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# A Sign of the Times: Saluting the Tuskegee Airmen and Their Path to Victory

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## Revised Lesson Plan

1. Title: A Sign of the Times: Saluting the Tuskegee Airmen and their Path to Victory

2. Overview:

This lesson uses inquiry, primary sources, and the Library of Congress to investigate the social context within which the Tuskegee Airmen began as a segregated unit and the obstacles they faced as they fought for their country in World War II. The lesson also investigates how the Tuskegee Airmen persevered for and for equal rights; and acceptance in the armed forces.

3. Goal:

Students will use the plight of the Tuskegee Airmen and WWII, the challenges and victories, to illustrate and support their understanding of how the military became integrated. They will explore concepts such as segregation, racism, discrimination, integration “Jim Crow,” as well as concepts of patriotism, determination, perseverance, and valor.

4. Objectives:

1. Students will research how the Tuskegee Airmen became a special unit in the Armed Forces and the challenges they faced.
2. Students will define terms: segregation; discrimination, integration; racism; patriotism, heroism—and others---as they relate to the Tuskegee Airmen
3. Students will name the social injustice(s) evidenced by the formation of a segregated unit and understand how the Tuskegee Airmen were affected.
4. Students will evaluate how the Tuskegee Airmen responded to the social injustice when confronted or challenged.
5. Students will research a variety of primary sources to support their understanding
6. Students will analyze primary sources using the Primary Analysis Tool for Photographs.
7. Students will view the film, "NightFighters" to view primary footage of the Tuskegee Airmen in flight and real-time situations
8. Students will listen to the personal experience of Tuskegee airman, Alexander Jefferson and reflect in journal
9. Students will study and reflect on the Desegregation of the Armed Forces Timeline
10. Students will evaluate the path to victory and honor, and then reflect in their journal an understanding of the “two battles” the Tuskegee Airmen had to win.

5. Investigative Questions:

1. Why was the military segregated?
2. How were the Tuskegee Airmen able to accomplish what they did (flew over 700 missions, never lost a bomber to enemy aircraft; earned more than 744 Air Medals and clusters, more than 100 flying crosses; 14 Bronze Stars, 8 Purple Hearts, a Silver Star and a Legion of Merit), in spite of segregation of the military and the US?
3. What were some of the events that occurred that helped the Tuskegee Airmen begin to integrate the military?

4. When did the Tuskegee Airmen become fully integrated into the military? How did they gain full acceptance?
5. How would you evaluate the path to victory and honor?
6. What would you say to a Tuskegee Airman if given the opportunity?

6. Time Periods (9 forty- minute periods)

Period 1: Read and discuss "What's Great about...? The Tuskegee Airmen," Peruse "Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History" Clarify and define vocabulary

Period 2: Read and discuss "the Tuskegee Airmen Story." Visit the Library of Congress Website in computer lab for primary sources on the Tuskegee Airmen

Period 3, 4, View and discuss the film "NightFighters.' Reflect in Journal

Period 5: Examine evidence of "Jim Crow" from Library of Congress Photo and Print Collection, in the computer lab. Complete analysis form.

Period 6: Listen to and reflect on Tuskegee Airmen, Alexander Jefferson's experience during WWII.

Period 7: Read, analyze and discuss the "Desegregation of the Armed Forces timeline. Read analyze and discuss: Executive Order 9981

Period 8: Read, analyze and discuss, "Tuskegee Airmen share story of perseverance"

Period 9: Reflect on the Tuskegee Airmen's path to victory in your Journal.

7. Recommended Grade Range: 4-10

8. Subject Sub/subject: Language Arts, Social Studies, History, Technology

9. Standards

IL. 5 Research: Use the Language Arts to acquire, assess and communicate information

5A: Locate organize and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas

5A2b: Organize and integrate information with a variety of sources (e.g. books, interviews, library reference materials, and websites CD/ROMS

5B: Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources

5C: Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats

IL 14: Political Systems: Understand political systems with an emphasis on the US

14C: Understand the election processes and responsibilities of citizens

14C3: Compare historical issues involving rights, roles and states of individuals in relation to municipalities, states and nations

IL 16 History: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.

