

It's Her Story: Josephine Baker - A Graphic Novel

EDUCATOR GUIDE



Josephine Baker left a segregated America in 1925 and became the most famous entertainer in Paris, France. She went on to be the first Black woman to star in a movie, a volunteer spy during World War II, and the mother of twelve adopted children from around the world. Then, she returned to the States to dance for American audiences and bring her voice to the Civil Rights Movement.

It's Her Story: Josephine Baker

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Ages 7 to 10

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DISCUSSION

Ask these questions to the class as a whole or have students discuss in small groups.

1. What are some character traits you see in Josephine Baker throughout her life? (Generosity, charm, determination, resourcefulness, independence, courage, hopefulness.) Choose a trait and make a timeline showing related incidents in Josephine's life. (As an option, small groups can create collaborative timelines that illustrate multiple traits.)
2. What did Josephine do to maintain her dignity and self-respect when she was treated poorly in the U.S.? (She moved out of the country, she did not let others define her talents or dreams, she refused to perform in segregated venues, she spoke out against racism.)
3. Think about your answers to the prompts above. What are some ways you can be like Josephine Baker when someone treats you or others poorly? (Know you deserve better, leave the place where the poor treatment is happening, stand up for others, only join activities where everyone is treated fairly, don't let put-downs shake your confidence.)

CLASSROOM COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Tell students that one of the ways Josephine Baker carried secrets for the Allies was by writing notes in invisible ink on her sheet music. (In fact, use of invisible ink to transport important information goes back to ancient times!) Have the class write messages with their own invisible ink.

Supplies needed: baking soda, water, grape concentrate or grape juice, cups or bowls, cotton swabs, measuring/mixing spoon, white paper (for extra intrigue, use copies of sheet music instead)

Instructions:

1. Distribute paper and cotton swabs to students.
2. Combine equal parts baking soda and water and mix. Pour into cups and distribute to students.
3. Students dip the cotton swab into the mixture and write with it on a sheet of paper.
4. Let the paper dry.
5. To read the secret message, students wet a paper towel or cloth with the grape juice and gently rub the cloth over the paper.



CLASSROOM COMMUNITY CONNECTION (Continued)

Science notes: The grape juice acts as a pH indicator and changes color when it interacts with the baking soda, which is a base. Experiment with different ratios of baking soda to water, different types of grape juice, and grape concentrate versus juice.

Making meaning: After students complete a first round of writing and discovery, tell them that even though they don't have war secrets to pass on, they can help Josephine Baker continue her work encouraging people to pursue their dreams. To inspire the right frame of mind, have the class come up with phrases offering encouragement and support, and list on the board. Then distribute new pieces of paper and have students write a positive message using the invisible ink. Let dry, collect, and pass back out at random for recipients to uncover. Alternatively, have students write messages for younger students or soon-to-graduates, and deliver—perhaps secretly—to the other classroom.

ART CONNECTION

Josephine Baker's life took some fascinating turns. Have students visually capture her talents, beliefs, and place in history by creating a personal crest for her. Use this activity to introduce or reinforce symbolism (language arts) and/or design (art or multimedia).

1. Explain that a personal crest uses colors, symbols, images, and other design elements to show who a person is and what is important to them. Show an example of a personal crest.
2. As a class or in small groups, have students write down people, places, events, activities, characteristics, and beliefs that were important to Josephine Baker.
3. Have each student choose from among these concepts to develop a personal crest. If you wish, create a printable template like one of the ones pictured.
4. Have students share their crests with each other and explain their design choices.

