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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help teachers incorporate African American history into the classroom curriculum. Designed to increase self-awareness and cultural sensitivity, the guide contains a variety of flexible lesson plans and activities for grades 3 through 12. The first section, "Teacher Background Information," presents introductory information on rites of passage and ways of celebrating community identity. The second section, "Rites of Passage," explores key concepts of rites of passage in southern African American communities, including birth, coming of age or baptism, marriage, and funerals. A section on "Community Celebrations" discusses the kinds of celebrations observed in southern black communities. Each of these sections presents student activity sheets. A final section is a bibliography divided into: (1) teacher resources (20 sources); (2) general African American history (36 sources); (3) African American culture (4 sources); and (4) children's books (32 sources). (SLD)

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# JUBILEE!

## African American Celebrations in the Southeast

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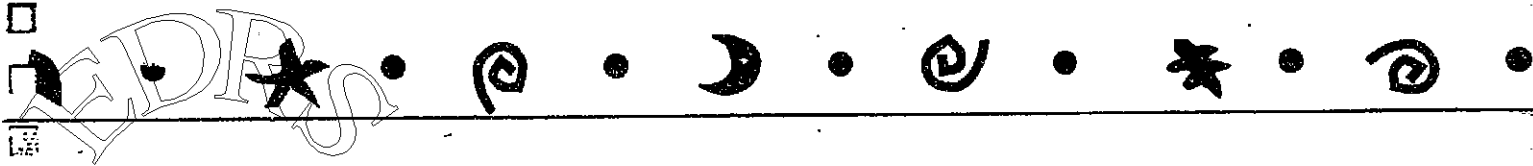
### An Educator's Guide

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**JUBILATION!**

**African American Celebrations in the Southeast**

*An Educator's Guide*



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Dear Educator,

Thank you for your interest in our Educator's Guide to "African American Celebrations". We at McKissick hope you will find the enclosed materials useful in incorporating African American history into the classroom curriculum. Designed to increase self-awareness and cultural sensitivity, "African American Celebrations" includes a variety of flexible lesson plans and activities for young people in grades 3-12. We encourage you to adapt these lessons to your special classroom environment.

This Educator's Guide is divided into four sections:

1. Teacher Background Information
2. Rites of Passage
3. Community Celebrations
4. Bibliography

While the enclosed materials are designed to be used independently of the exhibit "African American Celebrations," we encourage you to bring your students to the exhibit if possible.

You may photocopy any of these materials for classroom use. Use of part or all of this guide in written or published form outside the classroom must give credit to McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina.

*Thank you again for your interest in this wonderfully rich topic. If you have any questions or comments regarding the Educator's Guide, please contact us at:*

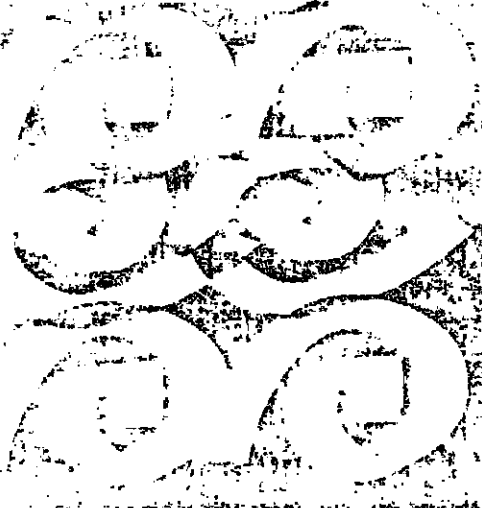
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# Teacher Background

Teacher Background @

Rites of passage are celebrations marking life changes. Most cultures have specific celebrations honoring the milestones of passage—birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death. In many southern African American communities, families continue their own traditional celebrations which link the past with the present and provide stability and continuity in troubled times. In these communities, rites of passage also link family life to the church. Children are introduced to their church community at a young age, and their spiritual identity is shaped by the rites of passage they experience throughout their lives. Celebrated within church communities, births, baptisms, weddings, and funerals identify and strengthen an individual's role within their spiritual community.

*The following is a more detailed explanation of specific rites of passage and their historical context.*

## Baptism

Celebrations marking the beginning of adulthood have long been a part of African traditions. Although the forced enslavement of Africans in the American colonies discouraged the retention of many African customs in America, traditional African coming of age ceremonies survived and were merged with the adopted Christian practice of baptism. In African American communities, baptism continues to signify spiritual maturity and adult membership in the church community.

In many communities, boys and girls about twelve years of age first undergo a conversion experience in which they renounce sin and accept the spirit of God. In the past, after receiving the spirit, baptism candidates were expected to search for the spirit in the "wilderness," in seclusion at home or outdoors. A "Seeking Mother," an adult woman from the church, guided candidates toward their spiritual vision. Candidates were dressed in traditional white gowns and led down to a river where the minister immersed them in the water. In many areas of the South this tradition continues, although most church communities now prefer baptism in the church sanctuary.

Baptism is a serious rite of passage. Immersion in the water signifies rebirth and the cleansing away of sin. Baptized individuals emerge from the water ready to assume the responsibilities of a fully acknowledged member of their church community.

## Weddings

African American wedding celebrations have often marked the continuity of family despite overwhelming obstacles. Slavery systems disregarded ties of marriage, tearing apart families whenever it was expedient. Marriage among enslaved African Americans was not recognized by law, yet the tradition of long-term commitments, viewed and referred to as marriages, continued.

Many African marrying traditions required individuals to find partners outside of their communities. In America, this meant going beyond the small plantation to find a husband or wife. Although owners reluctantly permitted cross-plantation marriages, this meant couples were separated most of the time.

Weddings for enslaved African Americans ranged from simple arrangements between a man and his bride's family, to elaborate celebrations bringing together the slaves and owners of two plantations. After Emancipation, well-established Christian practices brought the wedding ceremony into the church. Elaborate weddings became popular as both a statement of freedom and recognition of the importance of the occasion. Over time, weddings returned to a simpler tradition, often performed by a minister in the bride's home.

Since the civil rights movement, elements of African wedding rituals have re-emerged in contemporary African American weddings. In some ceremonies, a bride and groom assume African names, wear traditional African wedding clothes, and incorporate African rituals into the ceremony.

**Funerals**

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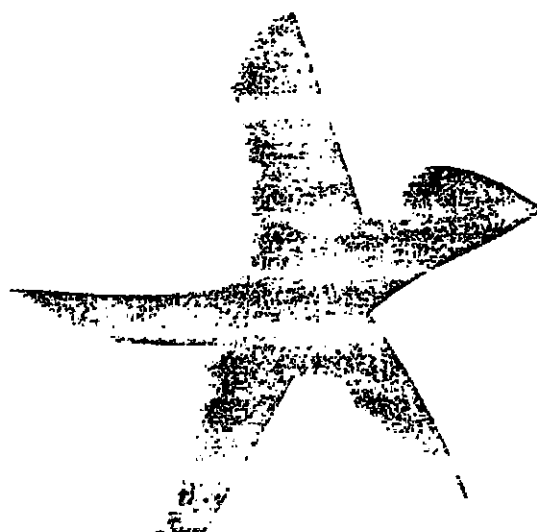
Like most African American rites of passage, rituals surrounding death blend Christian and African traditions. In death, the life cycle comes full circle and the spirit departs the earthly body. Religion and ritual combine to ensure the passage of the departed spirit and comfort the grieving family.

In slavery, Africans and African Americans maintained traditional ways of marking and mourning death. Drumming announced a death and called fellow enslaved Africans to the gravesite. Funerals often included singing, dancing, and praying. Early enslaved Africans believed death freed the soul from slavery and allowed it to "fly away" to Africa. This concept continued with American-born slaves, but it came to mean a return to the place where one had spent a lifetime.

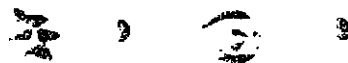
After Emancipation, burial societies were widespread. Also called benevolent aid societies, these sometimes secret organizations tended to the sick, buried the dead, and contributed to medical and funeral costs of members. When a member died, the society performed a special ceremony at the grave.

While funerals provide an opportunity to express grief, they also permit the family to tend to the spirit of the departed. In many southern African American communities, graves are decorated with offerings to the dead as a sign of respect. Sometimes the youngest child in the family is passed over the grave to release the spirit from its earthly bond.

