



# Afronautic Research Lab Teacher's Guide

Art  
Museum

# INTRODUCTION

The Afronautic Research Lab (2016–ongoing) is a Reading Room set within Camille Turner’s exhibition *Otherworld*. It was initiated in 2016 by the social practice/performance collective *Outerregion*, comprised of Afronauts Camille, Karen, and Lee Turner. Inspired by the Dogon people of West Africa, the Afronautic space travellers have been guided by their extraordinary knowledge of star systems to return to earth to create the Lab, which presents visitors with evidence of Canada’s entanglement in the transatlantic slave trade and its percussive effects into the present. The Lab contains clips from newspapers from the 18th century to the present, including “wanted” ads for enslaved people who escaped their bondage. It provides a glimpse into the complex and underacknowledged histories of anti-Blackness and Black resistance through time and into the present, to find a way to hope and to the future.

This specially commissioned Afronautic Research Lab Teacher’s Guide is intended for both independent and guided engagement, encouraging critical conversations prompted by the materials found in the Lab. The Teacher’s Guide has been produced and developed by Dr. Natasha L. Henry-Dixon, Assistant Professor, African Canadian History, in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies at York University.

This guide is structured to scaffold learning. It is meant primarily for instructor-guided classes but can be used by all visitors as an independent learning tool. It supports the exploration of historical thinking concepts through inquiry-based learning, including causes and consequences, establishing historical significance, using evidence-based sources, and developing empathy.

Please contact the Art Museum at [artmuseum@utoronto.ca](mailto:artmuseum@utoronto.ca) to book a time for your class visit.

**Afronautic Research Lab  
Teacher’s Guide**  
Developed by Dr. Natasha  
Henry-Dixon

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Lab** (2016–ongoing) is a  
Reading Room set within  
Camille Turner’s exhibition  
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[camilleturner.com/  
afronautic-research-lab](http://camilleturner.com/afronautic-research-lab)

**Art Museum at the  
University of Toronto**  
University of Toronto  
Art Centre  
(in University College)  
15 King’s College Circle  
[artmuseum.utoronto.ca/  
visiting/](http://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/visiting/)

Tuesday: 12pm–5pm  
Wednesday: 12pm–8pm  
Thursday: 12pm–5pm  
Friday: 12pm–5pm  
Saturday: 12pm–5pm

Free admission.

# LEARNING GOALS / OUTCOMES



Students and visitors will:

