

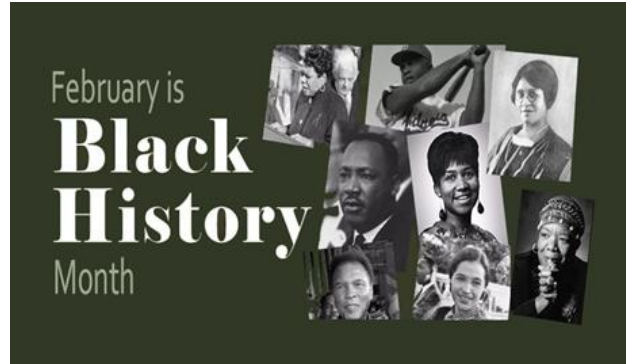


## ASHBROOK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

*To Challenge and Nurture Academically Capable Students*

*From the Office of the Head of School, Dr. Christopher A. Schoberl*

### **Is it Monday Yet? 1/2/24**



When I think about the importance of what are now called heritage months, such as Black History Month, Women's History Month, or Native American History Month, I think primarily of how they serve as dedicated periods to acknowledge, reflect upon, and learn about the historical contributions and experiences of specific groups of people.

Taking the time to note such contributions and experiences holds substantial educational value, of course, offering many approaches to learning that enrich our understanding of history, society, and the human experience in general. For example, prompted by the acknowledgement that February is Black History Month in a brief exchange I had with our Board President just this morning, Kathy [referred me to this article](#) where I learned that we have Dr. Gladys West to thank for the science and mathematics needed to create an item I use everyday to get to my kitchen: the GPS! In doing the research to write this article, I came across the perspectives of many other people who have also spent time thinking about the importance of heritage months, which I have taken the time to share and reflect on, below.

First of all, there are many lists of heritage months easily found on the Internet (don't try to find THE OFFICIAL LIST, though even with this great variety of lists (no two of them are the same, and I could not find one for OSU, though they do have a very robust institutional diversity mission represented by quite a nice web page), there are a few months that ALL of them have in common.

No matter which list you subscribe to, history months encourage a deeper exploration of often underrepresented or overlooked aspects of history. For instance, in February's Black History Month, we are invited to take a closer look at African American history, focusing on both the struggles and achievements of Black individuals throughout history. This promotes a more comprehensive understanding of history, moving beyond a default to Eurocentric narratives.

In taking the time to appreciate these overlooked aspects of history, heritage months also provide a pause for us to celebrate diversity in educational settings, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect starting with our children. Moreover, taking time to celebrate diversity in this way helps students from underrepresented backgrounds feel seen and valued, which is crucial for their social and emotional development. By celebrating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday in January (if you have not seen the wonderful mosaic created by our students in their Buddy Groups, mounted just outside the gym, treat yourself to a gander), we get a bit of a running start on our deeper dive into Black history in February. For students who do not belong

to underrepresented groups, heritage months offer an opportunity to develop empathy and understanding towards different cultures and experiences.

Heritage months also encourage us to think more critically about our experiences and the experiences of others by engaging in activities that encourage perspective-taking, mostly by encouraging students to examine history through the lens of multiple perspectives. For example, during Black History Month, students might explore how historical events connected to the period of time following the Civil War, known as Reconstruction, impacted Black Americans in different ways in different parts of the country, or how Reconstruction impacted the efforts of other groups of marginalized people later in history, leading to a more nuanced understanding of this event. This kind of perspective-taking is a key skill in developing critical thinking abilities, which we know is an important part of an Ashbrook education.

Another important outcome from the establishment of heritage months is the opportunity they give us to be inspired by people who are heroes and role models. A month like February, for example, provides a platform to shine a light on the achievements of individuals from various backgrounds, often in the face of significant obstacles. This can be incredibly inspiring for students, especially those who can see reflections of themselves and their own struggles in these stories. Witnessing the stories of those who have overcome similar struggles, and no longer feeling alone or isolated in their struggles, a child in this scenario is more likely to think to themselves, "If that person can do it, maybe I can too!" In this way, heritage months present students with a range of role models and paths to success these students might not have considered. Even as a White man of a certain age, reading the article Kathy sent me this morning and learning about all that Dr. West overcame to achieve the great things she did in her life (earning a doctorate at 70!), inspired me, and I bet it'd inspire our students too!

Incorporating heritage months into the curriculum ensures that educational content is not stagnant but continually evolving to include diverse perspectives. This not only enriches the curriculum, but also keeps it relevant to a changing world. Moreover, efforts to integrate the disciplines our students are studying, rather than studying them always as separate or stand alone subjects, is considered a best practice method, particularly in the older grades where they are more likely to be siloed in separate academic departments. In this way, heritage months provide teachers with rich opportunities for such interdisciplinary learning. For instance, Black History Month can provide a moment for teachers to work together to create integrated lessons on the legal system, societal changes, literature, art, and music, offering a holistic educational experience that transcends traditional subject boundaries. In these classrooms, the student experience promotes the skills needed to synthesize information in order to create a fuller picture of the world beyond our campus.

Finally, by focusing on the histories of marginalized groups, heritage months can foster a deeper understanding of current social issues and the historical context behind them. For example, it would be very difficult for students to fully appreciate the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement without fully understanding the history of the Civil Rights Movement, Plessy v. Ferguson, or Brown v. the Board of Education. Historical understanding on this level is essential for students to become fully informed and empathetic citizens who can contribute positively to a diverse society. With a more complete understanding of how the history that came before our current experience led to our current experience, our students will develop a greater appreciation for this context, establish the habit of mind to search for and value context in the future, and use this fuller understanding to inform their decisions and evaluations of the world they will enter as adults and members of the electorate.

Heritage months are much more than just monthly observances to check off the list and move to the next month; they are powerful educational tools that promote a deeper, more inclusive, more integrated and empathetic understanding of history and contemporary society. By highlighting the contributions and experiences of various groups, these observances play a critical role in shaping student experiences leading to more well-rounded, culturally sensitive, and socially aware students.