10. Credits: Phyllis Shalewa Crowe; assisted by Joseph Ruggiero; computer lab teacher

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## PREPARATION

### 11. Materials Used

Handouts of all of the activities, rubrics, computers

### 12. Resources Used

Book: "What's Great about...? The Tuskegee Airmen"

Book: "The Tuskegee Airmen Story"

"Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History"

Desegregation of the Armed Forces: Chronology

Executive Order 9981

Memos and press releases re: Executive Order 9981, July 26, 1948

#### Online Items:

Title: A Tuskegee Airmen's Harrowing WWII Tale

URL: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6467779>

Author/Creator: NPR

Date: November 10, 2006

Title: The Black Wings Story: African American Pioneer Aviators

URL: <http://www.nasm.si.edu/blackwings/hstory/>

Author/Creator: Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

#### Sources:

Library of Congress Online Items:

Title: World War II, Segregation Abroad and at Home

URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aohtml/exhibit/aopart8.html#08a>

Author/Creator: Library of Congress

Title: African American Pioneers

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/afam-pioneers.html>

Date: August 11, 2010

Title: Experiencing War: African Americans at War: Fighting Two Battles

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/ex-war-afam.html>

Author/Creator: Veterans History Project

Date: January 25, 2006

Title: Why Should We March?

URL: <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mssmisc/ody/ody0808/0808001v.jpg>

Author/Creator: African American Odyssey

Title: Photographs of signs Enforcing Racial Discrimination: Documentation by Farm Security Administration –Office of War Information Photographers

URL: [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/085\\_disc.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/085_disc.html)

Author/Creator: Various Photographers in series

Date(s): 1937-1943

Title: Members of the 322nd Fighter Group in Ramitelli, Italy, March 1945

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007675006/>

Author/Creator: Frissell, Toni

Date: 1945 March

Title: Members of the 332nd Fighter Group in a briefing room, Ramitelli, Italy, March, 1945

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007675005/>

Author/Creator: Frissell, Toni

Date: 1945 March

Title: Black Fighter Pilot Series: "Escape Kits" (cyanide) being distributed to fighter pilots at air base in southern Italy, 1945

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007675009/>

Author/Creator: Frissell, Toni

Date: 1945 March

Title: Edward C Gleed and two unidentified Tuskegee airmen, Ramitelli Italy, March 1945

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007675075/>

Author/Creator: Frissell, Toni

Date: 1945 March

Title: Photograph of several Tuskegee airmen at Ramitelli, Italy, March 1945

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007675064/>

Author/Creator: Frissell, Toni

Date: 1945 March

Title: Tuskegee Airmen's Museum, Tuskegee, Alabama

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010637803/>

Author/Creator: Highsmith, Carol M.

Date: 2010, March 8

Title: Tuskegee Airmen's Museum, Tuskegee, Alabama

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010637804/>

Author/Creator: Highsmith, Carol M.  
Date: 2010, March 8

Title: Executive Order 9981  
URL: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981a.htm>  
Author/Creator: Harry Truman, President  
Date: July 26, 1948

Title: Memos and press releases re: Executive Order 991, July 26, 1948  
URL: [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/desegregation/large/documents/pdf/2-7.pdf](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/documents/pdf/2-7.pdf)  
Author/Creator: Official file, Truman Papers  
Date: July 26, 1948

Title: Desegregation of the Armed Forces Chronology  
URL: [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=chronology](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=chronology)  
Author/Creator: Truman Library Online file

Title: Chief Anderson and Eleanor Roosevelt  
URL: <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/tuskegee/lgimage/air29.htm>  
Author/Creator: P.H. Polk  
Date: March 1941

Title: Commander's call  
URL: <http://bellsouthpwp2.net/r/e/redtails/id151.htm>  
Author/Creator Unknown

Title: The Tuskegee Airmen  
URL: <http://www.alabamamoments.state.al.us/sec52det.html>  
Author/Creator: Alabama Department of Archives & History

Title: Tuskegee Airmen share story of Perseverance  
URL: <http://tuskegeeairmen.org/uploads/Perseverance.pdf>  
Author: Dawn Neues

#### Sources:

Hardesty, Von. Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History. New York: Harper Collins, 2008. Print  
Orr, Tamara. What's so Great about...? The Tuskegee Airmen  
Mitchell Lane Publishers 2010 Print  
Homan, Lynn M. Reilly, Thomas. The Tuskegee Airmen Story  
Pelican Publishing Company 2002 Print  
PROCEDURE

### 13. Description of Procedure

Lessons will take place in the classroom and in the computer lab.