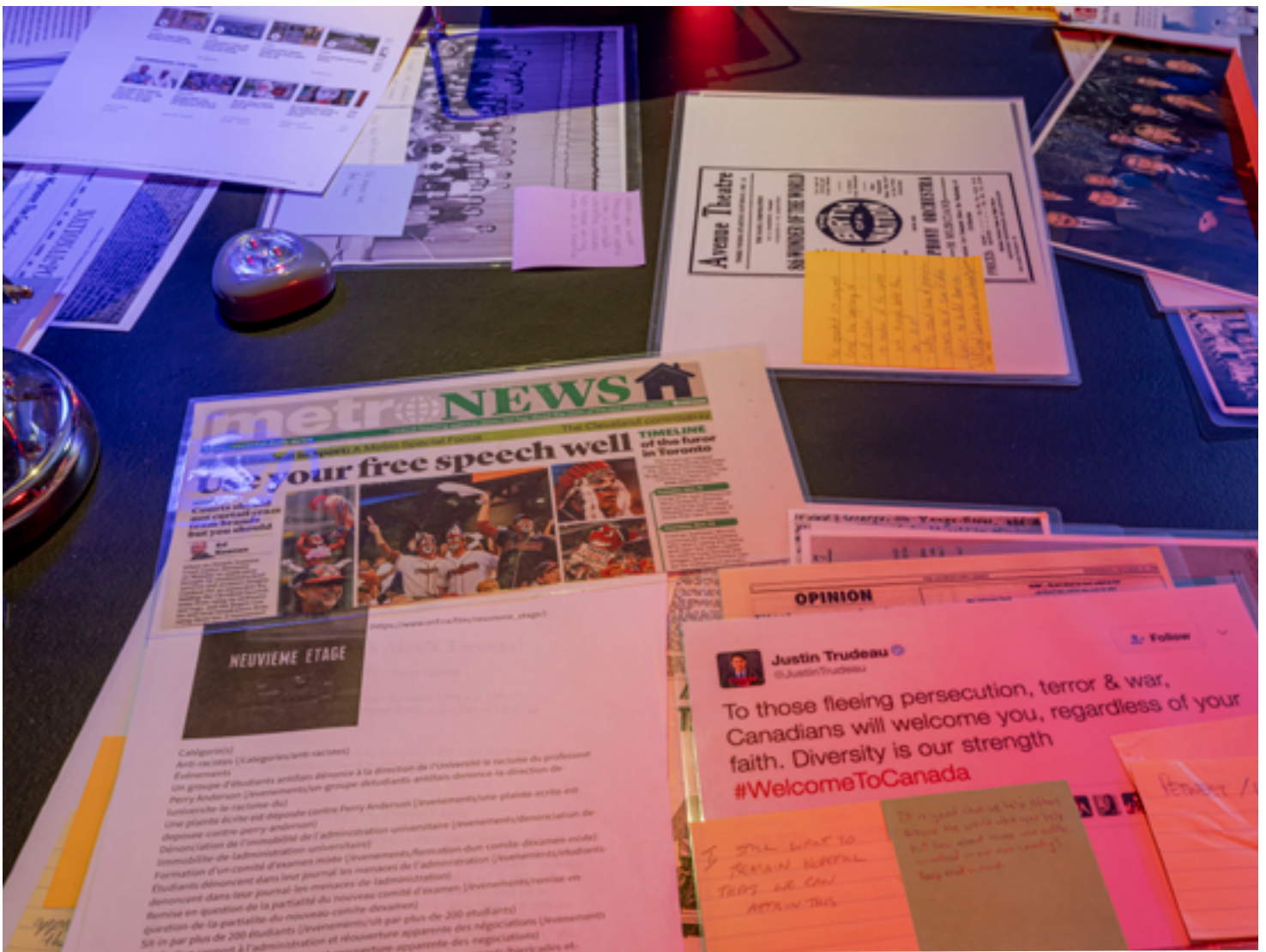
- Gain an understanding of the history and legacy of blackface minstrelsy; how media contains ideological and value messages that have social implications; how Black Canadians resisted these stereotypes and caricatures
- Examine the institution of slavery in colonial Canada, the white settlers that established it, and the experiences of Black people held in bondage
- Learn about the myriad ways that Black Canadians resisted oppression and anti-Black racism
- Analyze primary and secondary sources
- Share their learning

Camille Turner,  
*Afronautic Research Lab*, 2016–present.  
Installation view  
and performance at  
the Ontario College  
of Art & Design  
University as part of  
Artists Against Post  
Racism (AARP),  
2017. Courtesy of the  
artist.

# PRE-VISIT MATERIALS / ACTIVITIES



Installation view:  
*Afronautic Research  
Lab in Otherworld*  
at the University  
of Toronto Art  
Centre. Photo: Toni  
Hafkenschied.



These pre-visit activities are designed to prepare students for their visit to the Art Museum. They provide students with background information and introduce them to key concepts and vocabulary that will be integral to their learning experience.

Installation view:  
Afronautic Research  
Lab in *Otherworld*  
at the University  
of Toronto Art  
Centre. Photo: Toni  
Hafkenscheid.

## A. Read, View, and Listen

In preparation for the visit to the Afronautic Research Lab, have students Read, View, and/or Listen to the suggested sources. You can choose and assign which sources students engage with or you can allow them to choose.

