



York Region District School Board
Inclusive School and Community Services
Grades 7 – 12

African Heritage History Month Writing Contest



2018 Theme: Speaking Out / Taking Action Against Anti-Black Racism

Create a submission: short story, essay, artwork with a written explanation which reflects the theme of speaking out or taking action against anti-Black racism. **In your submission make a clear connection to the actions of Viola Desmond.**

[Heritage Minutes Video about Viola Desmond:](#)

Who is Viola Desmond?

Source: [Historica Canada](#)

Born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Viola Desmond trained as a teacher but soon joined her husband Jack Desmond in a combined barbershop and hairdressing salon, a beauty parlour on Gottingen Street. While expanding her business across the province, Viola went to New Glasgow, in 1946.

In New Glasgow, Desmond developed car trouble and decided to go to the movies while repairs were made. She bought a ticket, entered the theatre and took a seat on the main floor, unaware that tickets sold to African Canadians in this town were for the balcony. The main floor was reserved solely for White patrons. Theatre staff demanded that she go to the balcony, but she refused, since she could see better from the main floor. The police were summoned immediately and she was dragged out, which injured her hip. She was charged and held overnight in jail; she was not advised of her rights.

Maintaining her dignity, Desmond remained sitting upright, wearing her white gloves (a sign of sophistication and class at the time). The following morning, despite not having done anything wrong, she paid the imposed fine of \$20. Besides being fined, she was charged with defrauding the Government of Nova Scotia of the difference in the tax between a ground floor and a balcony seat, which amounted to one cent.

While discussing the incident with the doctor who tended to her, Desmond decided to fight the charges. Clearly, the issue was about her being African Canadian and there being a racist seating policy in place; it was not about tax evasion. In taking the matter to the courts, Viola Desmond's experience helped to galvanize public opinion locally and internationally, and to raise awareness about the reality of Canadian segregation.

Eligibility:

- Open to York Region District School Board Students, Grades 7 – 12.

Limit:

- One entry per student

Format:

- The author's name must appear *only* on the **Entry Form** and not on the written or artwork creation itself.

Deadline & Submissions:

- Submissions via email to charlotte.reid@yrdsb.ca with "Writing Contest" in the subject line.
- Hard copies of the application sent to Charlotte Reid, Inclusive School and Community Services, Dr. Bette Stephenson Centre for Learning.
- Include a completed **Entry Form** with each format – see **Entry Form** below.
- Entries must be received no later than **Thursday, February 28th, 2019**.

Judging Criteria:

- Consistency with the theme
- Substance
- Creativity
- Originality
- Clarity and readability

Decisions:

- Outstanding participants will be notified during the week of **March 25th, 2019**.
- Prizes will be awarded at the students' schools.

Qualifying submissions:

- Unpublished fictional short story, essay or artwork with written explanation
- Short story or essay 500 - 600 words, 12 point font, double spaced; artwork written explanation – 250 words
- Must be the original work of the author
- Must address the theme for the year
- Must be typed
- Must be titled

How the Contest works:

- The contest committee selects a theme for the year's contest, and invites entries.
- The contest committee selects the most outstanding submissions for recognition, publication and prizes.

Why An African Heritage Writing and Art Contest:

- To raise awareness among students and staff in the YRDSB about:
 - (1) The people of African-Canadian heritage who have made a significant contribution to Canadian and world development;
 - (2) Canadian laws and policies which promote anti-racism, equity and inclusion.
- To promote racial harmony in our school communities through knowledge and understanding of the experiences and the impact of the actions of persons of African heritage.
- To further develop and demonstrate the literacy skills of YRDSB students as they express their views, knowledge and concerns about African heritage and cultural unity.

Background:

- In 1926 author and journalist, Carter G. Woodson finalized efforts to popularize the history of African Americans by having the second week of February declared "Negro History Week". This initiative was needed because the history of Africa and Africans was neither formally documented nor studied until the 20th Century, even though the first Africans had arrived in America in the mid 1600's.
- The month of February was chosen because it marks the birthday of two men who greatly influenced Black Americans: Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.
- Since Woodson's achievement, several significant events have occurred during the month of February. One of these is the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in the United States of America.
- In Canada, Black History Month has been celebrated since the 1950's.
- On December 14, 1995, Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister Chretien, Jean Augustine moved "That this House of Parliament take note of the important contribution of Black Canadians to the settlement, growth and development of Canada, the diversity of the Black community in Canada and its importance to the history of this country, and recognize February as Black history month."
- According to the Ontario Black History Society, "Above all, Black History Month is an opportunity for Canadians to understand the role that the Black community has played in our history, a role that has been too often forgotten in our history books."



Contest in Celebration of African Canadian Heritage History Month Grades 7 – 12 - Entry Form - 2019

Commitment and Dedication: We unite in our purpose to inspire and to prepare learners for life in our changing world communities.

Entry Category

- Short Story**
- Essay**
- Artwork with written explanation of your piece**

Instructions:

- One entry per student.
- Your name should not appear on the work itself.
- Attach completed entry form when you send: an electronic version to charlotte.reid@yrdsb.ca

Submission Checklist:

- Completed Entry Form;
- Submission reviewed and approved by teacher advisor;
- Completed submission **without entrant's name on it**

By submitting you:

- **Agree that the entry is an original work;**
- *Give permission to the York Region District School Board to use the submission for promotional, educational and/or other literary purposes including reprinting.*

Be sure to complete the Entry Form on the next page!

Contest in Celebration of African Canadian Heritage History Month

Grades 7 – 12 - Entry Form - 2019

Title of your Submission	
Print Your Name	Your Signature
Your Grade	Your School
Print Your Teacher Advisor Name	Your Teacher Advisor Signature