



presents

Opal Lee: Grandmother of Juneteenth

featuring

Opal Lee and Bob Ray Sanders

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Introduction

Dear Teachers,

We are happy to present a virtual program which was videotaped on the stage of Bass Performance Hall in May 2022. Local journalist legend, Bob Ray Sanders, sits down and interviews Ms. Opal Lee to tell us about her life and journey in making Juneteenth a national holiday.

Ms. Opal is an IM Terrel High School graduate and is a Fort Worth fixture who has done many things in her life; a FWISD classroom teacher, the founder of Opal's Farm and Food Bank and along with Leonora Rolla is a founding member of the Tarrant County Black Historical and Genealogical Society. Among these grand community successes, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 for her crowning achievement of her passion for making Juneteenth a federal holiday. We hope you will learn something about this incredible inspirational woman in this up-close interview with the "Grandmother of Juneteenth."

"I have to tell you that none of us are free until we are all free."

— Opal Lee

Children's Education Program
Performing Arts Fort Worth



Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

There are many TEKS that correspond with *Opal Lee: The Grandmother of Juneteenth*. Below are just a few that we felt best correlated with the production.

Social Studies:

The student understands political, economic, and social changes that occurred in the United States during the 19th century. The student understands important issues, events, and individuals in the United States during the 20th and 21st centuries.

- 5.4(D) explain the central role of the expansion of slavery in causing sectionalism, disagreement over states' rights, and the Civil War
- 5.4(E) explain the effects of the Civil War, including Reconstruction and the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution
- 5.5(A) explain the significance of issues and events of the 20th century such as industrialization urbanization, the Great Depression, the world wars, the civil rights movement, and military actions
- 5.5(C) identify the accomplishments and contributions of individuals and groups as well as in the areas of civil rights, women's rights, military actions, and politics
- 5.7(B) explain the geographic factors that influence patterns of settlement and the distribution of population in the United States
- 5.14(B) explain the purposes of the U.S. Constitution as identified in the Preamble
- 5.14(C) explain the reasons for the creation of the Bill of Rights and its importance
- 5.18(B) identify leadership qualities of national leaders, past and present
- 5.17(A) explain why individuals have a duty to participate in civic affairs at the local, state, and national levels
- 5.19(A) describe the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, including freedom of religion speech, and press; the right to assemble and petition the government; the right to keep and bear arms; the right to trial by jury; and the right to an attorney
- 5.21(B) summarize the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to our national identity

Theater:

The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

- 5.4(A) explain theatre as a reflection of life in particular times, places, cultures, and oral traditions specific to American history.
- 5.5(B) compare visual, aural, oral, and kinetic aspects of informal and formal theatre with the elements of art, dance, or music.



Biography of Ms. Opal Lee

Biography of Ms. Opal Lee

Opal Broadus Flake Lee was born October 7, 1926, in Marshall, Texas, and moved with her family when she was 10 years old to Fort Worth. In June 1939 her parents bought a house in the 900 block of East Annie Street, in what was then a mostly white area. On June 19, 1939, white rioters vandalized and burned down her home. Lee was twelve years old at the time.

She graduated from Terrell High School, Fort Worth's Black high school, in 1943. She attended Wiley College in Marshall where she earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She taught elementary school for many years in the Fort Worth ISD. She eventually earned a master's degree in counseling from the University of North Texas and served as a counselor for the Fort Worth ISD until her retirement in 1977.

After her retirement, she became involved in many community projects. She was a charter member of the Tarrant County Black Historical and Genealogical Society so that she and Lenora Rolla worked to make James E. Guinn Elementary School, IM Terrell High School and Mount Zion Baptist Church recognized as historical sites. She has received 3 honorary doctorates.



Ms. Opal Lee, 2022



Opal Lee and others on the Walk of Freedom, 2021
Image: Genuine Shotz

She and others campaigned for years to make Juneteenth a national holiday. She would lead a walk 2 ½ miles each year, representing the 2 ½ years it took for news of the Emancipation Proclamation to reach Texas.

She has marched not only in Texas, but also in Fort Smith and Little Rock, Arkansas; Las Vegas, Nevada; Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Atlanta, Georgia; Selma, Alabama; and the Carolinas. She led a petition campaign for a Juneteenth national holiday, gathering 1.6 million signatures.

On June 17, 2021, she finally succeeded, when President Biden signed Senate Bill S. 475, into law, making **Juneteenth National Independence Day** a federal holiday. She was a guest at the bill signing ceremony in the White House and she received a standing ovation when she was recognized. Juneteenth is also known as Freedom Day, Liberation Day and Emancipation Day.