In modern times the funeral parlor takes responsibility for preparing the body. Through the church ritual and gathering after the funeral, family and friends ease the pain of loss and celebrate the life of the departed one.







Community celebrations provide an opportunity to take pride in being a part of something special. These celebrations take place within the spiritual and secular communities and recognize historical achievements, religious dedication, community pride, and family ties. While rites of passage center on the individual, celebrations of community identity rejoice in the joining together of individuals to form communities and congregations.

The following is a more detailed explanation of community celebrations and their historical context.

## Camp Meetings

Church homecomings, also known as camp meetings, combine both religious and secular celebrations. These church-sponsored events invite communities to participate in spiritual renewal while enjoying family-oriented leisure activities. In the South, many African American communities anticipate camp meetings throughout the year, sometimes saving for months to be able to attend them.

Camp meetings center around both homecoming and religious revival. Members of the community who have moved away often return to renew friendships and reunite with relatives. Participants set up individual tents around a central worship tent, and spare time is spent socializing with new and old friends. Originally, camp meetings coincided with a period of rest from the constant demands of agricultural labor. In cotton growing areas, this came after "lay-by," the last hoeing of the crop. In tobacco growing regions, camp meetings were held after the harvest.

In South Carolina, Mount Carmel, Camp Baskerville, and Shady Grove are permanent meeting grounds for annual camp meetings. Small cabins have been built to replace the traditional tents, although the buildings are still called tents in recognition of tradition.

## School Homecomings

Throughout the years of slavery, education in reading and writing was often unobtainable, and in most states illegal, for African Americans living in the South. After Emancipation, free families wanted schools for their children. Deprived of education themselves, they recognized that it could provide a way out of poverty and a path toward equality. Support for schools has been a constant in African American communities ever since.

In the South after the Civil War, missionary societies and the Freedmen's Bureau established schools for African American children. Many early schools were founded by interracial reconstruction governments. When southern states institutionalized segregation in the late 1800s, schools were legally separated by race. Although "separate but equal" hindered many African Americans from receiving the same educational benefits as white students, it strengthened their commitment to their own schools. African American communities provided funds for building and maintaining schools, hiring teachers, and purchasing supplies. The effort and sacrifice put into the schools created not only pride in education, but pride in the schools themselves.

School homecomings provided an important forum for individual achievement and community respect. Entire communities cheered school sports heroes, participated in or watched parades, and listened to invocations and speeches highlighting educational achievements. With the integration of schools, many historically all-black public schools were abandoned or destroyed, leaving neighborhoods without a center for community activity. Graduates of many southern schools



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continue to organize class reunions, an extension of school homecomings, to keep alive the legacy of the teachers who inspired them and the schools that shaped them.

## Family Reunions

Family reunions celebrate the need to reconnect with a place and a history, even after many family members have moved away. Often held annually, family reunions in the South bring together extended family members from across the country to link with their roots and remind children of their family's past. Although common in both white and black communities, the tradition of family reunions has special significance within African American families.

From the early 1930s through the 1950s, many African Americans migrated from the South to northern cities in search of steady work, a more racially tolerant climate, and better educational opportunities. Although many chose to leave their communities and families, they kept alive the memory of family and place. Homecomings evolved into a tradition of family reunions, which continued in succeeding generations. Along with food and fun, these reunions are occasions to become reacquainted with family and friends and to introduce new family members to their heritage.

## Decoration Day

Decoration Day, now celebrated on Memorial Day, began as a tribute to the 180,000 African American Union soldiers who fought during the Civil War. Decoration Day originally served as a counterpart to the Confederate Memorial Day celebrated by white southerners. Black regiments fought valiantly in South Carolina and liberated slaves throughout the South. In towns like Beaufort, South Carolina, where a National Cemetery is located, African Americans return each year to celebrate the efforts of their forebears. Through parades, fireworks, and speeches, they honor all the African-American soldiers who fought and died in this nation's wars.

## Turnouts

Following the Civil War, African Americans, like their white counterparts, encouraged the proliferation of secret societies, also known as lodges or fraternal orders. In African American communities, these secret societies also supported credit unions and insurance programs, reinforcing economic cooperation and self-sufficiency within the community.

By the early 20th century, there were about twenty national African American secret societies including Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Daughters of Bethel, the Brown Fellowship Society, and Good Samaritans. Although some lodges have the same name as white societies, they are generally separate.

The tradition of turnouts—parades featuring the pomp and splendor of the lodge brotherhood—started during Reconstruction when freedmen celebrated numerous holidays relating to Emancipation. Turnouts were occasions for an entire African American community to celebrate itself with pride. Crossing over geographical boundaries and “taking over the town,” turnouts evolved into forums for political solidarity and featured speeches by community leaders.

While the political aspect of turnouts is no longer as significant, parades and ceremonies continue the tradition.

## Emancipation Day Commemorations

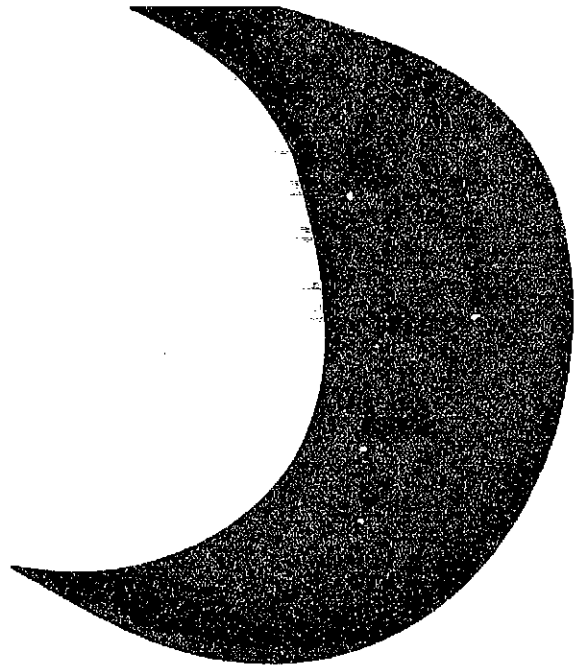
The Emancipation Proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, began the process of freeing enslaved African Americans throughout the country. Although African Americans were not legally freed until the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution was ratified in December of 1865, the day the Proclamation was signed marked the emergence of hope. As word of the Emancipation Proclamation spread throughout the South, African Americans celebrated with joy. Local celebrations of freedom highlighting both sacred church services and community-wide festivities became

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a tradition in African American communities. In most southern states, these observances occur on January 1. Some communities, especially those in Texas and Louisiana, celebrate on June 19, called "Juneteenth," as word of Emancipation did not reach them until June.

Even with the passage of the fourteenth amendment, which African Americans were continuously denied full participation as American citizens. Emancipation celebrations evolved into ways of expressing the determination to be full citizens. February observances of the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln led to the establishment of Negro History Week in the 1920s, which later evolved into Black History Month. This time was set aside for all Americans to study African American history and to appreciate the contributions African Americans have made in building this nation.

The civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s brought many African American leaders to prominence, none more influential than Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. From the time of his assassination in April of 1968, Dr. King's birth date has been commemorated by African Americans as the most significant observance of their right to be free and equal. Those who struggled to make that day a national holiday pursued a goal long sought by Emancipation celebrants: to have one day declared a national holiday to commemorate African American freedom. The creation of the federal holiday in 1983 made the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., a day for all Americans to celebrate peace and freedom.



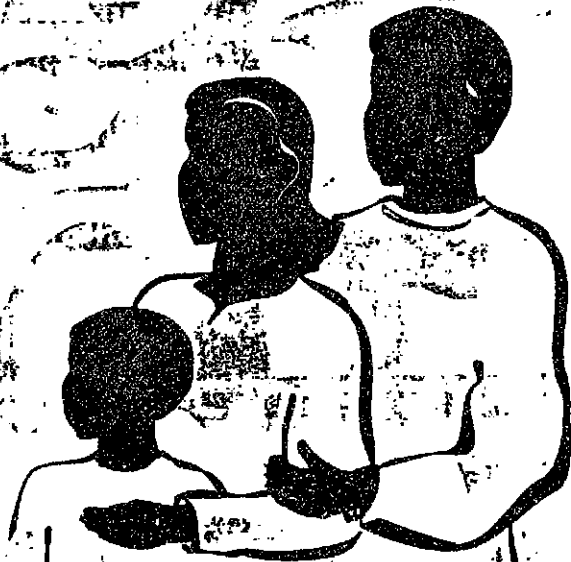


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# Rites of Passage

Rites of Passage



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**Rites of Passage***Introduction***Objective:**

Students will learn and understand key concepts of rites of passage in southern African American communities.

