**Lesson Plan for:**

**Building the Black Community in Rural Jackson County, NC,**

**from Civil War to Civil Rights**

**Shared by Marie T. Cochran**

**Overview**: Using the text *Just Over the Hills: Black Appalachians in Jackson Country, Western North Carolina* by Victoria A. Casey McDonald, students will employ the "jigsaw method" to gain insight into the realities of life in Jackson County, NC, for African Americans from the Civil War into the Civil Rights era. They will collectively create a working timeline and identify key themes of community-building to guide their learning. First, students will focus on the importance of storytelling itself as a necessity for preserving cultures and history through a guided close read of McDonald’s Acknowledgements and the Foreword by Marie T. Cochran.

**Learning Outcomes**:

* Students will explain how story-telling traditions are invaluable to learning the history of a people and the power of preserving those stories for future generations to learn from the past.
* Students will demonstrate an understanding of how African Americans built their lives in Jackson County by identifying key elements of community building: land ownership, churches, schools, jobs, social organizations, and interpersonal relationships.
* Students will create a timeline to provide context for the stories and how they fit into the larger historical narrative of slavery, US history, and the history of Jackson County.

**Standards: 8th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies**   
(can be adapted for grades 9–12)

**ELA**:

RI.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.8.3 Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events. RI.8.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**SS**:

I.1.3 Analyze details, central ideas, and inferences from sources using discipline-specific strategies.

I.1.4 Assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources using the origin, authority, structure, credibility, reliability, and context of the sources to guide the selection.

8.B.1 Analyze the impact of group behavior on the development of North Carolina and the nation.

8.C&G.2.2 Assess the effectiveness of societal reforms in terms of the impact on individuals, policies, and institutions in North Carolina and the nation.

8.H.1.4 Explain how recovery, resistance, and resilience to inequities, injustices, discrimination, prejudice, and bias have shaped the history of North Carolina and the nation.

**Lesson takes 3-7 days to complete, depending on how much of the book you choose to cover.**

**Materials/Teacher Prep**:

* *Just Over the Hills: Black Appalachians in Jackson Country, Western North Carolina* by Victoria Casey McDonald
* Note-catcher page, large paper, or online document (i.e. Jamboard) for capturing class notes

**Procedures**

1. Close read to understand author’s purpose (1 class period): Guide students in a close reading of the Acknowledgements (p. xi) and Foreword (p. 1-5). Answer the following questions as a class:
   1. How did McDonald come to collect these stories? Is this book a primary or secondary source? Have students refer to the Acknowledgements & p. 2 to answer this question. This is not an easy, direct answer. Discuss how her lived experience in the community with many of the individuals, along with her research in newspapers, government documents, photographs, and interviews make this a valuable, credible source.
   2. What does Cochran mean in her opening paragraph on p. 1? Specifically, how can these stories be both “part of ‘the Liars Bench’” and identify McDonald as a “griot”? Define griot for the class and have students discuss how McDonald’s work fits the definition.
   3. Define the term Affrilachia (p. 3). What has been the impact of the mainstream not recognizing or suppressing the histories of Affrilachians (p.2-3)? When someone pictures an Appalachian, they picture a white person. Yet, many vibrant black communities have struggled and thrived in the mountains. McDonald shares these stories because too often their stories, contributions, and accomplishments are overlooked. Without storytelling, this history would be lost.
   4. What are other examples of storytelling that have allowed history and cultures to live on? Are there examples in your family? Is storytelling, or story collecting, a form of activism? Explain. This is a broad question intended for students to make connections between this lesson, their own experiences, and prior knowledge.
2. Setting up the historical context (~30 min): Together read the Preface (p. 6-7) and begin a timeline that students will add to throughout the lesson. A large length of paper or whiteboard works well, or it can be done digitally. Fill in dates covered in the Preface and go ahead and add other important dates for context (i.e. beginning and end of Civil War).
3. Jigsaw Activity Step 1 (1 class periods): Put students in groups and assign each group the Introduction to Section I plus one (or more) of the chapters. (You can also read the introduction together, then break them into groups). Give each group a task card to guide their work (find sample task card below).

