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Ollye B. Conley, The Academy for Science and Foreign Language

Education's Unsung Heroes

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The Academy for Science and Foreign Language Huntsville, AL



Project Description

The Alabama African American Historic Project has as its objective to research and document the history and culture of Huntsville, Alabama's 19th Century African Americans. This project originated from a question asked by students during a field study to Huntsville's historic Maple Hill Cemetery. While at the cemetery, students located graves of Civil War veterans and former governors of Alabama. Magnificent stories about their lives and outstanding contributions to the city were told. "Where were the African Americans?" was the question asked. This question evolved into Field Studies, Pictorial and Artifacts Exhibits, and Interdisciplinary Units.

Field Study - Students revived an old cemetery, engaged in original research using old documents, newspapers, journals, city council minutes, census records, and local historical data.

Pictorial and Artifacts Exhibit - This exhibit depicts and tells the story of early contributors to the development of Huntsville.

Interdisciplinary Instructional Units - Students and teachers have developed primary, intermediate and middle grade instructional materials, integrating social studies/history, English, science, and the performing arts.

The use of the African American Cemetery to document the history of African Americans in the community and the involvement of multiracial and multicultural elementary and middle school students and parents in research using primary sources is unique. The development of a project was driven by questions asked by middle school students is also unique.

Benefits to Students

How many students will the project directly benefit? Approximately 450 Kindergarten through eighth grade students will benefit from the project. These students are from a wide range of abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds. They reflect the City of Huntsville's population: 35% African American and 65% other.

How will your project improve student learning? Students have engaged in problem solving, researching, interviewing, writing, math, and planning skills. They have made oral presentations at local, state, regional and National Service Learning Conferences. Students have conducted oral interviews, transcribed information, and used research skills to write stories, and biographical sketches about selected 19th Century contributors. Math and technology skills were used to plat the cemetery and record names of decedents in appropriate graves. Students conducted research at the cemetery and in the community to write the text for an historical marker commemorating the oldest existing African American Cemetery in the city. Many skills were used to develop instructional units and to establish the first annual Community

Day.

How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your project? This project is evaluated through increased academic achievement as measured by letter grades, teacher observation, standardized test scores, improved self-esteem and behavior. It is also measured through research conducted as a part of the Seven Portrait Schools sponsored by The National Youth Leadership Council and funded by the Kellogg Foundation.

Use of Funds

Tell what funds/money, materials or other resources you currently use (or will use) to operate your project. This project has received funding and resources from: The Learn and Serve Alabama Grant; The Huntsville Education Foundation; Raytheon; Kellogg Grant; State Representative Laura Hall; Huntsville City Council; local churches; /technical assistance from Alabama Constitution Village; Delta Omega Zeta; and Alabama State Black Archives.

How would you use the \$2,000 award? This money will be used to restore aged headstones. More than 166 headstones are in need of cleaning and/or repair. This award would provide for the restoration of approximately eight (8) headstones.

How would you use additional money up to \$25,000? Five thousand dollars would be used to clean and restore headstones. Filming, editing, lighting, and sound equipment will be purchased to produce a documentary of 19th Century African Americans and their contributions to Huntsville, Alabama. Students working with educational and commercial television technicians will produce will produce a documentary incorporating their research, artifacts, and oral histories. It would provide another opportunity for students to use technology and academic skills as they work with professional videographers, writers and community officials. Additionally, books written by students to supplement the K-8 Curriculum will be published and made available for all 29 elementary schools.

