

Valerie Tutson: *The Right to...Liberty* Educational Guide, Grades 3-8



About the Performance

During the Colonial Period and the time of the American Revolution, freedom was on the minds of all people, including those held in captivity or on the margins in free Black communities. There were many Black people who wanted to make sure that the revolutionary ideals of the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness would become reality for themselves, their community, and their children. Storyteller Valerie Tutson recounts significant moments from our national history through the tales of Ona Maria Judge, who ran away from President George Washington, James Forten, who as a teen risked his life fighting against the British, and Elizabeth Freeman, known as Mumbet, whose court case paved the way to abolishing slavery in Massachusetts.



About the Artist

Valerie Tutson is a multiple award-winning storyteller who has been performing in schools, churches, libraries, festivals and conferences since 1991. She draws her stories from around the world with an emphasis on African traditions. Her repertoire includes stories and songs she learned in her travels to South Africa, her experiences in West Africa and stories from African American history. She is a graduate of Brown University where she earned a Master's degree in theater arts and a BA in her self-designed major of Storytelling as a Communications Art.

Program Learning Goals

1. To experience the art of storytelling.
2. To get familiarized with storytelling as a way to pass on history.
3. To learn about the experiences of African Americans during the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods of American history.

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Essential Questions

1. How is hearing a story told out loud different from reading it in a book?
2. Why is it important to tell stories about the past/historical events?
3. Why is it important to learn about the experiences of African Americans during the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods of American history?

Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

The Right to...Liberty

The stories Valerie Tutson will tell are about people who lived during the Colonial & Revolutionary war periods. What do you know about life during that time? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?



The Boston Tea Party. Anon/Getty Images



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What is Storytelling?

Storytelling is the art of telling a story about real or imagined events, using gestures and words to bring the events and characters of the story to life in the minds of those listening. Who tells stories in your family? What are those stories about? Do you use gestures or different voices to make a story funny or scary or sad?

Oral Tradition

Storytelling is an oral tradition. That means that it is passed down from generation to generation, person to person, by word of mouth. Do the older people in your family tell stories that were told to them by their parents? Will you tell those stories to others? Stories passed down through oral tradition can be real or made up and can be an important way to learn about the past. What might a story teach us about history that we might not get from a history book?

Pre-Performance Activity: The Colonial and Revolutionary Period

LEARNING GOALS: To learn about the life and experiences of African Americans during the Colonial and Revolutionary period.

MATERIALS/PREP: Books and/or vetted websites about Colonial America and the Revolutionary period.

TIME NEEDED: Two 45 Minute Sessions

STEP 1: Discuss the Colonial and Revolutionary periods in American history. Using a bubble chart, ask students to share any words, customs, experiences, or other ideas that relate to the time period. Have them brainstorm their own understanding, knowledge, and ideas about Africans' and African Americans' experiences during that time.

STEP 2: Divide students into groups and assign each group a topic, such as living conditions, culture, holidays, history, the Declaration of Independence, etc. Have each group research its topic in relation to Africans and African Americans using print or web resources.

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STEP 3: Give students time to use the resources, both in and out of class, to research their topics.

STEP 4: Have each group present its research creatively to the class (i.e. through drawing, maps, crafts, music, drama, etc.).

EXTENSIONS:

1) Discuss the idea of history. What is its connection to story and storytelling? Whose stories do we read/learn about as part of history? Whose stories are missing? Ask students to discuss the challenges of knowing the history of Africans and African Americans. Have students discuss what other stories are missing from our studies in history.

2) Discuss storytelling as a way to pass on history. Discuss the elements of a good story (i.e. characters, setting, problem, conclusion). Create a story map and model it with the class. Have students read a story from history and create their own story maps. Have them share their maps with the rest of the class.

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Post- Show Activity: Storytelling

LEARNING GOALS: To explore plot and characters in the stories

MATERIALS/PREP: Pens and paper

TIME NEEDED: 45 Minutes

STEP 1: Discuss the way storytelling was used to portray history. Have students identify what was effective about the art form. What tools did the storyteller employ? Discuss how it is the same and different from story writing.

STEP 2: Discuss the plots of the various stories presented. Have students identify main characters in the stories.

STEP 3: Assign students to be scribes for each character. Discuss the personalities and roles of each character. Have scribes write down all of the important information discussed about their characters.

STEP 4: Have students think up other possible outcomes of the stories. Have the scribes write down these outcomes.

STEP 5: Divide the class into groups. Assign each group one of the alternative outcomes that were brainstormed. Ask the groups to work together to determine how the possible outcomes would change the story.

STEP 6: Ask the groups to present the possible outcomes to the rest of the class by presentation, acting it out, or storytelling.

EXTENSIONS:

- 1) Have the students write their own version of one of the stories Valerie Tutson told.
- 2) Have students create their own story. Brainstorm a character who may have been alive during the time period discussed and a possible problem and potential solutions. Have students work in pairs to make up a story out loud together. Pairs can present to small groups or the whole class. Stories can also be written.

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Further Resources

- "[Colonial America & American Revolution Learning Resources](#)" at historyisfun.org
- Figley, Marty Rhodes. Prisoner for Liberty. Minneapolis: Millbrook Press. 2008
- Haskins, Jim. Black Stars of Colonial Times and the Revolution. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2002

Curricular Connections

Theatre 3-8: Responding

- 7. Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- 8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- 9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Demonstrate active observation as an audience member (e.g., noticing details, making connections) (T.R.09)

Connecting

- 10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- 11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify different sources of theatrical works (e.g., folk and fairy tales, everyday life). (T.Co.11)

History/Social Science

- Topic 3. History: migrations and cultures [2.T3]
- Gr 4 Topic 4. The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today [4.T4]
- Gr. 5 Topic 1 Early colonization and growth of the colonies (5.T1.07).
- History/Social Science Gr. 3 Topic 1: Massachusetts cities and towns today and in history [3.T1] ;Topic 6. Massachusetts in the 18th century through the American Revolution [3.T6]; Gr. 4 Topic 4: The Northeast [4.T4a];
- HS1 Topic 1. Origins of the Revolution and the Constitution [US1.T1]