### Read

#### Blackface

- Cheryl Thompson, "Casting Blackface in Canada: Unmasking the History of 'White and Black' Minstrel Shows," *Canadian Theatre Review* 193 (2023): 16-20.
- [Blackface Minstrelsy](#), PBS.

#### Slavery

- [Slavery and Abolition in Upper Canada](#) Online Exhibit, Archives of Ontario.
- Joanna Lavoie, '[Clandestine' plaques inform public about Toronto's history of enslavement](#), *Toronto Star*, August 26, 2020.

#### Black Resistance

- Karolyn Smardz Frost, "Communities of Resistance: African Canadians and African Americans in Antebellum Toronto," *Ontario History* 99, no. 1 (2019): 44-63.

### View

#### Blackface

- [The History of Blackface in Canada](#), CBC (2019).
- [A Look at Canada's Long History of Blackface](#), Global (2019).
- [The Origins of Blackface and Stereotypes](#), TedX.

#### Slavery

- [A Canadian Slavery Story](#), Canadiana (2017).
- "[Plaques detailing history of racism and slavery pop up around Toronto](#)," *CityNews*, August 24, 2020.
- [Interview with Anna Jarvis](#), Archives of Ontario.
- [Streets Named After Enslavers](#), Archives of Ontario.

#### Black Resistance

- [Sisters in the Struggle](#), NFB (1991).
- [David Austin: Black Radicalism](#), TVO (2014).
- [The Skin We're In: Pulling Back the Curtain on Racism in Canada](#) (2017).

### Listen/Do

#### Blackface

- [Jim Crow and the Rise of Blackface](#), Retropod.
- [Blackface: a History](#), History Extra Podcast.
- [What's the Deal with Blackface?](#), Secret Life of Canada.

#### Slavery

- Part 1: "[Canada's slavery secret: The whitewashing of 200 years of enslavement](#)," CBC Ideas.
- Part 2: "[Slavery's long shadow: The impact of 200 years of enslavement in Canada](#)," CBC Ideas.

#### Black Resistance

- "[Mary Ann Shadd: Journalism, Activism, and the Power of Words](#)," Strong and Free Podcast.
- "[Fear of a Black Nation – What's Old in New](#)," ActiveHistory Podcast.

After students have completed the Read, View, and Listen exercise, invite them to write short responses to the following prompts (or to teacher-created prompts) to help synthesize the material, encourage reflection, and start conversations.

1. How did blackface influence the attitudes of white Canadians towards African Canadians?
2. What role did slavery play in the colonization of Canada?
3. How have Black people in Canada resisted oppression, subjugation, and marginalization?
4. What questions have been raised for you?

## B. Primary and Secondary Sources

In this exercise, students learn the difference between a primary and secondary source of history.

**Primary Sources** are sources that were created at the time events happened, or very shortly after the period being studied. They are first-hand accounts of a topic from people who had a direct connection with it.

Primary sources can include diaries, letters, newspapers and newspaper articles, photos, censuses, oral histories, songs, artworks, poems, autobiographies, treaties, memoirs, court records, and audio or video works.

**Secondary Sources** are texts that contain research produced by historians and other social scientists who have analyzed primary sources to learn more about the past. These texts analyze, evaluate, contextualize, and synthesize historical evidence from primary sources and the research of other scholars.

Secondary sources can include books analyses or interpretations of data, scholarly or other articles, documentaries, biographies, and critical reviews.

Sort the following sources into the correct category. Conduct internet searches as needed to inform your decision.

