

Recognizing, Acknowledging, and Celebrating African Heritage Month

Each year, Nova Scotia observes February as African Heritage Month, honouring the rich and vibrant culture, heritage, legacy, and traditions of people of African descent, including African Nova Scotians, recognizing their knowledge systems, histories, and contributions.

We encourage educators to critically reflect as they intentionally plan to recognize this important month with young children. By meaningfully recognizing, acknowledging, and celebrating African heritage, educators nurture the development of identity, well-being, and personal and social responsibility. Cultivating an appreciation for diversity supports the holistic growth of children, helping them develop positive racial identities and a deep respect for all cultures.

Invitations and Provocations to amplify Black joy:

To support your programming this month and on an ongoing basis, below are a set of creative open-ended play-based learning opportunities to spark curiosity, invite exploration, and celebrate Black joy in early learning and children environments. These invitations can be adapted to align with various stages of development.

Music and Movement

For people of African descent, music is considered an anchor to their histories, legacies, and heritage. Music offers children an opportunity to engage in movement, offering many benefits to children’s overall development while enhancing physical literacy. Diversifying music playlists builds a sense of belonging and community within early learning and child care programs.

Invitation set up:

- **Reflect:** What are the songs and music currently played? How and when can you incorporate child-friendly music and rhythm that highlights drumming and/or instrumentals that originated by people of African descent such as Blues, Hip-hop, Jazz, Afro-beats?
- **Plan:** Gather available musical instruments and a speaker. Allow children to use the instruments as they listen to the beat and rhythm of the music introduced. For infants, move rhythmically with them as you listen together.
- **Observe:** How did the children engage? In what ways did the songs and music foster enjoyment of diversity?

Exploring Self-portraits

Art offers children the opportunity to self-express and has key benefits to various areas of development, such as motor skills, cognitive, language, and social and emotional. Inviting children to an open-ended self-portrait art experience offers an opportunity to build healthy racial literacy and deepen understanding and awareness of differences.

Invitation set up:

- **Reflect:** Plan how to discuss skin tones, hair textures, and other differences with children. Prepare open-ended questions such as:
 - Can you tell me about your picture? Tell me about the colors you chose.
 - What do you love about yourself, your hair, your skin?
 - Plan how to respond to unexpected questions or comments. It’s okay to say "I'm not sure, let's come back to that later", and revisit the question when you've done some research.
- **Plan:** Set up child-safe hand mirrors alongside paper, crayons/paint/markers that reflect various skin tones. Allow children to freely express themselves. You may want to ask them about their choices of subjects, colors, shapes, textures.
- **Observe:** Stay nearby to listen and watch as children reflect on themselves and engage with peers.

Books and Stories

Children’s books can be a great way to begin conversations with children while promoting a sense of community. Books offer opportunities for children to investigate ideas, complex concepts, and ethical issues that are relevant to their lives and their local communities.

Invitation set up:

- Reflect:** What books can be introduced that positively represent and communicate messages about Black joy, achievements, and success? What do you know about the authors and illustrators of the books you’ve selected to share with children?
- Plan:** Set up books in various areas of the early learning environment. Read stories alongside children and take the time to engage in conversation about your cultural and social identities with children (beyond superficial elements).
- Observe:** What did children share? How did they relate to the story? How can you extend this further in your daily programming?