#### Period 1:

Introduce the story, "What's so great about...? The Tuskegee Airmen." After reading the title, ask if anyone can answer that question. Probe: Has anyone heard of Tuskegee before? Do you know where it is? What would you like to know about the Tuskegee Airmen? We will begin K-W-L process. Read and discuss story. (Connect, Wonder) Allow students to peruse *Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History*. Let them know that they will research the Tuskegee Airmen to find out more about them. Have students to take notes and write down unfamiliar words or words they are unsure about to create their word bank. Have students to "think, pair and share" their words. Teacher supplements word list, making sure the following appear: segregation, discrimination, integration, determination, desegregation, racism, patriotism, heroism, Jim Crow and valor. Students write their own definitions, and then define words with partner. Teacher provides working definitions for students. (Connect, investigate and Wonder)

#### Period 2:

Read and discuss, "The Tuskegee Airmen Story"

Remind students of the questions they had regarding the Tuskegee Airmen. In the computer lab, students are given the assignment to locate the Library of Congress Website, and begin to search the site for answers to their questions. They will search photos, videos and articles about the Tuskegee Airmen. Students will begin photo analysis activity. With the assistance of the computer teacher, students will create folders for their finds and begin to answer the investigative questions beginning with: What were some of the problems or obstacles the Tuskegee Airmen faced, and how did they overcome them? (Connect, Wonder, Investigate and reflect)

#### Periods 3 and 4

Ask students to share how they are beginning to answer the question posed, and any additional questions they may have. Introduce the film, *NightFighter*." Students will watch a portion of the film and reflect in their journal. They will share their reflections with their classmates. (Connect, Wonder, Investigate Construct, and Express)

#### Period 5

Students examine and analyze images of "Jim Crow" from the Library of Congress Photos and Prints Collection. Students will enlarge photos for detail use photo analysis tool to write what they see, think, and wonder about the photos. Students will view photos as a "sign of the times" the Tuskegee Airmen had to endure. (Connect, Wonder, Construct, Investigate and Reflect)

#### Period 6

Students will listen to a Tuskegee Airmen discuss what he experienced during the war

in: “A Tuskegee Airman’s Harrowing Tale” Reflect in Journal and share with classmates. (Connect, Wonder, Investigate, Construct, Express and Reflect)

#### Period 7

Read and discuss an abridged Desegregation of the Armed Forces Chronology. Students will work with partners to examine the timeline, making notes on dates that are of a particular interest to them in answering the investigative questions and others that they have. Ask students to find Executive Order 9981 and write about its significance. Did Executive Order 9981 end segregation immediately? When did segregation of the military end? Why do you think it took so long? (Connect, Wonder, Investigate, Construct, Express and Reflect)

#### Period 8

Have students to read: “Tuskegee Airmen share story of Perseverance.” Review what perseverance means and give examples. Ask students if they have ever had to persevere. When? Why? Is perseverance a good quality to have? Why was it important for the Tuskegee Airmen to have this quality? Discuss and reflect in Journal (Connect, Wonder, Investigate, Construct, Express, Reflect)

#### Period 9

Students will synthesize all of the information from the previous activities they have discovered and shared about The Tuskegee Airmen to create their final Journal entry. They will list the accomplishments made by the Tuskegee Airmen in spite of the barriers they had to face on their path to victory. Students will ask and any additional questions they would like to explore further. (Connect, Wonder, Construct, Express and Reflect)

#### 14. Evaluation:

Students will write a reflection on:

- “NightFighters”
- Desegregation of the Armed Forces: Chronology (abridged)
- Tuskegee Airmen share story of perseverance
- Tuskegee Airman shares harrowing tale

Students will incorporate words from our vocabulary list to write their reflections. Students will draw their own conclusions as to why the airmen were victorious: What obstacles they had to overcome to reach victory, what qualities they displayed and how they made it through.