**Materials:**

Birthday party items (hat, noisemaker, wrapped "present", candles), supplied by teacher (optional)

Information Sheet, "What Are Rites of Passage?", 1 copy per student

Student Worksheet, "Vocabulary Builders", 1 copy per student

**Procedure:**

Introduce students to the concepts of rites of passage by discussing how their families celebrate birthdays (use optional birthday materials to illustrate).

Ask students what traditions and foods are part of birthday celebrations.

Discuss the concept of rites of passage with students. Ask students if they have any family traditions which recognize growth and change. (We have noticed many children are responsible for doing chores at a certain age. Use examples such as getting a driver's license or being able to stay up past a certain bedtime if you need to encourage dialogue.)

Discuss with students that African American communities in the South have special rites of passage, some of which can be traced to Africa.

Pass out the Information Sheet, "What Are Rites of Passage?" and instruct students to pay special attention to the underlined vocabulary words.

Review material on the Information Sheet, and answer any questions about rites of passage in southern African American communities. Did anything surprise them? Was anything familiar to them? Do they have similar celebrations in their families?

Pass out Student Worksheet, "Vocabulary Building," and provide students time to complete.

Wrap up lesson by reviewing answers to the Student Worksheet and discussing why traditions are important (because they link the past with the present, they remind us of where our families came from, and they make us part of a culture).

## What are the Rites of Passage?

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Most people around the world have celebrations called rites of passage. What are rites of passage? Rites of passage are special celebrations that mark growth and change in a person's life. Birth, coming of age (becoming an adult), marriage, and death are some common rites of passage. You have already experienced one rite of passage—you were born!

Coming of age means becoming an adult. Families have different ways of deciding when someone is an adult. People who are Jewish, for example, become adults when they turn thirteen and have a special religious ceremony called a bar mitzvah (for boys) or bat mitzvah (for girls).

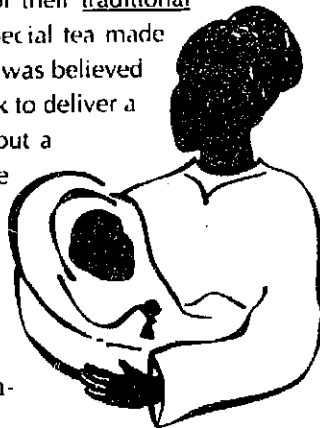
Marriage is a rite of passage celebrating two adults who decide to become a family and live together in one house. Marriage celebrations in America are called weddings. Even in America, weddings can be very different—some people like traditional weddings while other people like to try something new like getting married in a hot air balloon!

The final rite of passage in a person's life is death. Most people around the world have special ceremonies to celebrate and honor someone who has died. In America, these ceremonies are called funerals. Some ceremonies are very sad while others celebrate death as a freedom from the pain and struggle of life on earth.

In African American communities, families use special celebrations, or rites of passage, to mark the different stages in their lives. Many rites of passage are celebrated both in the family and in church. These celebrations are traditions passed down from generation to generation within communities.

### Birth

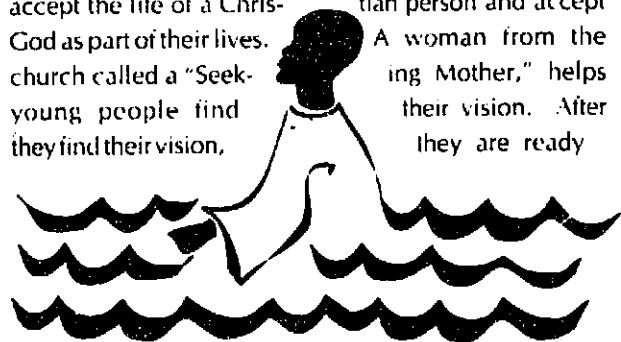
In southern African American communities, the midwife, also called a "grannie" was a very important person when babies were born. Midwives used medicines and special knowledge to help women deliver healthy babies. Some of their traditional medicines included a special tea made from a bird's nest which was believed to shorten the time it took to deliver a baby. Some midwives put a knife or scissors under the bed to "cut the pain" caused by the baby's birth. Today, midwives use different medicines, but still depend on traditional ways of bringing babies into the world.



### Coming of Age—Baptism

Rituals are special traditional ceremonies. Many cultures have rituals celebrating the day a young person becomes an adult. In African American communities, these rituals come from both African traditions and Christian traditions. Baptism is the most important coming of age ritual. After people from an African American community are baptized, they are members of the church and have adult responsibilities to their community.

The process of Baptism begins when children are small. They are taught to be good Christians and live a good life. When young people are twelve years old, they accept the life of a Christian person and accept God as part of their lives. A woman from the church called a "Seeking Mother," helps young people find their vision. After they find their vision, they are ready.

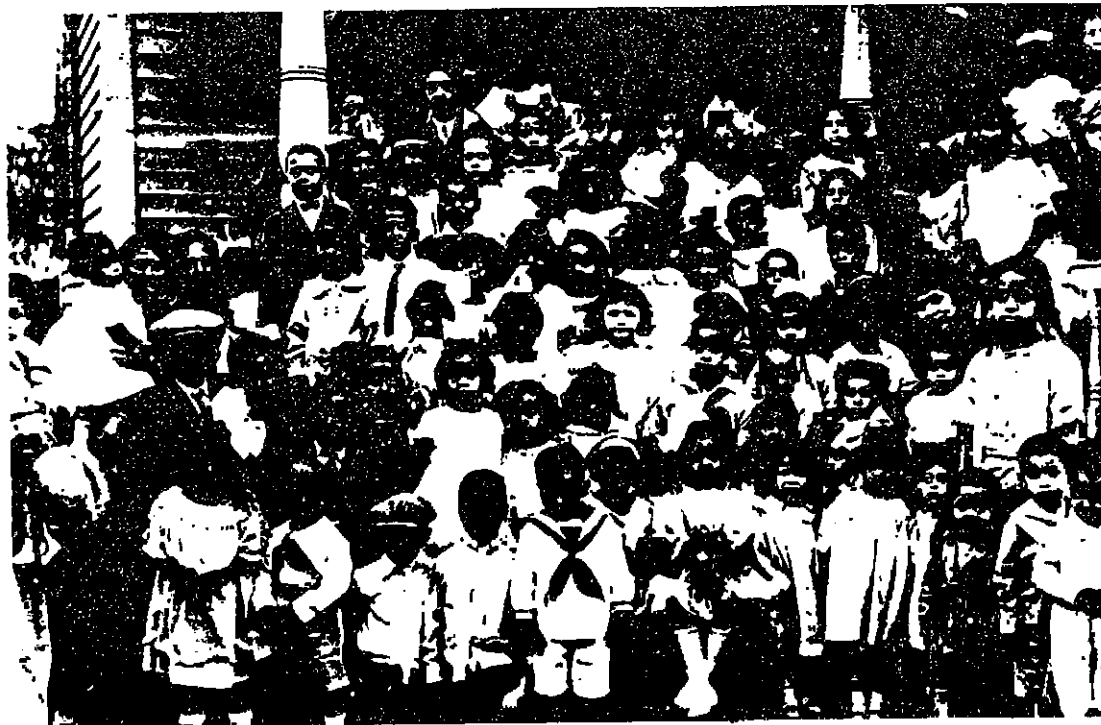


for baptism. In some areas of the South, the young people dress in white gowns and are led to a river where a minister soaks them in the water. When they come out of the water, their souls are clean, and they can begin their new lives as adult Christians.

## Marriage

A long time ago when African Americans were still enslaved, marriage and building families was difficult and sometimes impossible. Slave owners often sold African Americans to other plantations far away even if they were married and had families. Although being separated by the plantation owner was possible, many enslaved African Americans fell in love, married, and had families. Marriage ceremonies, called weddings, were different at each plantation. Some couples married quietly, while others had large parties attended by people from several plantations. Some modern African American weddings continue traditions in honor of the Africans brought to America. In some ceremonies, couples take African names, wear African clothing, and use African rituals in the wedding ceremony.