She is a founding member of **Transform 1012 North Main Street**, an organization of nonprofits and arts groups, working to convert the former Ku Klux Klan auditorium into the Fred Rouse Center and Museum for Arts and Community. Fred Rouse was a Black man who was lynched by a Fort Worth mob in 1921.



Opal Lee, Vice President Harris and President Biden on June 17, 2021.
Image: Jim Watson AFP

Ms. Lee was named 2021 “Texan of the Year” by the Dallas Morning News for her activism. She was included in a 2021 book *Unsung Heroes* for operating a food bank, a farm and community garden, Opal’s Farm. Located on the banks of the Trinity River, Opals Farms was crucial to helping those during the Covid-19 pandemic to help provide food for the community.

In 2022, Ms. Opal was nominated by Congressman Marc Veasey for a Nobel Peace Prize. She also published a children's book, called *Juneteenth, A Children’s Story*.

“If we don’t remember what we have been through, our nation is doomed to repeat it.”

- Ms. Opal Lee



Ms. Opal with Gregory Joel, center, manager of the farm and Charlie Blaylock at Opal’s Farm.



Understanding and Celebrating Juneteenth

by National Museum of African American
History and Culture (NMAAHC)



NMAAHC Kids

Understanding & Celebrating Juneteenth

Juneteenth is a time for celebration and reflection with the whole family. For young children, the abstract concept of freedom and the hard history of slavery can be challenging to grasp. NMAAHC's early childhood education team offers the following resources to support young children's understanding and celebration of Juneteenth: a guide on how to talk about slavery and freedom in age appropriate ways, an activity to inspire hope and activism.

This resource was designed by the National Museum of African American History and Culture's [Early Childhood Education Initiative Team](#). All objects and photographs featured in this resources are from the Collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.



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WHAT IS JUNETEENTH?

Juneteenth – also known as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day, and Emancipation Day – is a holiday celebrating the emancipation of African Americans who had been enslaved in the United States. Although the emancipation proclamation was signed almost two and a half years earlier, the news of this important decision didn't reach Texas until June 19th, 1865. Now, Juneteenth is celebrated annually on June 19th and has become a time for celebration. People honor Juneteenth in many ways from parties and parades to memorials and lessons. However it's celebrated, it's a time to share stories of resilience, resistance, and liberation, and to uplift Black joy.



WHY INCLUDE YOUNG CHILDREN IN JUNETEENTH CELEBRATIONS?

The foundation for understanding our complex, diverse and often unjust world and our role in it is built during the [first eight years of a child's life](#). These are years when children are forming their identities as well as constructing their attitudes towards people who are different from themselves. From birth on, children internalize the messages they receive - at home, in their communities, from media - about who they are, who other people are, who is valued in society, and who is to be feared or seen as "other." To develop a positive sense of self and others, young children need opportunities to learn about and celebrate who they are, as well as learn about and celebrate a multitude of diverse identities and cultures other than their own. When families and communities honor Juneteenth together, young children have a special chance to do just that.

For children of all racial identities, Juneteenth can be a time for learning about slavery in the United States, the resilience of Black people and the bravery of people of all racial groups who fought to end slavery. For Black children, this can be a time where they learn about their ancestors and past fights for justice and come together with their families and communities to express pride in Black culture and hope in a more just future. For children of color and white children, this can be a time to learn about the history of enslaved Africans and African Americans and celebrate with Black communities the uniqueness of their culture and lived experiences in the United States.

For all children, Juneteenth celebrations and lessons are only one part of a longer conversation about race, history and culture that will take place over many years as children grow and mature.

HOW DO YOUNG CHILDREN MAKE SENSE OF HISTORY?

Young children have a highly personal sense of time. Developmentally, children understand the world most easily by starting with how it relates to them. Their understanding of the world is grounded in personal experiences and their understanding of time, or history, starts with concrete, personal events (like birthdays, morning time, snack time, recess, and bedtime). Because of their short time on Earth, “a long time ago” could be yesterday or a year for them.

Though a child under the age of six (or sometimes even older) may not be at a stage where they fully understand the concept of something happening hundreds of years ago, we can still share history with them. At the core of most stories from history are topics that young children can relate to and learn from like love, fairness, creativity, sadness, and collaboration. When teaching your little one about history, try starting with an explanation that helps give the child a better understanding that what you are sharing with them did not happen today or yesterday. You can say, *History is everything that has already*

happened, like breakfast this morning or even longer ago. Slavery in America happened before either of us were born and even before grandparents were born.