NOTE: Chapter 1 “Where it All Began: My Great-Great Grandmother” does not fit neatly with the other chapters. It is written in verse and is a necessarily fictionalized account of her great-great grandmother’s story. This chapter can be read together as a class and discuss why it is included, ideas for how it was informed, and why it is structured differently than the other stories. Or you can assign it as an extension or to a group of students ready for more challenge. You may also choose not to use this chapter.

1. Jigsaw Activity Step 2 (1 class period): Put students in new groups so that each group has a representative to speak for a different chapter. Students take turns sharing what they learned from their assigned chapter. Together, they create a list of similarities.
2. Bring it together (~30 min): As a whole class, have students share the similarities they identified. Create a chart to collect their information specifically about community building (i.e. churches, schools, land ownership, organizations, economy). Ask students the following questions:

a. *What resources and skills were necessary in creating these vibrant communities?*

b. *Why were churches often the first social and physical structure in a community?*

c. *What was the access to education? To jobs? To land ownership?*

d. *How did the relationship with whites in the community impact its development?*

i. In Section I particularly, it will be important to talk about the master/slave relationship since these stories do not show a clear “good guy, bad guy” narrative as many others do. Have students compare these stories with others they’ve learned. There are links to others in additional resources below. Steer students away from the “benevolent master” narrative by emphasizing the power dynamic and dehumanization of the master/slave relationship.

ii. Here are some resources to help:

1. [Teaching Hard History: Grades 6–12 | Learning for Justice](https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/6-12-framework): a framework for teaching about slavery
2. [The experience of slavery varied depending on time, location, crop, labor performed, size of slaveholding and gender.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onHR_3fOVt8) (6 min video produced by Learning for Justice)

6. Repeat the jigsaw activity (#3–5) for each of the book’s sections. (You should not need 2 whole class periods for the jigsaw activity after they’ve done it once.) As you move through the sections of the book, continue to add to the class timeline and answer the “Bring it Home” questions. Students should see how the answers change with the time and be able to infer why those answers change. You may end the lesson after Section I or choose which sections to cover.

7. Summative assessment (optional): Have students complete a written response to the following questions:

a. In addition to entertainment, what is the value in storytelling? Why is it important to preserve the stories? Explain your answer with specific examples.

b. How did African Americans in Jackson County create their communities? What key elements were present?

**Modifications & Extensions**:

* Assign chapters for jigsaw groups purposefully to meet student learning needs, considering length and complexity of the text.
* Use Google Earth or a printed physical map and have students mark the different community locations identified in the text, illustrating the “Just over the hill” concept of the Jackson Co. black community.
* Compare the experiences of the individuals in the text to other oral histories from African Americans in Appalachia or other parts of NC and the nation.

**Additional Resources**:

* [Oral histories collected by Victoria Casey McDonald](https://southernappalachiandigitalcollections.org/browse/search/search/keyword:victoria-casey-mcdonald)
* National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, [The Making of African American Identity](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/masterslaverelationship.pdf): Vol. I, 1500–1865, On the Slave-Master Relationship: Selections from 19th-Century Slave Narratives
* [Teaching Hard History: Grades 6–12 | Learning for Justice](https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/6-12-framework)
* [Database of runaway slave advertisements in NC](http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/RAS)

**Task Card**

*Each member of your group will be responsible for teaching others the information you collect, so everyone should take their own notes.*

Name of the individual(s):

Dates and places of birth and death:

Family members:

Contributions to the community (job, group memberships, etc.):

Where did they live? Did they own land?

Relationship to enslaver (Section I) or white community (Sections II-IV) if applicable:

\*Add important events from the reading to the class timeline.