*Birthday party for Bernice Paul, 1924*



## Funerals

African American celebrations dealing with the last rite of passage are a combination of both African and Christian traditions. During the time of slavery, African Americans viewed death as a joy because the soul was free from slavery and could return to Africa. After the Civil War, African American communities formed clubs called burial societies. Burial societies had an important role in the community. They took care of the sick, buried the dead, and helped pay for the medical and funeral costs of members. When a member died, the society performed a special ceremony at the grave to honor him or her.



Some African American communities decorated graves with personal objects as a sign of respect. Sometimes a clock was left on the grave showing what time the person died. Another tradition was to pass the youngest child in the family over the grave to release the soul from the body. This tradition was a symbol of the family life cycle.



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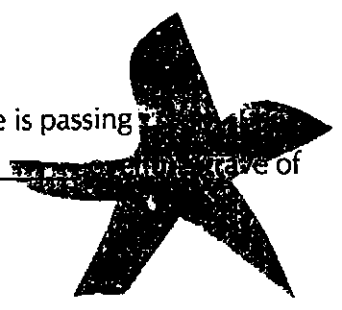
# Vocabulary Building

Student Worksheet

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After reading the Rites of Passage information sheet, use the information you learned to complete the sentences below.

1. Rites of passage are celebrations that mark \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the life of an individual.
2. Some common rites of passage include \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ are women who have special traditional knowledge about bringing babies into the world.
4. A special traditional ceremony is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The most important coming of age celebration in many African American communities is \_\_\_\_\_.
6. A woman called a \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes helps young people find their vision before baptism.
7. In America, a celebration for a couple who decide to share their lives together is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The last rite of passage is \_\_\_\_\_ and in America celebrations for this are called \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Societies were clubs formed by African Americans after the Civil War which helped families deal with many aspects of illness and death.
10. One African American tradition that symbolizes the continuing life cycle is passing \_\_\_\_\_ the grave of a family member.



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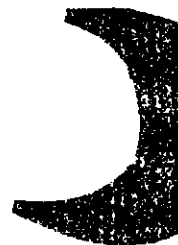
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## Vocabulary Building

Teacher Answer Key

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1. Rites of passage are celebrations that mark **growth** and **change** in the life of an individual.
2. Some common rites of passage include **birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.**
3. **Midwives** or "**grannies**" are women who have special traditional knowledge about bringing babies into the world.
4. A special traditional ceremony is called a **ritual.**
5. The most important coming of age celebration in many African American communities is **baptism.**
6. A woman called a **Seeking Mother** sometimes helps young people find their vision before baptism.
7. In America, a celebration for a couple who decide to share their lives together is called a **wedding.**
8. The last rite of passage is **death** and in America celebrations for this are called **funerals.**
9. **Burial Societies** were clubs formed by African Americans after the Civil War which helped families deal with many aspects of illness and death.
10. One African American tradition that symbolizes the continuing life cycle is passing **the youngest child** over the grave of a family member.



## Rites of Passage

*Exploring the Visual Record*

### Objective:

Students will use visual literacy skills and background information to analyze photographs of African American rites of passage.

### Materials:

Photographs of family celebrations, students provide

Student Worksheet, "Analyzing Photographs", 1 copy per student

Student Worksheet, "Exploring the Visual Record", 1 copy per student

### Procedures:

Have each student bring in one photograph of a family celebration (a rite of passage, if possible).

Introduce lesson by discussing how photographs can tell us a lot about past family celebrations—who was there, what activities took place, how they celebrate, what kinds of foods were prepared, and what special traditions families had.

Explain to students that looking at an old photograph is like being a detective; they need to look carefully for any clues about the people and activities in the photo.

Pass out the Student Worksheet, "Analyzing Photographs."

Have students exchange photographs with a partner and instruct them to use their detective skills and the worksheet to find out as much about their partner's celebration photo as they can. Remind them not to stop at the obvious (a Christmas tree = Christmas celebration). When students have finished, have them compare their notes with the owner of the photograph. How close were their analyses? Did the "photo detectives" notice things the owner did not?

Pass out the Student Worksheet, "Exploring the Visual Record" and provide students time to analyze photos of African American celebrations.

### Extension Activity:

Students can choose one photograph and imagine they are present during the celebration. Have students write a short story about what they think they would experience—tell them to include smells, sounds, feelings, and activities.

# Analyzing Photographs

Student Worksheet

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Look carefully at your photograph and examine it for any clues that tell you what kind of celebration is pictured.

1. Measure your photograph. How long is it? \_\_\_\_\_ How wide? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Does this photograph look old or new? How can you tell?

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3. How many people are in this photograph? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Look at the faces of people in the photo. Do they look happy? sad? serious?

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5. What activities are taking place in the photo?

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6. What kind of clothing are people wearing? Does that tell you anything about the celebration?

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7. Is there food present in the photograph? Who do you think made it?

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8. What kind of celebration do you think is pictured? Why?

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9. List any other information about your photograph:

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# Exploring the Visual Record

## Student Worksheet

Look carefully at the photographs below and examine them for any clues that tell you what kind of celebration is pictured.



### Clues:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Celebration:

\_\_\_\_\_



### Clues:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Celebration:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Rites of Passage

### Documenting Family Celebrations

**Objective:**

Students will interview one member of their family and document family celebrations.

**Materials:**

Information Sheet, "Documenting Family Celebrations", 1 copy per student  
 Information Sheet, "Tips for Doing Oral History Interviews", 1 copy per student  
 Student Worksheet, "Oral History Questions", 1 copy per student

**Procedure:**

Introduce lesson by asking students how historians learn about what happened in the past. Possible answers include looking at old papers, letters, diaries, and photographs.

Ask students if they know what a folklorist is. Explain that a folklorist is someone who researches and records how people live. They study celebrations and other aspects of life, (i.e. what traditions they have, how they work, what foods they eat, what kind of music they make or listen to). One way folklorists learn about how people live is to interview people about their lives and families. These interviews are especially important because some traditions are not practiced anymore, but need to be remembered.

Pass out the Information Sheets, "Documenting Family Celebrations" and "Tips for Doing Oral History Interviews."

Provide students with time to read the information and ask questions.

If necessary, review the "Tips for Doing Oral History Interviews." If time allows, choose a student from the class and demonstrate how an interview should progress.

Pass out the Student Worksheet, "Oral History Questions," and remind students that they can ask other questions and record information that is not included on the worksheet.

Wrap up the lesson by having a family history festival where students share the results of their interview with classmates.

**Documenting Family Celebrations**

Information Sheet

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Does your family celebrate rites of passage? What kinds of traditions does your family have for welcoming new family members? How does your family recognize that a child has become an adult? Does your family have special wedding traditions? Does your family have special rituals or ceremonies when a family member dies?

The questions above center around family celebrations and rites of passage. Sometimes we forget how special our families are and how wonderful our traditions are when celebrated with people we love. People specially trained to document or record family celebrations and traditions are called folklorists. They meet people and ask them questions about their family history, traditions, and celebrations. These interviews are called oral histories. Oral histories are stories about your family that are not written down—they are told by word of mouth. Your family may already have some funny or sad stories about you when you were a baby or about your grandparents when they were your age. Folklorists listen to oral histories and write them down so that no one will forget them.

You and your classmates are going to be junior folklorists. Your teacher will review with you how to ask questions and interview people in your family about your celebrations and rites of passage.

**A Lesson in History—Decoration Day**



## Tips for Doing Oral History Interviews

### Information Sheet

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1. Remember that a family is a group of people who live together and love each other. You can interview any adult in your family.
  2. If you want to interview more than one person, interview them one at a time. Sometimes adults interrupt each other when they talk, and you want to get the whole story from each person.
  3. Sit together in a comfortable place away from distractions like the television or radio.
  4. Really listen to what is being said—it is your family history!
  5. You may use a tape recorder to record your interview if you like. Folklorists like to use tape recorders because they can pay attention to the interview without writing all the time.
  6. Use family photographs to remind your family member of special times. You might even ask them to bring photographs of their own!
  7. Ask questions that don't have a "yes" or "no" answer. "Yes" or "no" questions don't give you much information. For example, ask your family member "What games did you play as a child?" instead of "Did you play games as a child?" See the difference?
  8. Remember to ask about rites of passage and family celebrations!
  9. If you are interviewing someone who is very old, remember that they may get tired easily. Take time for breaks if necessary.
  10. Have fun! Enjoy learning new things about your family!

