RAISING THE VOLUME
Anson Street African Burial Project
CORE SUBJECTS AND 21ST CENTURY THEMES

Mastery of core subjects and twenty-first century themes is essential for all students in the twenty-first century. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts; world languages; arts; mathematics; economics; science; geography; history; and government and civics. In addition to these subjects, schools must move forward to include not only a focus on mastery of core subjects, but also an understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving twenty-first century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects.

Global Awareness
1. Use twenty-first century skills to understand and address global issues.
2. Learn from and work collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work, and community contexts.

Civic Literacy
1. Participate effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes.
2. Exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national, and global levels.
3. Understand the local and global implications of civic decisions.

Work Creatively with Others
1. Develop, implement, and communicate new ideas to others effectively.
2. Be open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback into the work.
3. Demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work; understand the real world limits to adopting new ideas.
4. View failure as an opportunity to learn; understand that creativity and innovation is a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes.
5. Implement innovations.
6. Act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur.
OVERVIEW

Everyone has a story. It’s our place to take a moment to listen. Once you listen, your eyes open. You can put yourself in someone else’s shoes and try to comprehend their experiences. You may be inspired, you may come away with more knowledge, or you may find a bit of yourself in someone else.

“Raising the Volume” is a series of Black stories. These are stories about Black entrepreneurs, judges, authors, artists, and leaders in our community. These are stories that need to be heard. Led by the Gaillard’s Artists-in-Residence Charlton Singleton and Marcus Amaker, “Raising the Volume” gives a platform to Black community members whose lives matter.

As you introduce this series to your students, follow the bullet points below for discussion. Your students will find that they are challenged to think about uncomfortable things. Those conversations are what will help us change our world. In the words of Judge McFarland, “To break down racial barriers, start where you are.” So, let’s start where we are and see what change we can bring to our community.

For each lesson, split your class into small groups for discussion or discuss as a whole. Choose the model that is the most comfortable for your students so they feel free to discuss opinions openly.

Teachers, if you are interested in scheduling a cross-school discussion on Raising the Volume Episode XXVII, please email Sterling deVries at sdevries@gaillardcenter.org. Through cross-school Zoom calls, we can offer students from one school a different perspective on the video with students from a second school. We will schedule class-to-class meetings where whole groups can discuss various topics covered in Episode XXVII.
EPISODE XXVII

Raising the Volume

Episode XXVII: Anson Street African Burial Project

(CLICK THE IMAGE TO WATCH EPISODE XXVII)
Raising the Volume

Episode XXVII:
Anson Street
African Burial Project

Anson Street African Burial Project

In 2013, during the renovation of the Charleston Gaillard Center, the remains of thirty-six individuals were recovered. “Researchers dated the burials from 1770 to 1790, making the Anson Street site the oldest known graveyard of enslaved Africans in Charleston. Yet it wasn’t marked on any map or city plat.”1 Dr. Ade Ajani Ofunniyin, also known as Dr. O, founded the Gullah Society to preserve the history and traditions of the Gullah Geechee. The Gullah Geechee are the descendants of enslaved Africans brought to coastal South Carolina and Georgia to work on rice plantations. One of the major efforts of the Gullah Society has been documenting and restoring the region's African American burial grounds. The Thirty-Six, as retired teacher La'Sheia Oubre’ of Charleston calls them, became the responsibility of the city and its Black community. Since the deceased are unable to give consent on their burial, it became the rights of the African American community to determine the disposition of their ancestral remains. As such, genetic research was undertaken with explicit permission from the Charleston African American community, whose members considered the human remains to represent their ancestors. The resulting Anson Street African Burial Ground Project undertook genetic analysis to give each member of the Thirty-Six a physical profile and story.

1 Joel K. Bourne, Jr., “Digging for the Life Stories of Forgotten Slaves,” National Geographic, December 11, 2018,
After the remains were discovered, seventy-eight African American volunteers donated their DNA to learn about their ancestry and whether they might descend from the ancestors buried at the Anson Street site. At this time, no blood relatives have been discovered. However, La'Sheia Oubre’ states, “We are all related to the Thirty-Six because in the African American culture and many cultures, it doesn't matter if you are my bloodline or not—you are my family. We take care of each other. We take care of our elders, our children. So that is how I feel about the Thirty-Six.”

In your small group, discuss what community means to you. To what community do you belong? What does your community value, honor, and appreciate? Does your group have a good sense of community? What can you do to strengthen your communities?

La'Sheia Oubre’ discusses the traditional African naming ceremony that was held at McLeod Plantation with Alonzo Turner’s book, African Priestess, and Dr. Ade Ajani Ofunniyin. Based on the data of the Thirty-Six, she created a name that matched that data and a name was lovingly given to each ancestor. Take a few moments with your group and research Yoruba culture and their naming ceremony. What are two facts that your learned about this culture and ceremony?