Students will also reflect on the photos from the Library of Congress as a “sign of the times.”

A rubric has been provided for the evaluation.



#### 14. Teacher Reflection

The Tuskegee Airmen Unit has been a journey for me. I wanted my students to have a powerful anticipatory set: What do you know and want to know about the Tuskegee Airmen: the assumptions made about African Americans, how the units were formed, how they were treated, how they overcame. I knew from the outset that I was dealing with complex concepts for fourth graders. However, since we had already completed units on the civil rights movement, the Great Migration, and discussed the "Night Riders," I felt they were ready. They built on the vocabulary already exposed to, and were able to apply words we used like segregation, integration, and racism, and understood Jim Crow laws in context. They also identified words in context that I had not given them: inferiority and humiliation. These concepts were evident in the DVD "NightFighters" as we shared examples. Students demonstrated their understanding of primary sources. I felt that I was successful in exposing them to a part of our history that shows up as negative, and how some of our great pioneers made it positive in that they paved the way for the freedoms of us all. Just as Alexander Jefferson in the NPR first hand primary source account reflected:

"Malcolm, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, I am a part of the civil rights movement!" He alluded to the "two battles" the airmen had to fight. Students were curious to see what he looked like as a young pilot and as an elder, and they researched him and located the book he had written.

However, I feel that I tried to do too much. Each of the lesson periods could have been extended. The lessons in this unit could have easily taken at least four (4) more class periods for my age/grade. Older students could be more successful with the periods as outlined. Still, I had time allocated for students to "think, pair and share," but could have allowed more time for these activities. My students enjoy sharing and only a few were able to share their reflections with the class.

Some of the students wrote a paper on the Tuskegee Airmen for extra credit. They learned a wealth of information and more importantly, they know and appreciate how to find out information from a variety of sources, and that the Library of Congress is an excellent source.

With the assistance of Joseph Ruggiero in the Computer Lab, students were adept with using the computer to locate photos and complete the analysis. They were excited about the images they found and their expertise in placing the photos as well as any notes in their folders. One area I would change would be to simplify the analysis tool. There were several questions about "social context". Perhaps that concept is too advanced for my young students, and maybe the question could have read, "What evidence do you have that Jim Crow (or some other concept) is shown in this photo?" Some of the students wanted to do multiple photos. He shared with them ways to access the Library of Congress site to simplify your search.

I was impressed with the level of understanding my students had on the conditions and experiences the Tuskegee Airmen had to face. One image that stood out for them was

seeing in “NightFighters,” an enactment of how Benjamin O. Davis had to sit and eat alone in a segregated “mess hall” every day of the week, but on Sundays, he had go around to each table to ask permission to be seated, and was denied each time. One wonders whether he was able eat at all that day. Students understood what humiliation meant.

Looking at the Desegregation of the Armed forces: chronology; students were able to evaluate how events come together, and that as a country; we were not ready to integrate the armed forces until conditions were right. We also discussed the idea of a “turning point” in the history of the Tuskegee Airmen and several students identified Truman’s Executive Order 9981, which they studied, as the turning point toward integration, while others thought it was Eleanor Roosevelt’s ride with “Chief” Anderson.

One of my students reflected, “Just like we read in, ‘Bud, Not Buddy,’ when one door closes another door opens,’ the unit on The Tuskegee Airmen opened up the minds of my students.

#### Further Exploration:

I would explore the accounts of Alexander Jefferson: He named bombers and gave detail about parachuting; with all of their training, they never practiced how to jump out of a plane. What is a POW? Who were the allies and enemies of WWII? What did he find in Dachau Germany? What do you know about Holocaust?

#### Appendix: The Inquiry Cycle ‘Defined’

Connect: Students connect new insight, gain background information, observe, learn and experience.

Wonder: Students develop questions and create hypothesis or predictions.

Investigate: Find and evaluate information to answer questions; test hypotheses; think about information to illuminate new questions and hypotheses.

Construct: Construct new understandings connected to previous knowledge; draw conclusions about questions and hypotheses.

Express: Apply understandings connected to previous knowledge; draw conclusions about questions and hypotheses.

Reflect: Reflect on own learning; ask new questions