- Letter from Tom Elice to Mary Warner, July 9, 1854
- Buseje Bailey, *Explain Black*
- Karen Fricker, “Da Kink in my Hair is Still a Canadian Classic,” *Toronto Star*, December 12, 2022
- *Being Brown: A Very Public Life* (Ballantine, 1990)
- No. 2 Construction Battalion Nominal Roll
- Garrison Shadd Diary (1881-1889)
- John Cooper, *Season of Rage: Hugh Burnett and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Tundra Books, 2005)
- *The Voice of the Fugitive* (1851-1854)
- Alexander family portrait, c.1890 (I0053551), F 2076, Alvin McCurdy Collection, Archives of Ontario
- David Sutherland and Jennifer Holness, *Speakers for the Dead*, NFB, 2000
- Chantal Gibson, *Souvenir*, 2017
- F. Aladejebi, K.A. Allain, R.C. George, and O. Nzindukiyimana, “We the North”? Race, Nation, and the Multicultural Politics of Toronto’s First NBA Championship, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 56, no. 1 (2022): 1–34.
- *That Lonesome Road: The Autobiography of Carrie Best* (Clarion, 1979)
- *Contrast Newspaper* (1969-1991)
- James St. G. Walker and Burnley “Rocky” Jones, *Burnley “Rocky” Jones Revolutionary: An Autobiography by Burnley “Rocky” Jones* (Fernwood Publishing, 2016)
- Crawford’s Purchase, 1783
- “Let it Slide,” by Maestro Fresh Wes
- Deanna Bowen, *The Black Canadians (after Cooke)*
- “I’m On My Way to Canada” by Joshua McCarter Simpson, 1852

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Primary Source

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Secondary Source

## C. Group Discussions

After completing the selected pre-visit activities, place students in small groups and invite them to share what they have learned thus far. What did they already know? What was new? Then, in small groups or as a whole class, invite students to respond to these questions:

1. Do you think the information you will learn on this trip will confirm what you already know? Why or why not?
2. What is one way that the visit to the Afronautic Lab might challenge what you already know?
3. What is one concept you hope to expand your knowledge on?
4. Based on the pre-visit activities, what is one thing you would like to know more about or have a question about?

Encourage students to record their thoughts to revisit them after the Afronautic Lab learning experience.

# VISIT



Installation view:  
*Afronautic Research  
Lab* in *Otherworld*  
at the University  
of Toronto Art  
Centre. Photo: Toni  
Hafkenscheid.



### **Small Class (up to 20 people):**

The Afronautic Reading Lab is a reading room set within the exhibition *Otherworld*. Your class can visit both the exhibition and the Reading Lab, in any order, or you may choose to visit only the Reading Lab. Art Museum staff can present a short introduction to your class about the exhibition and/or the reading room.

Installation view:  
*Afronautic Research Lab* in *Otherworld*  
at the University of  
Toronto Art Centre.  
Photo: Dominic Chan.

## A. Jigsaw

Students will engage in a Jigsaw activity to gain a deeper understanding of the key themes of the exhibit.

Educators unfamiliar with the Jigsaw strategy can consult the following resources to learn more:

- [readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/jigsaw](http://readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/jigsaw)
- [educationworld.com/a\\_curr/strategy/strategy036.shtml](http://educationworld.com/a_curr/strategy/strategy036.shtml)

Divide students into five Home Groups. The students in one Home Group will each read and research different sources. Home Groups will then gather again so that each student can “teach” their specific area of research to the entire group.

Students should use the Jigsaw Graphic Organizer to record key points and information (Appendix A).

Each student in a Home Group will be assigned 3 or 4 sources identified by the colour-coded items that are available for study in the Lab. These students will form Expert Groups that consist of students across Home Groups who will read and research the same sources.

Give all students clear guidelines for managing their time on the various parts of the Jigsaw task. Classes will generally spend from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours in the reading room.

The Jigsaw Graphic Organizer provides key questions and prompts to help the Expert Groups gather information in their particular area. Students will spend the determined amount of time to learn about their topics and become “experts.” Students should complete the Graphic Organizer and then regroup with their designated Home Groups to share their findings. Each topic “expert” reports the information learned. Remind students that Home Group members are responsible to learn all content from one another. Each Home Group can prepare a summary chart to organize information from the experts’ reports.

## B. Choice Board

Students choose which topics to explore from the list below for a designated amount of time, completing the activities.