# Oral History Questions

## Activity Sheet

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Remember, you can use any other questions in addition to the questions below. Also, you may use a tape recorder, if you have one, instead of writing down all the answers.

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1. When and where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What did your family do for fun? Do they still do it today?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What were your favorite stories as a child? Who read or told them to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Tell me about the family trips you took. How did you get there? What family trip do you remember best?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What holidays or festivals did your family celebrate? Which were most important? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

6. What kind of celebrations did your family have for the birth of new members? Where were these celebrations held? Who was there?

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7. How did your family celebrate young people becoming adults? When did young people in your family become adults?

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8. How did your family celebrate marriages? Where were weddings held? What special family traditions did you have?

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9. What special traditions did your family have for funerals?

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10. What kind of old traditions did your family keep when celebrating holidays? What kind of new traditions did they invent?

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11. Does your family have reunions? Who organizes them? What usually happens at reunions?

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12. How were illnesses treated in your family? What kinds of illness affected your family?

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13. What members of the family served in the military? How did this affect the lives of other people in the family?

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14. What big events occurred in the life of your family or community?

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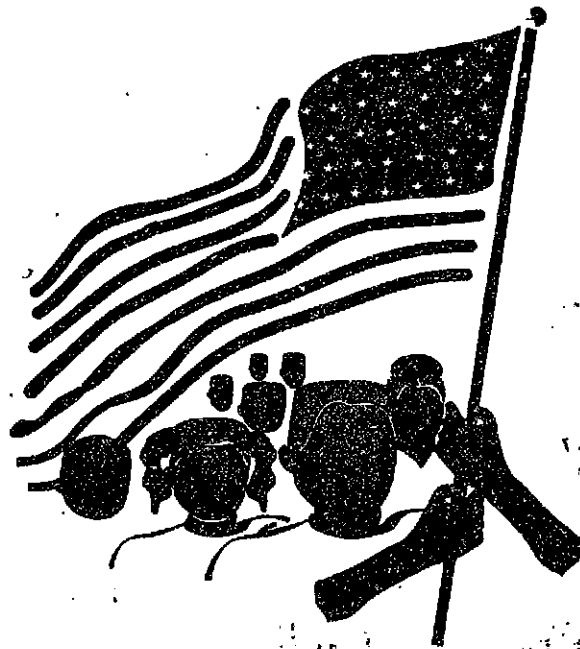
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# Community Celebrations

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# Community Celebrations

## Introduction

### Objective:

Students will learn and understand key concepts about celebrations in southern African American communities.

### Materials:

Information Sheet, "What Are Community Celebrations?", 1 copy per student

Student Worksheet, "Vocabulary Builders", 1 copy per student

Teacher Answer Key, "Vocabulary Builders"

### Procedure:

Introduce students to the lesson by discussing what a community is. Ask students what communities they belong to (such as church communities, schools, sports teams, neighborhoods).

Ask students if they participate in community celebrations. Use Fourth of July, block parties, family reunions, or parades as examples. Do they wear special clothing? Eat special foods?

Discuss community celebrations in African American communities. These communities celebrate their history and their future through parades, reunions, church services, and other activities.

Pass out the Information Sheet, "What Are Community Celebrations?" and instruct students to read the information and pay special attention to underlined vocabulary words.

Review answers to the worksheet and answer any questions about celebrations in southern African American communities. Do their communities host any of the celebrations? Were there any new celebrations they had never heard of prior to reading the information?

Pass out the Student Worksheets, "Vocabulary Building," and provide students time to complete.

Wrap up the lesson by discussing the answers and why community celebrations are important (because they make us feel part of a community and give us a chance to enjoy our heritage and culture).

# What are Community Celebrations?

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A community is a group of people who have something in common, such as where they live, work, or go to church. Your class is one example of a small community, and so is the neighborhood where you live.

Many communities have special celebrations such as parades, parties, and ceremonies where people come together and celebrate. African American communities honor their history through several different celebrations. These include camp meetings, school homecomings, family reunions, and special commemorations. Some celebrations focus on the church while others focus on the pride of black schools or the role of African American soldiers in war. All of these celebrations make people feel proud to belong to their community and proud of being an African American.

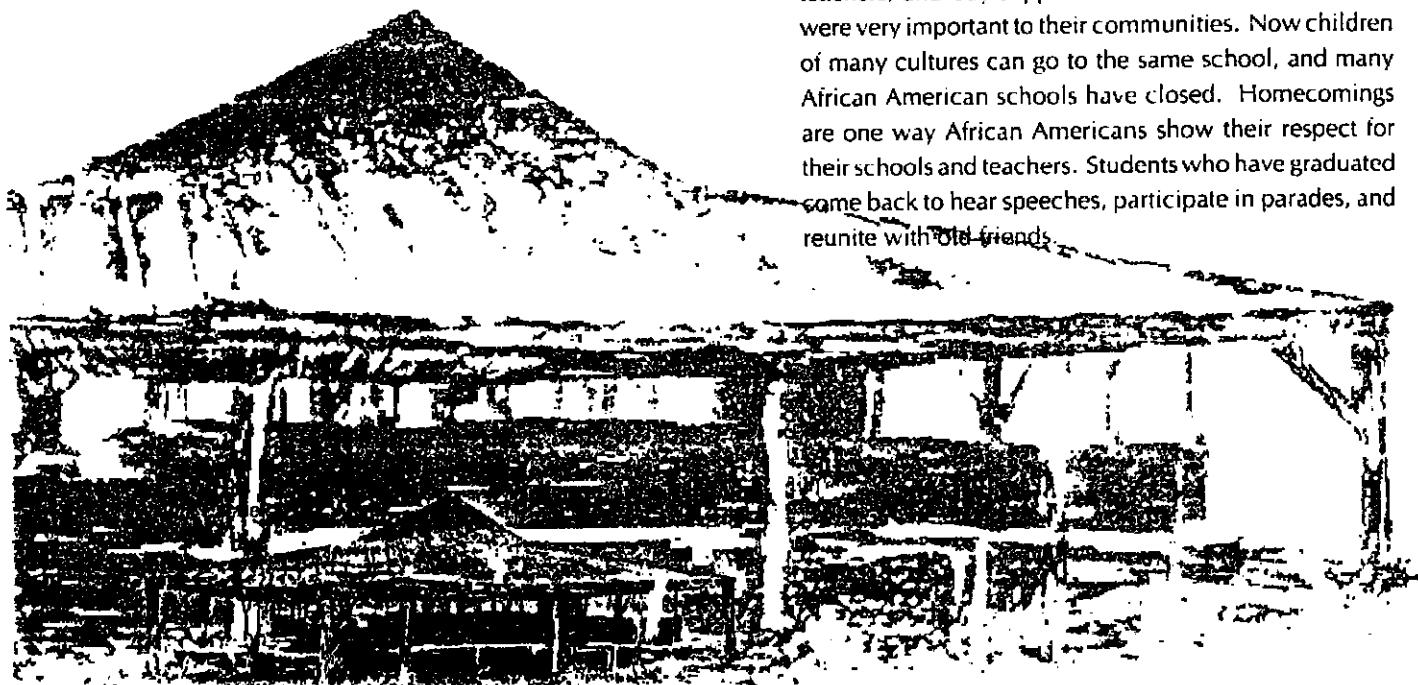
## Camp Meetings

Camp meetings are celebrations of community and religion at which many people come together to enjoy church events while reuniting with family and friends who have moved away, but who still come home for special celebrations. They are called camp meetings because in the past, the church held special programs in a big tent. Families stayed in smaller tents around the big tent. Camp meetings used to occur after the fall harvest of crops, especially tobacco. Many communities have built cabins to replace the tents. Camp Baskervill and Mount Carmel are two famous meeting areas in South Carolina. Today, families still use time at the camp meetings to relax from work and have fun.

## Homecomings

Many schools in America have special homecoming celebrations at which former students return to their school to celebrate their education. In African American communities, these homecomings are especially important because African Americans had to struggle for equal education.

During the days of slavery, most African Americans were not allowed to learn how to read and write. After the Civil War, free African American families wanted schools for their children. Because black children and white children were not allowed to go to school together, African American communities had to provide many of their own schools. They paid to build the schools, hire teachers, and buy supplies. African American schools were very important to their communities. Now children of many cultures can go to the same school, and many African American schools have closed. Homecomings are one way African Americans show their respect for their schools and teachers. Students who have graduated come back to hear speeches, participate in parades, and reunite with old friends.