Click here to learn more about Yoruba culture.
LESSONS

Both La’Sheia Oubre’ and Joanna Gilmore mention the Gullah Geechee people: “The Gullah Geechee people are descendants of Africans who were enslaved on the rice, indigo, and cotton plantations of the lower Atlantic coast. Many came from the rice-growing region of West Africa. The nature of their enslavement on isolated island and coastal plantations created a unique culture with deep African retentions that are clearly visible in the Gullah Geechee people’s distinctive arts, crafts, foodways, music, and language.”

In your group, research more about the Gullah culture. What are two new facts that you have learned about the culture?

Click here For more information about the Gullah culture.

Both Raquel Fleskes and Theodore Schurr discuss their work and how they focus on interpreting genomic data to understand lived experiences, ancestry, and relationships: “We move from a set of skeletal remains to understanding who these people were and their life.” In your group, discuss why you think it is important for the community to know and understand the history of our ancestors. Why should we learn about the lives of those who lived hundreds of years ago? What can we do to recognize, memorialize, or commemorate burial grounds that are forgotten?

PROJECT

In this individual project, you can either research a culture of your choice or a culture from which you are a descendent. What are some traditions that the culture honors? What is a tradition that you would like to incorporate into your own life and pass down to your descendants?

More Information:

Anson Street African Burial Ground

Ancestry, Health, and Lived Experiences of Enslaved Africans in 18th Century Charleston

Gullah Geechee Tours

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INTERVIEW PANEL

Raquel Fleskes is a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut. She received her doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in Biological Anthropology, specializing in Anthropological Genetics. Her work focuses on interpreting genomic data with archaeological and other bio-molecular techniques to understand lived experience, ancestry, and relationships in early colonial North America, such as the Anson Street African Burial Ground Project.

Joanna Gilmore has worked as an archaeologist and museologist for 20 years. She has taught courses in museum studies and bioarchaeology as an adjunct assistant professor at the College of Charleston since 2015. She is especially interested in researching and sharing untold stories through inclusive interpretation, education programs, and exhibition design. In addition to teaching, Joanna worked as director of research and interpretation with the Gullah Society from 2016 until 2020 and is continuing this work as a member of the Anson Street African Burial Ground team (ASABG). She is also a research fellow with the Center for Historic Landscapes at the College of Charleston and serves on the College of Charleston Committee for Commemoration and Landscapes, which seeks to uncover and share hidden histories associated with the institution.

La'Sheia Oubre’ is an educator and community activist. She earned a degree in Exceptional Education and worked as an exceptional education teacher in Charleston County School District for thirty-nine years. During her time as a teacher and beyond, she was always civically engaged and worked for many years with Charleston Rhizome Collective, Black Lives Matter, and many community activism causes. La'Sheia’s community work has taken her to various cities and states and to Nairobi, Africa, in 2007, where she helped document the World's Social Forum and collected oral histories and stories. In 2019, she became the Community Engagement and Education Coordinator for the Gullah Society 501c3, planning and facilitating education programs and events. La'Sheia continues this work as a member of the Anson Street African Burial Ground team (ASABG). She is also currently working as a research fellow with the Center for the Historic Landscapes at the College of Charleston.
For over thirty years, Theodore Schurr has investigated the genetic prehistory of Asia and the Americas through studies of mtDNA, Y-chromosome, and autosomal DNA variation in Asian, Siberian, and Native American populations. His research group is exploring the population history of Georgia (Caucasus) and Pakistan through collaborative genetic studies in those countries. They are also investigating the colonial history of North America through bioarchaeology and ancient DNA studies, including the Anson Street African Burial Ground project. Other projects are investigating mitochondrial diseases in human populations and the role of the mtDNA in complex diseases, metabolism, and adaptation.

Dr. Ade Ajani Ofunniyin (1952-2020) was a cultural anthropologist trained in African Area Studies whose work focused on the traditional spiritual practices of Yoruba people in the African diaspora. He was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and lived in Harlem and the South Bronx, New York, until he was a young adult. He returned to Charleston in 1985 to work with his grandfather, Master Blacksmith Philip Simmons, apprenticing in his blacksmith shop. In 1998, Ade pursued a Master's degree and PhD at the University of Florida in historical archaeology. His Master's thesis research connected his family's blacksmithing business with blacksmithing traditions in Africa, while his doctoral research explored the traditional spiritual practices of Yoruba people. In 2012, Ade discovered that his ancestors were buried in Grove Cemetery on Daniel Island, which was overgrown and inaccessible. Shortly after this visit, Ade established the Gullah Society, Inc., with the mission to preserve, promote, and perpetuate Gullah Geechee culture and traditions, with a special focus on African-descendant burial grounds. Dr. Ofunniyin brought all aspects of his identity and life experiences to serving the Gullah Society, curating exhibitions at the Charleston's City Gallery that explored African traditions, art, and spirituality. He taught at the College of Charleston as an adjunct professor in African American Studies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

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