe-trotting book is, *My Granny Went to Market: A Round-the World Counting Rhyme*, by Stella Blackstone, ISBN 1-84148-792-9.



While it may seem like a PRE-K book because of the topic, some of the vocabulary is a bit challenging and would lend itself more toward first or even second grade.

For middle school and older students, Ann Rinaldi's fictionalized biography, *Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons: The Story of Phillis Wheatley*, ISBN 0-15-200877-2, is a wonderful historical novel about a young Senegal girl who was kidnapped in 1761 and brought to America where she was bought by a wealthy Boston family. She quickly became more than a slave, and through determination learned to read and write, and the Wheatley family discovers she has a unique gift for writing poetry. And was able to develop a talent in writing poetry. The book follows her struggles in getting published the first book of poetry written by an American Negro woman. Another book for middle school and older students based on a real person is *Journey to the Bottomless Pit: The Story of Stephen Bishop & Mammoth Cave*, by Elizabeth Mitchell, ISBN0-439-82640-3. This tells the story of Stephen Bishop, a seventeen year old African American slave who was one of America's first great cave explorers mapping hundreds of miles of the Mammoth Cave, and helping to identify the beauty and uniqueness

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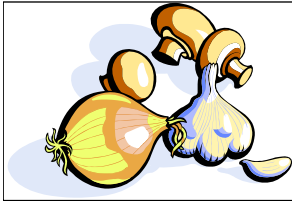
## When is a Doctor Not a Doctor?

That question certainly applies to Vivien Thomas. Born in the early 1900s in Louisiana, and raised in Tennessee, even as a child he dreamed of becoming a doctor. But the Great Depression forced him to drop out of college during his first year, and take a menial job in a lab with experimental animals run by Dr. Blalock. Eventually Dr. Blalock recognized Vivien's natural talent and trained him as his surgical assistant working on experiments with the animals related to pulmonary hypertension and traumatic shock. Their work would ultimately help thousands during WWII, but Vivien was not publicly acknowledged for his contributions, for you see he was African American.

Thomas worked with Dr. Blalock for years, following him wherever his career took him, including to Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Dr. Blalock worked with Dr. Helen Taussig, with Thomas providing technical assistance behind the scenes, to develop a surgical procedure to save “blue babies.” While Blalock and Taussig received international acclaim, the time was not right for the world to recognize Vivien's contributions, even though it was well known that he directed Dr. Blalock in the procedure in the operating room,

Eventually Vivien became the supervisor of surgical research laboratories at Hopkins, training hundreds of surgeons over his 35 year career. Ironically he was never allowed to operate on a human himself. In 1976 he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by John Hopkins University and was appointed instructor of surgery. An excellent film about him is the 2004 HBO film “Something the Lord Made.”



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**Answers to page 2 Trivia:**

1. O; 2. Y Rugby & Tug-of-War;
3. T; 4. X; 5. Z, 10 years old;
6. N—James Connolly; 7. V; 8. N;
9. C—Sailing and Equestrian;
10. M—Fanny Blankers-Koen;
11. I Equestrian Event

**In This Issue...**

Black Towns, Politics & Olympics; Olympic Trivia; Literature Connection; Vivien Thomas

**How did the Incas communicate over long distances, without the wheel, the horse, or the written word?**

They built a 10,000 mile network of trails to connect their empire, and then used couriers. The couriers were basically a relay team, with members stationed every few miles. Couriers were capable of moving messages at a speed of up to 150 miles a day facing such difficulties as high altitudes, steep precipices, steep stone steps, and rope bridges over ravines. Add to that they had to memorize the messages!

*(Black Towns—Cont'd from page 1)*  
alone, however, was not what ultimately led to the decline of all-Black towns. It was the Recession, the Great Depression, urbanization, and the Dust Bowl which proved the downfall of most of Oklahoma's Black towns in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Today there are approximately a dozen of the original Black Towns still in existence. Besides Langston, there are a few others of note.

Boley, which was founded by an interracial group of White, Black, and Creek individuals in 1903 as a railway stop, was one of the most thriving Black towns. At one time it had over 4,000 residents and was even visited by Booker T. Washington. Now it is a small community of about 750, perhaps best known for the Boley Black Rodeo it sponsors every year, and for the attempted bank robbery

by Pretty Boy Floyd in 1932.

Today Rentiesville is essentially a bedroom community known for the reenactment every three years of the Battle of Honey Springs, often called the Gettysburg of the West. This 1863 battle was the first time Black troops (most of whom were from the Creek Nation) played a decisive role in the Civil War, giving control of the Indian Territory north of the Arkansas River back to the Union.

Taft is a Creek Nation Black town established in 1903, and is one of the few Black towns which still has a town council in operation. It is also the home of the Creek Freedmen Shrine and African American landmark memorializing the history of the 5,000 Africans who live in the Creek Nation.

For more information on Black Towns check out Hannibal Johnson's *Acres of Aspiration*.

*(Lit. Connection—Cont'd from page 3)*  
of its ecology which enabled it to be named a national park in 1941.

Part of the *We Are America Series: Mexican Americans*, by Tristan Boyer Binns, ISBN 1-40340-418-6, provides a brief overview of Mexican American history from the early 1500s, when much of southwest United States was part of Mexico, up to present day immigration—legal and illegal. It also includes a synopsis of the immigration story of María Hinojosa, a television reporter for CNN, as well as memories from several different Mexican American immigrants, and a look at the culture and daily life of Mexican Americans today. The visual tools of charts, maps, and photographs are particularly meaningful.