Students will engage with one source from the provided colour-coded list and fill in the graphic organizer for each station (see Appendix B). Ask students to annotate the readings with sticky notes.

### List of Topics/Themes:

1. Green: resistance, Black life, resilience
2. Yellow: modern anti-Black racism
3. Red: slavery and the history of enslaved Africans
4. Blue: blackface
5. Silver: the KKK in Canada

## C. Debrief Discussion

After their time in the Afronautic Research Lab and/or the exhibition, lead a group discussion on site, if time permits, or during your next class.

Pose one or two of the following questions. Encourage students to reflect on their learning experience and make connections to their learning in the classroom.

1. Do you have any questions for the tour guide?
2. Revisit what they anticipated and highlight what happened on their visit. Identify inconsistencies.
3. What new ideas/thoughts are percolating after your time in the Afronautic Research Lab?
4. How did your learning experience connect to your life?

Students can leave notes, comments, and observations on the magnetic bulletin board where other visitors can read and respond. They can write down words or phrases (one per sticky note) that encapsulate their responses to what they encountered at the Art Museum. Encourage them to write as many as they choose.

### Individual/General Public Visits

Individual visitors can complete the STATION exercise independently.

# POST-VISIT



Installation view:  
*Afronautic Research  
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at the University  
of Toronto Art  
Centre. Photo: Toni  
Hafkenscheid.



Post-visit activities will help your students continue to explore what they saw and engaged with on their visit and encourage them to use critical thinking skills.

Installation view:  
*Afronautic Research Lab* in *Otherworld*  
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of Toronto Art  
Centre. Photo: Toni  
Hafkenscheid.

## A. Reflection

Revisit the KWL chart students completed prior to the visit and have them complete the “What I Learned” section. Allow students to express further questions about the topics discussed that might be answered by further research. Reflections can take place as small group or class discussions, or students can write their reflections individually. They can also reflect on the things they were able to connect to their prior learning/previous knowledge.

## B. Further Exploration

Have students choose (or assign) a topic or theme to continue their research using these curated sources: [Research Sources](#).

### Topics/Themes:

1. Resistance, Black life, resilience – Green
2. Modern anti-Black racism – Yellow
3. Slavery and the history of enslaved Africans – Red
4. Blackface – Blue
5. The KKK in Canada – Silver

Students can also continue exploring beyond the Afronautic Research Lab by visiting archives, media commons, libraries, and heritage sites. Suggested places to visit in the GTA that have content and material on African Canadian experiences:

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### Archives

- City of Toronto Archives
- Archives of Ontario, York University
- Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario, York University

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### Heritage/Cultural Sites

- Mackenzie House
- Art Gallery of Ontario
- Bradley Museum

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### Libraries/Media Commons

- Clara Thomas Special Collections, Scott Library, York University
- Baldwin Collection of Canadiana, Toronto Reference Library
- Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, University of Toronto

Students can research places where there were or are Black cultural meeting places or community spaces in the city. They can use the “[Black History Navigational Toolkit](#)” produced by Camille and Yaniya Lee to support their research.

## C. Culminating Task/Activity

Students can demonstrate their learning by producing a culminating project. The project could take a range of forms, from a traditional research essay to a presentation in a variety of other media (e.g., a video essay, vlog, short documentary, guided tour, audio or video podcast, series of Tik Tok videos, heritage website, online exhibit, web essay, Wikipedia page, etc.) to a form of artistic expression (e.g., poems, collages, paintings, media art, drawings, mixed media pieces, etc.).

For media projects, set an expected time length for recordings, and ask students to develop and include scripts as well as a reflection discussing the project process and related scholarly work.

For artistic projects, student submissions can include their artwork, and an artist statement explaining the artwork's relation to the subject matter under study.

Finally, you can organize an opportunity for students to share their work with the class. Depending on students' chosen project formats, this could involve:

- scheduling in-class presentations,
- setting up a classroom exhibition, where students view each other's work, ask questions, and provide feedback,
- hosting a research fair, which could allow students to highlight the significance of their research and practice communicating to a diverse audience.