The more we share history with children, the stronger their sense of history and time will become. Storytelling, and retelling, especially when you incorporate details that children have experienced themselves, supports children's brains to better hold complex and abstract ideas such as freedom, justice, slavery, and resistance. Hearing these stories from people they love and trust lets children know that learning about events or people from a long time ago is relevant and not something to be afraid of. Rather, history teaches us valuable lessons, inspires resilience, and affirms the worthiness of ourselves and others to exist freely and fairly.



WHEN DO WE TALK ABOUT SLAVERY?

When and how to talk about slavery with young children is an ongoing conversation in the field of early childhood education. Cognitively, most children can have explicit conversations about slavery by age six, with increasing depth at ages seven and eight. Emotionally, they may be ready earlier or later. Regardless of the child's readiness or whether you introduce it to them yourself or not, they will likely hear about slavery in some capacity by the time they are five.



Whatever the age, a child's first introduction to race should never be centered on trauma. African American history does not start with slavery and it does not end there either. When a child's first conversations around race are about pain, hate or adversity, it communicates that talking about race or differences is negative or something to avoid. A child's introductions to race and history must be grounded in pride, empowerment, and celebration first. Celebrating and teaching stories of Black culture, leadership, inventions, beauty, and accomplishments allows children to first understand Black identity as special and strong, and better equips them to later hear about, understand and emotionally process the terrible truths of slavery. Juneteenth events can be wonderful opportunities to introduce the concepts of slavery with a focus on resilience and within an environment of love, trust, and joy.

SLAVERY, FREEDOM AND JUNETEENTH CONVERSATIONS

The dominant narrative is that the United States started as "the land of the free." Yet, that was simply not true for many people. And in many ways, this ideal is still to be realized. Telling our children a more nuanced, complete, and accurate account of history helps us all live up to the ideal of freedom and gets us closer to that reality. Sometimes because of how much we as adults know or understand about slavery we can feel like there isn't a way to talk about it with children simply yet honestly. But there is a way.

Start by asking yourself questions like: *Why is this event or topic important? What do I want my child to be able to do or understand with this information? What is essential that they know now? What can they be told later?* Questions like these help you to stay focused in your discussion with your child. Too many details or advanced information about violence or laws can take the conversation in a direction that your child isn't ready for developmentally or emotionally. Remember that even with simple storytelling children can feel confused or take a long time to process and respond. Conversations about history may take place over the span of a few days or longer.

This resource was designed by the National Museum of African American History and Culture's [Early Childhood Education Initiative Team](#). All objects and photographs featured in this resources are from the Collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Below are examples of simple, accurate and age-appropriate language and questions to inspire on-going conversations with children about slavery and freedom.

WHAT IS SLAVERY?

Slavery is when one person owns another person. A really long time ago (even before your grandparents or I were born or before there were buildings and streets), white people created an untrue idea that white people were better than Black people. They used this idea to pretend that slavery was okay, but it's not okay for some people to be owned and hurt by other people just because of their skin or where they come from.

Slavery started in the United States a very long time ago when Africans were taken from their homes without their permission, brought to the United States far away from their families and special things, and forced to live and work here without being paid or treated well. This was not okay. Enslaved Africans and African Americans were smart and skilled workers and had their own ideas and families and came from many different places and cultures, but people called them slaves. Enslaved people were forced to do things they didn't want to do and were hurt if they tried to do what they wanted or leave the places they worked. Being enslaved was hard, scary, unfair, and hurtful. Enslaved Africans and African Americans knew that being treated this way was wrong and so they found ways to resist, build community, and continue some of the traditions that connected them to their families and cultures. Many people of all different skin colors knew it was wrong too and bravely worked together with Black people to end slavery. Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the end of slavery.

Ask your child questions to help continue or conclude the conversation in a way that is best for them:

What do you think about this true story?

How are you feeling?

What questions do you have?



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WHAT IS FREEDOM?

Part of our celebration of Juneteenth is celebrating freedom. There are choices, or freedoms, that all people should have in their life. Freedom means you can act and to think the way you believe is best. There are big freedoms and little freedoms. You have the freedom to say I want to play with blocks not puzzles. Or you can say I like peaches instead of oranges. Those are choices you get to make. There are bigger freedoms or choices you make as you grow up: Freedom to express yourself in different ways. Freedom to choose your family and to stay together. Freedom to go to school, to travel or to work where you want to. Freedom to live where you want and be where you are treated well.

Enslaved Africans and African Americans did not have these freedoms. They could not visit their loved ones when they wanted to. They could not decide what work they did. They didn't have the choice to learn to read, or to vote or to create a life that was best for themselves or their family. When slavery ended, those who had been enslaved claimed freedom in their everyday life. They could now make the decisions they thought were most important. This made them very happy. On Juneteenth we can celebrate freedom with joyous festivities!

