

## **A School-wide Heritage Timeline: Nonfiction Learning Fills the Hallway**

This activity was developed by Paula Januzzi-Godfrey, teacher-librarian at Glenn Elementary School in Durham, North Carolina

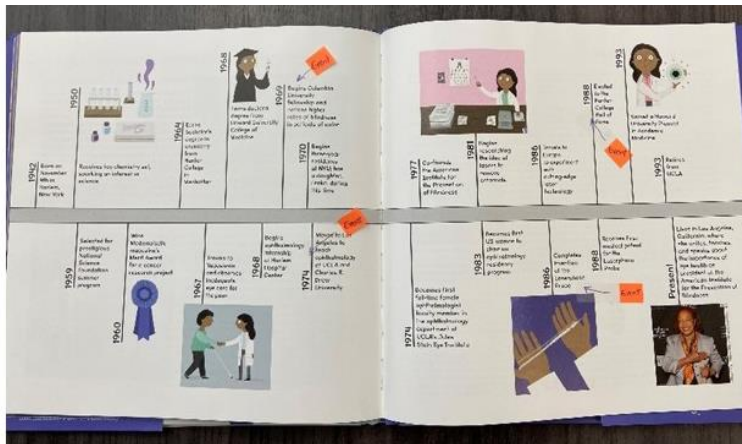
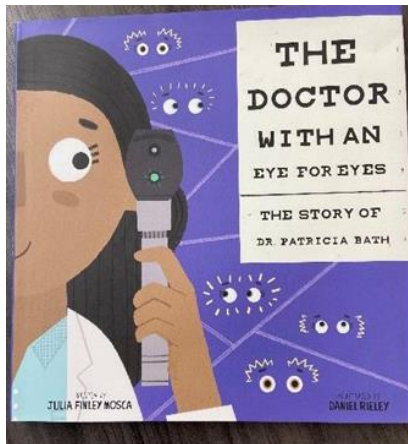
*Last September, I began a new job as an elementary librarian at a school that serves predominantly Black and Brown children that represent a variety of cultures and countries of origin. One of my goals was to find meaningful ways to celebrate heritage months. I saw this as a perfect way to generate school-wide enthusiasm about our nonfiction book collections and the many ways we can learn about people, places, history, cultures, and ourselves through nonfiction literacy instruction.*



Inspiration for the heritage timeline project developed organically, beginning as I was teaching a lesson in January. I had pulled out some of my favorite books about Martin Luther King, Jr. to share with students. I began each lesson by showing a photo of MLK, Jr. and asking if anyone recognized him.

The majority of the students were not sure, and some identified him as another person, such as LeBron James and Barack Obama. This led to rich, informative discussions about when and why the civil rights movement began, Black Lives Matter, and why we celebrate certain people on certain days.

I began to see that putting people, places, and events in historical context would help student understanding tremendously. Most importantly, I wanted the children to realize that what they were learning about the past was relevant to their lives now. I knew that visual teaching tools like timelines, maps, and photos could play a powerful role in expanding their knowledge.



Using a document camera, I began sharing timelines from a variety of nonfiction books. One of my favorites is *The Doctor with an Eye for Eyes: The Story of Patricia Bath* by Julia Finley Mosca. I used maps and photos to show where events on the timelines occurred, and I connected people and events that had happened across our country or world. These visuals helped students put everything into perspective.

Next, I told students what year I was born and what was happening in history when I was their age, and what was happening when their parents and grandparents were their age. Student engagement was high, and they were asking thought-provoking questions.

As I thought about building on this momentum in a way that made what they were learning interactive, I began to envision a life-size timeline heritage timeline in the main hallway of the school. It would consist of content created by students, teachers, and staff—the entire school community.



So I used black construction paper secured with putty (so that I could remove it later without leaving any marks on the walls) to layout a timeline that began in 1619 and ended in 2022. I provided some templates and invited students and teachers to draw or write about a person or



event that we had discussed. Over time, more and more students and teachers added pieces to the timeline.

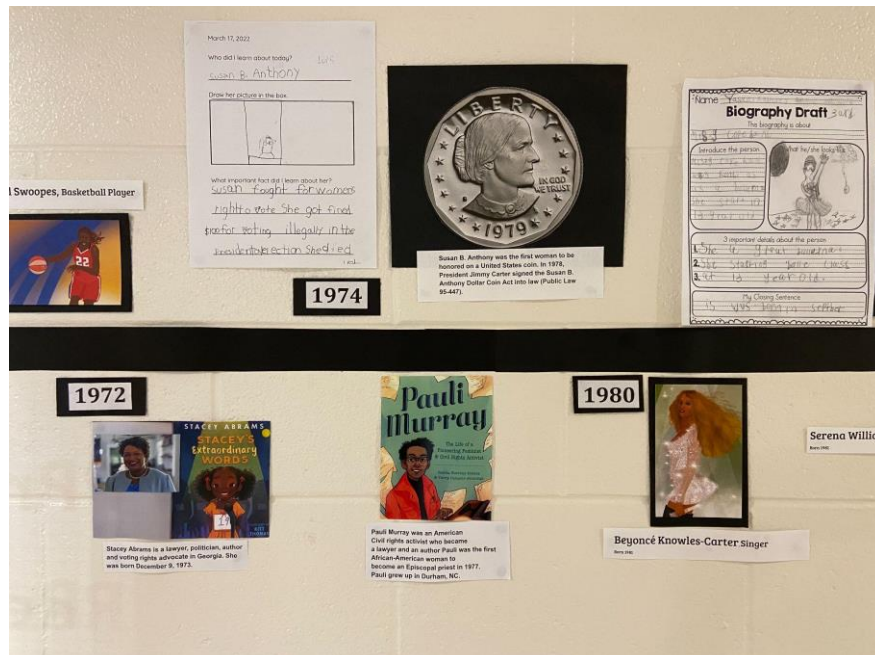
There was representation of Black artists, politicians, athletes, authors, poets, activists, musicians and more. All genders and people with many shades of black and brown skin tones covered the walls as you entered the school.



One of our guest speakers was a city councilman who could be found in a photo on our timeline with his wife, as local business owners.

I began to notice teachers and students stopping in the hallway to read items on the timeline, and I received feedback about how much our students and staff were enjoying watching the unfolding of the timeline display. Most importantly to me, I heard and saw that students and teachers were seeing themselves reflected in the photos on the

timeline.





At the end of the month, I placed two mirrors under the year 2022 along with the words “World Changer”. Our students are our future world changers, so I wanted them to see themselves on the timeline.



The timeline was so well received that staff members asked if it could be kept on display beyond February. That inspired me to not only keep it up in the hallway, but to encourage the school community to keep adding to it for Women's History Month, Poetry Month and Asian Pacific Month. I'm hoping we'll keep adding to the timeline this year, starting with materials related to Hispanic Heritage month.