Please feel free to share student work and teachers' experiences with the learning activities with the Art Museum team at [artmuseum@utoronto.ca](mailto:artmuseum@utoronto.ca).

# GLOSSARY, ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, BIBLIOGRAPHY



Installation view:  
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Centre. Photo: Toni  
Hafkenscheid.

# GLOSSARY

## Annotation

Annotating involves highlighting, underlining, and making marginal notes while reading a document. They are margin notes that explain or comment on parts of the text being read. Annotations can include: defining words, analyzing word choices, summarizing main ideas, asking questions, giving reactions, making connections and predictions, giving clarifications, and identifying individuals and places named. Also consider the source's author, perspective, and the historical context.

**Jigsaw** is a cooperative learning strategy that enables each student of a “home” group to specialize in one aspect of a topic (for example, one group studies habitats of rainforest animals, another group studies predators of rainforest animals). Students meet with members from other groups who are assigned the same aspect, and after mastering the material, return to the “home” group and teach the material to their group members. With this strategy, each student in the “home” group serves as a piece of the topic's puzzle and when they work together as a whole, they create the complete jigsaw puzzle.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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### Websites

[Teaching African Canadian History](#)

[Freedom City](#), Toronto Public Library

[“Abolition and the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada.”](#) Celebrating Black Voices: Black History Resources at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

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### Journal Articles

Afua Cooper, [The Enslavement of Africans in Canada](#), Canadian Historical Association, Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada Series, Booklet No. 39, 2022.

Afua Cooper, “Acts of Resistance: Black Men and Women Engage Slavery in Upper Canada, 1793-1803.” *Ontario History* 99, no. 1 (2007): 5–17.

Amoaba Gooden, “Community Organizing by African Caribbean People in Toronto, Ontario,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 38, 3, January 2008, 413–426.

William Renwick Riddell, [“Upper Canada-Early Period,”](#) *The Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 3 (1920): 316–39.

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## News Articles and Reports

Natasha Henry, “[If Black Lives Truly Matter in Canada, an Apology for Slavery is Only a First Step](#),” *Spacing*, June 9, 2020.

Althea Manasan, “[The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada — and why its lasting impact still matters](#),” CBC, November 28, 2020.

Cheryl Thompson, “[Remembering the Harriet Tubman Youth Centre On St. Clair West](#),” *Spacing*, August 1, 2024.

[UN Human Rights Council Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent](#), 2017. Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its Mission to Canada. Geneva: United Nations.

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## Books

Benjamin Drew, [A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee, or, The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada: Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada](#) (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856).

Philip S.S. Howard, [Performing Postracialism: Reflections on Antiracism, Nation, and Education through Contemporary Blackface in Canada](#), 1st ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023).

Adrienne L. Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost, *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!*, (New edition) (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2022).

Allan Bartley, *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada: A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom* (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 2020).

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## Book Chapters

Natasha Henry-Dixon, “Sold as a Slave for Life: Black Enslavement in Colonial Canada,” in *In/to Canada: Forced Migration from Colonization to Resettlement*, ed. C. Clark-Kazak (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2024).

Natasha Henry, “Where, Oh Where, is Bet? Locating Enslaved Africans on the Ontario Landscape,” in *Unsettling the Great White North: African Canadian History*, ed. Michele Johnson and Funké Aladejebi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

Joan Nicks and Jeannette Sloniowski, “Entertaining Niagara Falls, Ontario: Minstrel Shows, Theatres and Popular Pleasures,” in *Covering Niagara: Studies in Local Popular Culture*, ed. Joan Nicks and Barry Keith Grant (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2010), 285–310.

Cheryl Thompson, “‘Come One, Come All’: Blackface Minstrelsy as a Canadian Tradition and Early Form of Popular Culture,” in *Towards an African Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, Resistance*, ed. Charmaine A. Nelson (Captus Press Inc., 2019), 97–123.