Ask your child questions to help continue or conclude the conversation in a way that is best for them:

What do you think about this true story?

How are you feeling?

What questions do you have?

Remember:

Remember these conversations are ongoing! As your child grows, they can learn more specific stories and information about slavery and will further understand and define freedom for themselves. As you have conversations, always center the humanity of those enslaved by talking about ways they resisted, found joy, and expressed agency. Criticize the institution of slavery, pointing out those who directly and indirectly



benefited from the dehumanizing act of slavery. Over time, as children absorb the information, make connections to current events to build their awareness about how the legacy of the slave system continues to shape American culture and provide benefits to some while hurting others.

HONORING JUNETEENTH

Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the freedom of enslaved African Americans in the United States. However, even though slavery ended, Black people were still treated unfairly because of the color of their skin. Alongside people from other communities, Black people continued to stand up and speak out against unfair and violent treatment, racism and unequal access to important things like education, housing, jobs and health care. Today, the fight for justice and freedom goes on.

People from different cultures, religions, genders, and racial groups are still working together to make our world a better and more fair place for everyone. Many people still do not have all of the freedoms that every person deserves, like the freedom to live where you want, the freedom to love or worship how you want, or the freedom to be yourself safely and proudly. This can change. We all can do something to make a difference in the world and help make sure our community and country leaders respect and protect all people.



Draw a picture, make a sign or write in a journal to tell about what positive changes you would like to see in the world and what you and others can do to help. Think about how your school, community, country or the world can change for the better. Use the questions below to guide your art making or writing.

- Who or what is important to you?
- What's something you'd like to see change in your community?
- What would your community be like if everyone was healthy, happy and safe?
- Do you see a problem that needs to be fixed? Are there people who should be treated better? How?
- What can you do to make a difference, fix a problem or help someone?



The Emancipation Proclamation

The Emancipation Proclamation

It was the end of the second year of the Civil War; more than 100 battles had been fought and neither side was winning. The North had lost many men in the war. The South was using slave labor in many ways to fight and support their efforts in the war. Congress had passed small ways to award freedom to escaped slaves. But by making an executive order—a proclamation—President Abraham Lincoln was taking away slaves throughout the “States and parts of States which...are in rebellion against the United States,” to aid the North.



The first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation
Painted by F.B. Carpenter

President Lincoln was originally not certain that he had the power to outlaw slavery. In normal times he couldn't just overturn laws. And because slavery was mentioned in the Constitution, he could not with a proclamation, do away with slavery. However eventually he decided that a country at war was allowed to seize “property” that the enemy was using to fight the war, and in this case, that property included the south's slave labor. Lincoln, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, used emancipation as a tactic of war, not just as the mission itself: by reasserting his mission was to save the Union, he could justify emancipation of enslaved people.

While the decree could not free slaves in areas where the United States could not enforce the Proclamation, it sent a signal to Blacks and the Confederacy that enslavement would no longer be tolerated. It was an invitation to slaves to take up arms and fight to end the war, and 185,000 did.

While it was limited, it transformed the character of the war. Lincoln called it *An Act of Justice*. He believed that once the war was won, Congress would end slavery in the entire country and proclaimed that the Union planned to do just that. Just before he signed the document, President Lincoln said, “*I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper.*”

Celebrations and pandemonium broke out across the country on January 1 at 8 p.m. after news of Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation went out on telegraph wires. Men squealed, women fainted, dogs barked, and whites and Blacks shook hands. Cannons in the Navy Yard in Washington D.C. began to go off.

Many Abolitionists, a person who moves to end slavery, such as Henry Ward Beecher said, *"The Proclamation... gives liberty a moral recognition."* Former slave Frederick Douglass pronounced it *"a worthy celebration of the first step on the part of the nation in its departure from the thralldom [domination, bondage] of the ages."* He continued to point out that the Emancipation Proclamation was but the first step. And while the decree could not free slaves in areas where the US could not enforce the Proclamation, it *did* send a signal to slaves and the Confederacy of the Southern States, that enslavement would no longer be tolerated.

Lincoln was aware that the Proclamation was just an initial step. True freedom also depended on the Union winning the Civil War and making freedom a plank of the 1864 Republican Party platform. When he was nominated for a second term, he said that constitutional emancipation was "a fitting and necessary conclusion to the final success of the Union cause," and in 1865 the 13th Amendment confirmed it. But many felt it was that first step, the Emancipation Proclamation, which began the rolling back of enslavement of all kinds.

