

2019
Meet THESE African Americans

This lesson can be used to honor *any* local or national African Americans that your students know and admire. It's not meant to be limited to career success. A letter can be written to a person of noble character in your local community just as well.

This lesson is also not limited to African-Americans or the STEM professions. It can be used to focus on any profession or any other people group.

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr. though, I've prepared the lesson to focus on African-American men and women.

Now for the lesson!

1. Tell the students the storyline: "You're going to write a letter to an African-American working in a profession that you admire."
2. Explain to them that asking questions is an integral part of letter writing. It expresses interest in the other person and also elicits a response letter for continued dialogue. Have the students think of questions they can ask the person in their letter.
3. Show the five sections:
 - a. Greeting and introduction.
 - b. Tell your own interests.
 - c. Tell what you know about the person you're writing to.
 - d. Ask questions.
 - e. Conclusion

Now to write!

Guide the students through the following steps so their letter is organized and complete. They are free to write these ideas in their own words. There are sample sentences in italics.

4. Begin by writing the date on the first line on the right side of the page.
5. Skip a line.
6. Write the greeting on the 3rd line, left side (Dear Capital Letters and a comma).
Dear Zena Howard,
7. Skip a line.
8. Write the introductory paragraph on the next line, left side. In your own words write a greeting and introduce yourself.
Hello! My name is _____. I'm in _____ Grade.
9. Write about your own interests.
I love gymnastics, drawing and math. I like to draw animals best. Right now, I'm learning multiplication in Math. It's my favorite subject!

10. Write what you know about the person you're writing to.
I know that you helped design the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC.
11. Ask questions. Sample questions could be:
What was your favorite subject in school? What do you like to do when you're not working? Do you have a favorite author? Who do you admire?
12. Write a conclusion that is positive.
"I admire the work that you do. OR Thank you for the work that you do. I would love to meet you one day!"
13. Write the salutation under the body of the letter. *Respectfully, Kindly, Sincerely...*
14. Write your name UNDER the salutation.
15. If possible, photo copy each child's letter before sending it so they can have their own copy.
16. Complete an envelope. Stick a stamp and send it away!

Below are names and addresses of people you can introduce to your students for this lesson. If you use these names, please note the following:

- I don't know that Katherine Johnson can receive mail through NASA, but that address was our best attempt.
- I believe Zena Howard will receive letters at the address below.
- I was only able to obtain an email address for Tiera and Myron Fletcher. They posted the following email on their Facebook page.
- Shaquem Griffin had a Facebook page and Twitter account so sending a letter directly to the Seattle Seahawks organization seems best.

NASA Headquarters
c/o Katherine Johnson
300 E. Street SW, Suite 5R30
Washington, DC 20546

Zena Howard
Legacy Tower
411 W Chapel Hill Street, Suite 200
Durham, North Carolina 27701

Rocketwiththefletchers@gmail.com

Seattle Seahawks
C/O Shaquem Griffin
12 Seahawks Way
Renton, WA 98056

NOTE: The information below was gathered to serve as a resource for you and your students. It can be printed out for older students to read and refer to. For younger students, I suggest reading, simplifying and discussing key facts that they can understand and in turn use in their writing.

KATHERINE JOHNSON

Source of information: <https://www.nasa.gov/content/katherine-johnson-biography>

DATE OF BIRTH August 26, 1918

HOMETOWN: White Sulphur Springs, WV

EDUCATION: B.S., Mathematics and French, West Virginia State College, 1937

EMPLOYMENT: She was hired by NACA in 1953 and retired from NASA in 1986.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS: Katherine completed calculations of orbital mechanics as a NASA employee that were critical to the success of the first and subsequent U.S. manned spaceflights. During her career, she earned a reputation for mastering complex manual calculations and helped the space agency pioneer the use of computers to perform the tasks.

AWARDS: President Barack Obama awarded Johnson the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The movie Hidden Figures was made to show her story.

ZENA HOWARD

Source of information: <https://perkinswill.com/people/zena-howard>

Zena is an award-winning architect, strategist, mentor and team builder, she is known for her success leading visionary, complex, and culturally-significant projects including the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, several libraries for Durham County in Durham, NC and the New Brooklyn Village development initiative in Charlotte, NC. Zena is an advocate for diversity within the architecture profession. She is a founding member of Perkins+Will's Diversity + Inclusion Council, an associate professor of architecture at North Carolina State University College of Design, and is a member of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. public service sorority.

MYRON and TIERA FLETCHER

Source of information: <https://medium.com/thrive-global/this-african-american-couple-is-working-on-the-first-rocket-ship-to-go-to-mars-3dbc53d0c31>

Myron and Tiera Fletcher are working on the biggest challenge of their engineering careers—designing the first rocket-ship to go to Mars.

Tiera holds a degree in Aeronautics and Astronautics from MIT.

Additionally, Myron holds a double degree in Aerospace Engineering and Physics from Tuskegee University as well as a Masters in Engineering Management from Duke University. The Fletchers have already worked at Boeing and NASA.

The Fletchers are passionate about impacting the next generation of STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics) enthusiasts!

Currently, the Fletchers are working on their biggest challenge yet as some of the engineers behind the Space Launch System (SLS)-the first rocket ship that will go to Mars.

SHAQUEM GRIFFIN

Source of information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaquem_Griffin

DATE of BIRTH: July 20, 1995, less than 2 minutes after his twin brother Shaquill

LEFT HAND: Shaquem's left hand didn't grown properly. He had to have it amputated at the age of 4. :

SPORTS: He played track, baseball and football alongside his brother.

COLLEGE: He played football at University of Central Florida with his brother.

CAREER: In April 2018, Shaquem was picked to play professional football for the Seattle Seahawks. He was reunited with his brother. He is the first one handed player to be drafted into the NFL