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## Encyclopedia Articles

Paul Banfield, “[Ku Klux Klan](#),” Canadian Encyclopedia.

Afua Cooper, “[Richard Amos Ball](#),” Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

Natasha Henry-Dixon, “[1793 Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada](#),” Canadian Encyclopedia.

Natasha Henry-Dixon, “[Chloe Cooley](#),” Canadian Encyclopedia.

Natasha Henry-Dixon, “[Racial Segregation of Black People in Canada](#),” Canadian Encyclopedia.

Jason Silverman, “[Mary Ann Shadd Cary](#),” Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

Channon Oyeniran, “[Anti-Black Racism in Canada](#),” Canadian Encyclopedia.

Owen Thomas, “[Anderson Ruffin Abbott](#),” Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

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## Toronto-Based Walking Tours

“[The Black Grange Walking Lab](#)” by Camille Turner

“[Tracing Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s Footsteps in Mid-19th Century Black Toronto](#)” by Natasha Henry-Dixon

“[Brought in Bondage: Black Enslavement in Upper Canada](#)” by Natasha Henry-Dixon

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## Toronto-Based Walking Tours

Akua Benjamin Legacy Project: 50 Years of Black Activism (2016)

- “[Where is Marlene Green?](#)”
- “[Rosie, the Fearless Rebel](#)”
- “[Dudley Laws Speaks for Me](#)”
- “[Charley](#)”

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lauren DeAngelis Alvarez, “[Pre-Travel and Pre-Field Trip Reflection Questions](#),” Rustic Pathways.

# APPENDIX A: JIGSAW

NAME:

MY "HOME" GROUP
Expert Topic:
What I learned from my research:
What I'm going to share with my Jigsaw group:

MY JIGSAW GROUP
Topics covered in my Jigsaw group:
What I learned from my Jigsaw group:
Questions I still have:

# APPENDIX B: CHOICE BOARD

NAME:

	Theme: Blackface	Theme: Slavery	Theme: Resistance, Black Life, Resilience	Theme: KKK in Canada	Theme: Modern anti-Black Racism
Source Title:					
Primary Source? Secondary Source?					
Questions/Prompts?	<p>What is blackface minstrelsy?</p> <p>What are examples of stereotypes in the sources you examined?</p> <p>Why were the range of stereotypes, negative views, and sentiments of Black people in Canada and North America created and why do they persist? How have they served white interests? How did minstrelsy shape white Americans' views of Black people? How might this process deepen anti-black prejudices?</p> <p>How have blackface stereotypes been disrupted? Can they be disrupted?</p> <p>Why is studying blackface a useful way of discerning whites' and wider societies changing attitudes about Black people?</p>	<p>What was the system of racial chattel slavery?</p> <p>How were Black people perceived in order for them to be deemed and treated as property?</p> <p>What types of labour were the enslaved people forced to perform in their households?</p> <p>What do you think the relationships were like between the enslaved and their enslavers? Between the enslaved?</p> <p>How were the Black people who were enslaved source of wealth and a status symbol for their enslavers?</p> <p>How did enslavers improve the chances that their slaves would be sold in the advertisements they placed in newspapers?</p>	<p>Provide examples of Black refusal, of the ways that Black have refused and resisted the terms and parameters of oppression, racial discrimination, and anti-Black racism?</p>	<p>Why did white Canadians gravitate to the Ku Klux Klan?</p> <p>What are some similarities and differences between the KKK in Canada and the KKK in the United States?</p> <p>Fear is a strong element of the KKK. What and who did they fear? How did they instill fear and intimidate others?</p>	<p>What is anti-Blackness? How are some ways that anti-Blackness presents itself in Canada within white-dominate society? In white communities? In non-Black communities of colour?</p> <p>What are some unique challenges Black people face in society based on their shared historical experiences?</p> <p>What does white supremacy have to do with anti-Black racism?</p>
Annotation					