Homecoming Queen

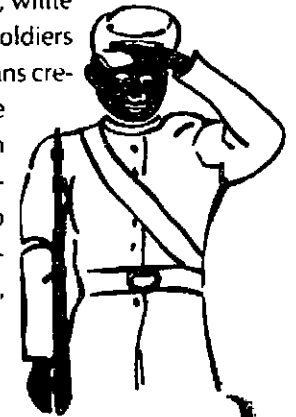


**Family Reunions**

Family reunions celebrate the importance of families, even after many members move away. In the South, some families have reunions every year, and some have more than one hundred people! Although family reunions are common in both black and white communities, the tradition is especially important to African Americans. As people from these communities move away, family reunions become an important way of keeping family traditions, remembering family history, and celebrating all the best things about being part of a family.

**Decoration Day**

Decoration Day is celebrated in the South to remember all the African American soldiers who fought in wars around the world. In the past, white southerners remembered only white soldiers on Memorial Day, so African Americans created their own holiday. In towns like Beaufort, South Carolina, African Americans return each year to celebrate the efforts of black soldiers who helped fight for freedom. They celebrate these soldiers through parades, fireworks, and speeches.



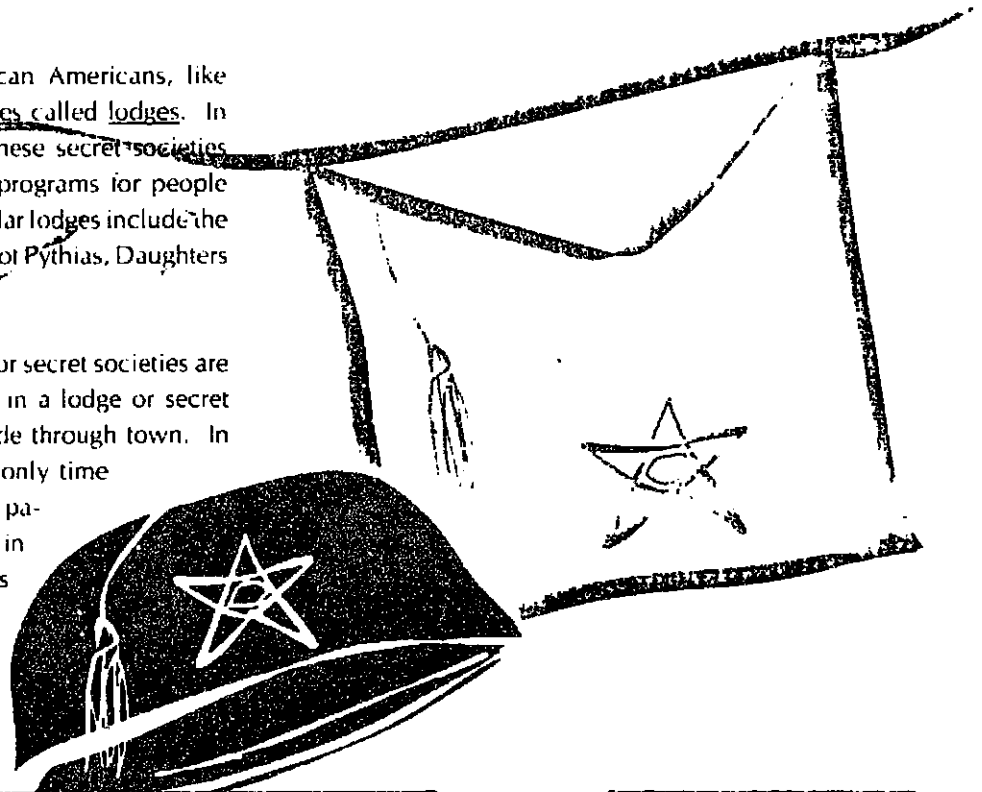
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## Turnouts

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After the Civil War, African Americans, like many whites, joined secret societies called lodges. In African American communities, these secret societies helped run banks and insurance programs for people within the community. Some popular lodges include the Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Daughters of Bethel, and Good Samaritans.

Community celebrations for secret societies are called turnouts because everyone in a lodge or secret society would "turnout" and parade through town. In many cases, the turnout was the only time African Americans were allowed to parade in white parts of town. People in the African American communities celebrated during the parade with speeches and special ceremonies honoring the secret societies.



Lodge men



## Emancipation Day

On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which began the long process of freeing enslaved African Americans. As word of the Emancipation Proclamation spread across the country, African Americans celebrated the new hope of freedom with Emancipation Day celebrations. These celebrations became a tradition in African American communities after slavery was abolished (ended), and communities held special church services and festivals every year on January 1. In some states like Texas and Louisiana, word of the Emancipation Proclamation did not reach slaves until June. In these areas, Emancipation Day is celebrated on June 19th and the holiday is called "Juneteenth."

Over time, Emancipation Day celebrations became known as Negro History Week which we celebrate now as Black History Month. This time is set aside for all Americans to rejoice in the contributions African Americans have made to our country.



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**Vocabulary Building***Student Worksheet*

After reading the Community Celebrations information sheet, use the information you learned to complete the crossword puzzle below.

**Across**

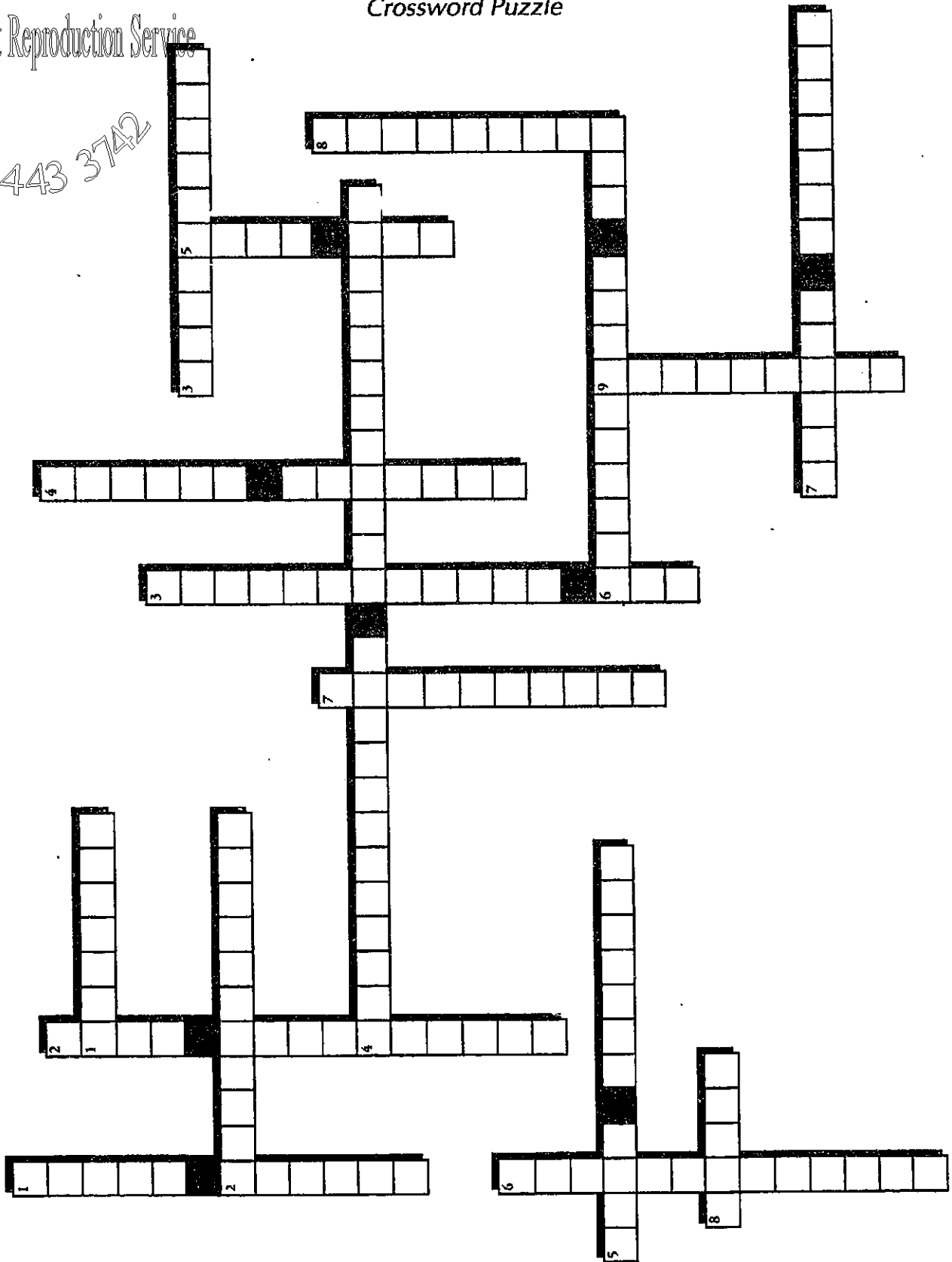
1. To end something completely (as in to end slavery).
2. An event or tradition which recognizes some thing or someone important.
3. A celebration in Texas and Louisiana that honors the beginning of freedom for African Americans.
4. The document issued by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863 which began the process of freeing enslaved African Americans. *2 words*
5. A religious and community celebration held at special camp sites. *2 words*
6. Celebration honoring African Americans who fought in American wars. *2 words*
7. Families come together to share their history and celebrate their achievements. *2 words*
8. An organized club that serves the community; also called a secret society.

