

We Were Here

A Spoken Word Lesson Resource on Black Canadian Legacy

The Poem

We were here
before the borders were confident,
before the history books knew what to call us.

We were here
when freedom meant land and a schoolhouse,
and dignity meant teaching your children
how to read the world that tried to erase them.

We built Africville;
not just houses,
but a way of surviving together.

We built Buxton;
not just a settlement,
but a promise that education
could be an act of resistance.

We rode trains that did not want us.
Sat in seats that were never designed for us.
Spoke English that people still questioned.

We were loyal without loyalty in return.
Invisible, yet essential.
Present, yet rarely named.

We were not waiting to be included.
We were already here;
building, teaching, praying, surviving,
inside a country that still struggles
to remember us.

Teacher Resource Guide

Lesson Purpose

This lesson introduces students to the longstanding presence and contributions of Black Canadians. It encourages historical awareness, critical literacy, and reflection on national identity.

Learning Goals

- Understand that Black history in Canada spans centuries.
- Analyze how spoken word communicates historical truth.
- Reflect on whose stories are remembered and whose are overlooked.

Before Reading (Activate Prior Knowledge)

1. When you think of Black history, which country comes to mind first? Why?
2. What do you already know about Black history in Canada?

During Reading

Read the poem aloud once without interruption.

On the second reading, ask students to:

- Underline lines that show strength.
- Circle lines that show invisibility.
- Star a line that feels powerful or important.

After Reading – Discussion Questions

1. What does the line 'before the borders were confident' mean?
2. Why might some communities be present in history but rarely acknowledged?
3. How does spoken word feel different from reading a textbook?
4. Why is it important for a country to know its full story?

Research Extension (Group Activity)

Assign each group one topic:

- Africville
- Buxton Settlement
- Black Loyalists

- Viola Desmond

- Lincoln Alexander

- Michaëlle Jean

Students may present their findings as a spoken word piece, short presentation, poster, or timeline.

Culminating Writing Activity

Students write their own poem titled: 'We Are Still Here.'

Encourage them to connect past contributions to present-day impact.