

Relevant Unit Objectives

Module 3: African American Community and Culture

This lesson addresses the following Essential Questions:

- How did the existence of slavery shape African American communal life and cultural expression?
- How did acts of resistance shape African American cultural heritage and community?

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

Aim: How does the discovery of the African Burial Ground teach us about how African Americans were valued by New Yorkers as time went by?

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify important factual information about the African Burial Ground
- Understand how the devaluation of African Americans and their contributions to New York history continues after their death
- Develop empathic understanding of the significance of the loss and rediscovery of the remains of those buried at the African Burial Ground

Introduction

Ask students how many of them have ever seen any exhibit containing human remains - such as a skeleton at a science museum, a fossil of early human remains at a natural history museum, a mummy in a historical museum, etc. What types of things do they imagine can be learned from these remains about the lives the individuals led? For example, if a mummy were buried with elaborate jewelry, we might conclude that the person was very wealthy and led a privileged life. What might be learned from the manner in which the person was buried? For example, because mummies were often buried in pyramids with supplies for daily living and statues of servants, we conclude that this person believed in an afterlife and the necessity of having these objects available when s/he came back to life.

Instructional Procedures**Step One: Learning about the African Burial Ground**

The teacher reads the FAQ's about the African Burial Ground found at http://www.africanburialground.gov/ABG_FAQ.htm

Cemeteries are places set aside to help us remember people from the past.

- How good a job is this cemetery doing to remind us of the African Americans who are buried in it?
- What evidence is there that the city has forgotten about these people?

Step Two: Analyzing the physical evidence of the African Burial Ground

Share the image of the burial ground found at <http://www.africanburialground.gov/FinalReports/Archaeology/1.7-24x36.pdf>

Ask students to try to count how many burials there are.

- What portion has coffins?
- What portion are infants or children?
- Why doesn't there seem to be a pattern to how people are buried? (hint: tombstones)

Step Three: Analyzing the physical evidence of a gravesite from the African Burial Ground

Ask students to look at the photograph of Burial 213 (this can be done online or can be reproduced by the teacher). It is available at <http://www.nps.gov/afbg/historyculture/preservation.htm>

The teacher will then ask students to consider the following questions:

1. Who was buried at this site?
2. Do we know the person's name? Why or why not?
3. What is the large brick hole at the center of the burial?
4. Because of the construction of a building through this gravesite, what can we tell about how memorable and respected this cemetery was to New Yorkers who came later ?

Step Four: Discussion

How does the discovery of the African Burial Ground teach us about how African Americans were valued by New Yorkers as time goes by?

Materials

National Park Service Brochure for the African Burial Ground
<http://www.africanburialground.gov/FinalReports/Archaeology/1.7-24x36.pdf>

Photograph of Burial 213
<http://www.nps.gov/afbg/historyculture/preservation.htm>