**Down**

1. One of two special camp sites in South Carolina where members of African American communities celebrate and worship. *2 words*
2. The other traditional site in South Carolina where members of African American communities celebrate and worship. *2 words*
3. A celebration which remembers the beginning of freedom for enslaved African Americans in the southeast (except Texas and Louisiana). *2 words*
4. An organized club that serves the community; also called a lodge. *2 words*
5. Parades and speeches by African American lodges and fraternities to celebrate their contributions to the community.
6. A celebration which honors a special person or time. *2 words*
7. Returning to a hometown or school.
8. A group of people who live or work together and share culture.
9. Knowledge of how to do or make something that is passed down from generation to generation.

# Vocabulary Building

## Crossword Puzzle



## Vocabulary Building

Teacher Answer Key

1 MOUNT  
2 CARMEL  
3 EMBROIDERY  
4 CARMEL  
5 JUBILEE  
6 COMMUNITY  
7 FAMILY REUNION  
8 LODGE  
9 CAMP MEETING  
10 ABOLISH  
11 AMPS  
12 ELERATION  
13 SOCIETY  
14 SECRET  
15 PROCLAMATION  
16 EMANCIPATION  
17 HONORING  
18 DECORATION  
19 ADDITION  
20 COMMUNITY MEETING  
21 CAMP MEETING  
22 LODGE  
23 ABOLISH  
24 AMPS  
25 ELERATION  
26 SOCIETY  
27 SECRET  
28 PROCLAMATION  
29 EMANCIPATION  
30 HONORING  
31 DECORATION  
32 ADDITION  
33 COMMUNITY REUNION  
34 COMMUNITY MEETING  
35 CAMP MEETING  
36 LODGE

**Objective:** Students will hear the story of Vennie Deas-Moore's community celebrations and complete an exercise sheet that covers what they learned from the story and what they know about their own community celebrations.

**Materials:** Story, "I've Got Something to Celebrate!"

Student Worksheets, "I've Got Something to Celebrate!", 1 copy per student

**Procedure:** Introduce lesson by asking students what they would include if they were to write a story about their community. Which celebrations would they include?

Introduce students to the story, "I've Got Something to Celebrate!", by explaining that Vennie Deas-Moore grew up in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1950s. She lived there until she was an adult, then traveled around the country. As she traveled, she realized how special her Charleston neighborhood was and why it is important for her to remember her community celebrations and traditions.

Read the story, "I've Got Something to Celebrate!" aloud to students, making sure to show them the map and photographs.

After reading the story, pass out the Student Worksheets, "I've Got Something to Celebrate!" and provide students with time to answer the questions.

Wrap up the lesson by discussing the answers to the worksheet as well as what the students learned about life in a southern African American community in the 1950s.

## "I've Got Something To Celebrate"

by Vennie Deas-Moore

I gave little thought to my childhood until recently. My name is Vennie Deas-Moore and I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1950s. The black community was *segregated* then. Segregation means to separate people into groups. In Charleston and other cities, black people were separated from whites because of their skin color. Black communities and white communities each had their own grocery stores, banks, schools, and churches.

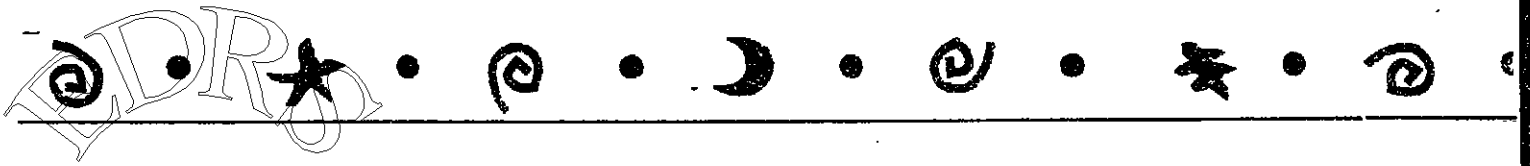
As a young girl living on Sumter Street, my world was rather protected. I lived in a segregated black community where we had our own special celebrations and traditions. I would like to share with you the rich celebrations that were part of my culture and community.

My family lived in downtown Charleston. Our neighborhood was actually part of a larger black community in Charleston. We had the Emancipation Day Parade on January first, a Fourth of July picnic at the Battery, and the big Turn-out for the Masons and Eastern Star Society.

Map of Charleston







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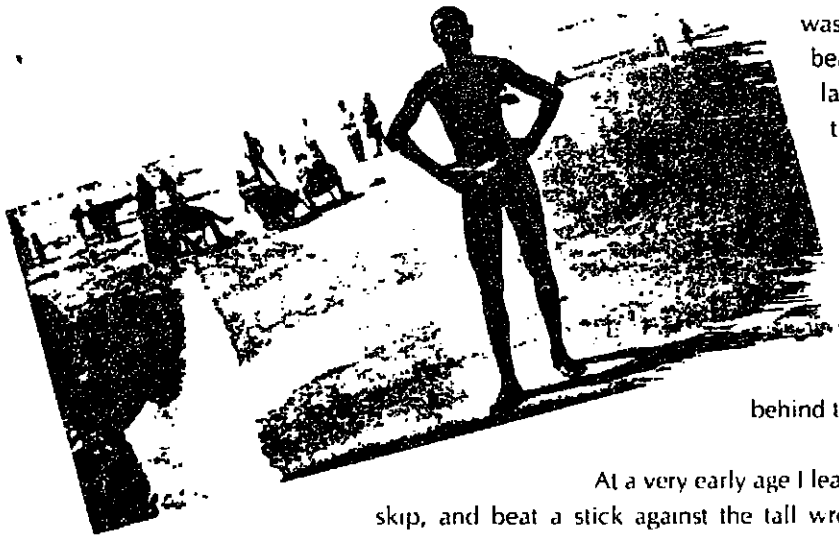
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I always know when a big occasion was about to happen. My mother would be up all night cooking, the aroma of turkey and stuffing filling the house throughout the night. The night before Thanksgiving she would stay up all night preparing Thanksgiving dinner, and right after dinner she would begin making her fruit cakes for the Christmas holidays. After Christmas, as my sister and I watched the New Years Parade, my mother would be steaming up the kitchen with Hopping John (blackeyed peas and rice) and greens to bring us good luck for the New Year.

There were times when I was part of those big events. A week before Easter, my mother would try to pull my new pastel organdy dress, basted with straight pins, over my head. She was always careful not to stick me, but it never failed that a pin or two would sneak through the fabric and scratch my skin. The day before Easter, my hair would get a hard press with an iron; the hot curler iron would drop my hair into Shirley Temple curls.

Our church, Morris Street Baptist Church, was located some fifteen blocks from my house. For my family, our entire life revolved around our church. My mother sent me there to Vacation Bible School for two weeks during the summer. Mama seemed to know a lot of the people who attended that church; some of the ladies belonged to her society, and the men belonged to the Masons with my father.