With Emancipation, formerly enslaved people could now:

- 1) work for wages
- 2) own land
- 3) name themselves
- 4) read and write
- 5) serve in the military
- 6) travel
- 7) worship freely



African American Union Soldier, 12-pdr Napoleon
c. 1860

In the Second Inaugural Address, he went further, in saying that the war is best understood as divine punishment for the sin of slavery, a sin for which all Americans were complicit. He called on passages from the Bible to explain that God used the war to finally end slavery, once and for all.

As Jon Meacham says in his biography of Lincoln, *And There Was Light*, that while he did much good, he left much undone. And because of the assassination of Lincoln the following April, much was left undone for many years to come.

For perspective, we should note that Great Britain had granted emancipation to their slaves in the 1830s. Any compensation was given to the slaveowners, not the former slaves, and it happened in tiers, over many years. In this country Lincoln's similar act, happening with one proclamation and later an amendment in 1860s, was looked upon as radical. He thought emancipation was the right, just and morally sound thing to do.

As Meacham says, military necessity was one motive but conscience in the service of justice was another, and perhaps the war was an excuse to finally make the change. As the war continued to drag on, he was repeatedly asked to moderate his emancipation stance so that the war could end, and the Union could be saved. He could not, he would not do that.

Many criticized Lincoln through the years for not being single-minded enough in his mission to end slavery, once and for all, sooner. However, throughout the years after his death his accomplishments have been heralded.



Tin box handmade and carried by Joseph Trammell to hold freedom papers, c. 1852
Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture



Timeline

Timeline

September 22, 1862	During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln announces the Emancipation Proclamation. It sets January 1863, as the date of Freedom for over 3 million Black Americans living as slaves. This document establishes that the Civil War is a fight against slavery.
January 1, 1864	President Abraham Lincoln officially signs the Emancipation Proclamation, releasing servants from bondage. Before, black men were unable to join the Union Army, but by the end of the war, approximately 180,000 African Americans volunteered to join the war.
April 9, 1865	General Robert E. Lee surrenders to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox in Virginia. This ends the Civil War.
June 19, 1865	General Gordon Granger reads General Order No. 3 in Galveston, Texas. More than 250,000 enslaved African Americans are now free. This day became known as "Juneteenth".
December 6, 1865	The 13th Amendment is ratified, making slavery illegal in US.
June 19, 1866	The first official Juneteenth celebrations take place around Texas.
June 1968	Civil Rights activist Ralph Abernathy encourages Black Americans to celebrate Juneteenth.
June 15, 2021	The US Senate and Congress vote to make Juneteenth a National holiday. President Joe Biden signs the legislation into law on June 19 th , with Opal Lee standing by his side.



Fisk University Jubilee Singers, c. 1872
Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture



Resources

Resources

- National Archives
 - Copy and transcription of the Emancipation Proclamation: https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation?_ga=2.143337462.2141344694.1688657064-1823154391.1687875908
 - Copy of the record General Order No. 3, now known as Juneteenth: <https://www.archives.gov/news/articles/juneteenth-original-document>
- National Museum of African American History and Culture
 - The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/juneteenth#:~:text=On%20June%2019%2C%201865%2C%20nearly,as%20Juneteenth%20or%20Freedom%20Day.>
- Equal Justice Initiative:
 - Brief summary of Emancipation Proclamation: <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-emancipation-proclamation/>
- History Channel:
 - Article and Videos of Emancipation Proclamation and Juneteenth: <https://www.history.com/news/what-is-juneteenth>
- Texas State Historical Association:
 - Videos of Juneteenth and Opal Lee: <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/juneteenth>
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):
 - How Juneteenth is celebrated today: <https://naacp.org/campaigns/juneteenth>
- The Real Opal Lee:
 - Opal Lee's official page with history and updates: <https://www.opalswalk2dc.com/>
- PBS:
 - Lesson Plan of Juneteenth: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/classroom/2023/06/lesson-plan-history-of-juneteenth-and-why-its-set-to-become-a-national-holiday/>
 - Videos and discussion by Opal Lee: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/classroom/2023/06/what-juneteenth-means-for-americans-according-to-teacher-opal-lee/>
- Community Food Bank:
 - Information about Opal Lee's food bank: <https://www.food-bank.org/>
- Juneteenth Ft. Worth:
 - Juneteenth in Ft. Worth and legacy of Opal Lee: <https://www.juneteenthftw.com/opal-lee>
- U.S. Department of Education:
 - List of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>



Angels In The Wings

Angels In The Wings

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