Photo of Martin beach



I remember the majestic church sanctuary so vividly. It was huge inside, with white cement walls. It had a white horseshoe shaped balcony circling almost the entire inside of the church. The rail on the balcony led to two staircases and was trimmed in gold. Each light bulb in the beautiful chandelier was softened by a fancy lamp shade which reminded me of the wafer thin bread served on Communion Sunday. Although I could never forget the magnificent stained glass windows and the huge organ, the most attractive feature to me was a trap door in the roof. This door was located right outside the door to the Bible Study room. As a young child, I always felt that young Jesus lived behind that door.

At a very early age I learned the route to church and would walk, skip, and beat a stick against the tall wrought iron fences which surrounded the graveyards, schools and churches along the way. I was told that many of the fences in the city were shaped as spears because they were made long ago by a free African American blacksmith named Denmark Vesey. It was told that Vesey made those wrought iron spears as weapons.

At my church, I attended Girl Scout meetings in the basement on Wednesday evenings at 5:00. Sunday meant Sunday School, Morning Service, Bible Training Union and occasionally evening services as well. As I sat at my family's pew, I sometimes wondered how it would be when I grew up. How would it be not to spend every Sunday in Morris Street Baptist Church? I couldn't help but wonder...

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Worshippers at church convention



For many black families the church was the center of life and the centerpiece of the community. The entire year's calendar was filled with missionary meetings, church anniversaries, church teas, choir anniversaries, usher board teas, and Sunday School events. One of my best memories is of the church's Sunday School excursion to Huntington Beach. Going to the beach, we had to start out before day break to meet the buses lined up in front of the church. Traveling "Ocean Highway" North 17 would take some three or four hours depending on the condition of the buses. Along the 150 mile route we passed many resort areas and beaches, but because of segregation, we were not allowed on those beaches. There were "colored" beaches and "white" beaches, and the only black people allowed on a white beach were the maids.

Along with the churches, our segregated schools were another very important part of our community. My grade school and high school were only a block from my house. During those days we had a great deal of school pride. After school I often sat on the second story porch of my house watching the social club members as they strolled down the street with their letter sweaters. In grade school we had the annual May Day program and the annual operetta. Being a shy child, I was usually part of the audience, but I was chosen to braid the May Pole in 2nd and 4th grades. My mother was delighted because it gave her another opportunity to make one of those organdy pastel dresses with the crinoline slips. If I was not extremely careful as I sat down, that slip would spring up and expose my underwear!

Our neighborhood had several celebrations throughout the year and I enjoyed them all. During Christmas the police even blocked off our street so we could all try out our new roller skates. I was so proud of being able to jump the man-hole backwards on my skates. When I was in high school, a nearby street was barricaded one Saturday night each summer so we could dance in the street. I never did understand the occasion, but we had a great time dancing to the Temptations, the Supremes, and the Four Tops. The songs would fill the humid air until about midnight.

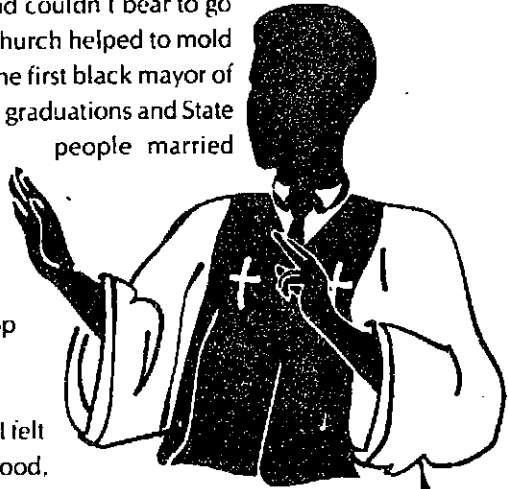


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My family rarely traveled; it wasn't that we couldn't afford it, but I guess we didn't feel the need. I do remember occasions when we traveled to Atlantic Beach on Labor Day and Beaufort Beach on Decoration Day. We also traveled for family funerals. In our community, a funeral was something to behold. You would be lucky to park within four or five blocks of the church. After the funeral, the body was driven to the old family cemetery. I can remember the funeral of my parent's distant relative, Cousin Jesse. The funeral procession had to drive about 40 miles to Georgetown County. At least 25 cars were in the procession. Being distant relatives, we were nearer the end of the line. Walking through the thickets to reach the rural graveyard, my little silk stockings and patent leather pumps were scratched by the burrs and spattered with red mud. My socks were also covered with hitchhikers, those sticky plant seeds, and it took the entire trip back to pull them out.

On February 20, 1964 an awful thing happened in my community. My church was burned. I had heard the news while walking to my Girl Scout meeting at the church. I pressed my face against the tall wrought iron fence of Immaculate Conception School with my fingers clasped around the tall black spear shaped rails. I can't remember why I didn't walk any closer to my burning church—maybe I was afraid of standing alone and couldn't bear to go any closer. All I remember is the hurt of seeing my church burn. That old church helped to mold Harvey Gantt, the first black student to enter Clemson University and later the first black mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina...it served as the principle assembly hall for school graduations and State Baptist Conventions...many children were taught religion there, many people married in its sanctuary and still many more had their final funeral services underneath the beautiful chandelier. My church helped to liberate nurses during the Charleston County Nurses strike, it provided a platform for Martin Luther King to speak and it nurtured me. No one ever knew for sure how the fire started, but it was rumored that other people burned my church down to stop our celebrations and activities.



Thinking back to that attic door, I wondered where Jesus would go. I felt at that moment that I was his safest haven, along with my memories of childhood, the times spent celebrating so many things with my family, and growing up in my secure black neighborhood. I eventually left Charleston and traveled to many places, meeting many different people. My roots in Charleston, however, always stay with me. Looking back on how rich my family was in tradition, love and heritage, I realize that I have something very special to celebrate!

## "I've Got Something to Celebrate!"

### Student Worksheet

Use the information from Vennie's story to answer the following questions.

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1. What is segregation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. How would you feel if you were separated from other people because of your skin color?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. List three celebrations Vennie participated in while she lived in Charleston:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. What kind of community celebrations does your community have?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What special food did Vennie's mother make on New Year's Day?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What special foods does your family eat during holidays?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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7. What clubs or social groups do your family members belong to?

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8. What school celebration did Vennie participate in? What did her mother make her for the celebration?

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9. What terrible event happened in Vennie's life?

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10. What did Vennie mean when she wrote "I realize that I have something very special to celebrate!"?

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**Objective:**

Students will record celebrations in their communities and create a class scrapbook of celebrations.

**Materials:**

Scrapbook example, provided by teacher

Student Worksheet, "Creating a Community Scrapbook", 2-3 sheets per student

Crayons, colored pencils, markers or other art supplies, provided by teacher

Three-hole punch, provided by teacher

Three pieces of yarn about six inches long each, provided by teacher

**Procedure:**

Introduce lesson by showing students the sample scrapbook and/or discussing what a scrapbook is.

Discuss with students that although many people keep scrapbooks, they are a special way to record celebrations and events in many southern African America communities.

Give students instructions for completing their scrapbook sheets. They have room to draw a picture of a community celebration and describe why the celebration is important.

Pass out art supplies and Student Worksheets, and give students time to complete their drawings.

When drawings are complete, punch holes in them, thread yarn through the holes and tie the pages together. Design a cover page and have all the students sign it.

Wrap up the lesson by giving students time to review their work as a class room community. What did they learn about their communities?

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**Name:**

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**My community celebration:**

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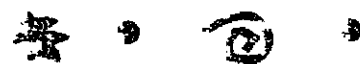
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**Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Blanton after the Baptism, Easter Monday, 1911.** From the Penn Center Collection. Permission granted by Penn Center, Inc., St. Helena Island, South Carolina.

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**Benedict College homecoming queen, Columbia, South Carolina ca. 1940s.** Courtesy of Benedict College.

**Members of the Prince Hall Lodge, Columbia, South Carolina, date unknown.** Courtesy of Anna Mae Dickson.

**Vennie Deas-Moore, aged seven or eight, 1956.** Courtesy of personal collection of Vennie Deas-Moore.

**Bathers at Atlantic Beach, South Carolina, 1967.** Courtesy of personal collection of Vennie Deas-Moore.

**New Covenant Association meeting at the Redmond Creek Baptist Church, Galax, Virginia, 1978.** Photographer: Gerri Johnson. Blue Ridge Parkway Project, American Folklife Center Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



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