



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **Prince Hall and His Organization of Black Free Masons in the United States**

Curriculum Unit 91.03.02  
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I became fascinated with the reasons for Prince Hall becoming a Freemason. Why would a black man, in an era when slavery was the only social condition thought to be relevant to his existence, have the courage to embrace an organization associated with kings, noblemen and George Washington, etc., etc., and be of the opinion that the philosophy of such an ancient order of men be kindred to him and other men of similar circumstances?

Immediately, one can associate the plight of today's black people and the same struggle which existed over two hundred years ago as an ongoing situation. Black people in 1991, as a majority, are faced with the same degrading conditions as slaves in Prince Hall's time. Although education is available to everyone in the United States, it is the minority population which faces so many problems in obtaining an education. People of color throughout the world still suffer from hunger, do the most menial work for the lowest pay, live in the worst substandard conditions on earth, are suffering from the most deadly diseases. These conditions are no different than were had by slaves who died from smallpox, measles, etc. Minorities have been forced through generations of sub-human treatment to choose to kill one another either by guns or drugs, as though reading the subconscious exploits of a country and the world since their arrival to America. Challenging death seems to have far better chances than remaining on this earth as just a person . . . a black person.

Since the societal circumstances of the black man are so similar, I thought it time to re-examine the strengths that Prince Hall must have seen in this establishment that might have answers to the possibility of solving some of our present problems.

I have extracted some of the principles of Freemasonry, and please remember that I am a lay person who has no affiliation with this organization, in order that those of us who are trying to guide, counsel and teach today's youth can find some additional resources by which we could all come up with some answers to the many perplexing problems facing our adult human and our children's existence.

The principal purpose of the freemasons is to strive for producing the finest type of character and culture through fellowship and mutual helpfulness.

Understanding that life as it exists has its roots in the past must be examined; so that one does not become trapped in what has already failed man.

Those seeking admittance into the order wish to elevate themselves socially.

Masonry serves to improve private conduct, and relationships through fellowship and discipline.

All ritualism is primarily to increase the importance of the message conveyed.

Masonry should inspire and stimulate many interests because variety is wholesome and beneficial.

Ethics is the primary teaching of all Masonic work:

1. To produce a finer grade of men.
2. Its many lessons are intended to make domestic relations cleaner and more binding.
3. To nurture the spirit of charity through tolerance and helpfulness.
4. To be concerned with the human behavior and the possibility for its improvement.

To seek the meaning of the Universe, its structure, workings and purpose, but most of all the place of man in the scheme of things. In other words, to seek the SUPREME ARCHITECT.

Every creation testifies to a creator.

Prince Hall seemed to recognize that the social attitudes which exist do not determine the legitimacy for one's existence. And although pigment can separate, it most assuredly cannot impugn the existing rights in order to deny the owner the protection of their rights.

The following pages are set up for students, teachers, etc. to discuss the above philosophies in relationship to our society as it exists today.

## TIMELINE

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A TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS IN BLACK HISTORY WHICH WERE TAKING PLACE IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE LIFE OF PRINCE HALL AND THOSE SEEKING FREEDOM FROM THE THROES OF SLAVERY.

*EVENTS IN THE U.S.*

### **July 4, 1776**

The First Continental Congress meets to sign the Constitution of the United States of America.

### **1787**

The U.S. Constitution was signed with the inclusion to count all slaves as 3/5 of a person.

### **1808**

African slave trade prohibited, but continues illegally; at least 250,000 slaves are smuggled in before Civil War.

### **1820**

Missouri Compromise.

### **1822**

Slave revolt led by Denmark Vesey in South Carolina.

### **1828**

John Quincy Adams defeated for Presidency, in part because of his stand against slavery.

## *INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENTS*

### **March 5, 1770**

Chrispus Attucks, a black man, armed only with a cordwood stick, was one of the first Americans to die in the beginning of the American Revolution.

### **April, 1770**

Prince Hall was granted his manumission (freedom) papers.

### **March 6, 1775**

Prince Hall and fourteen other free colored men were initiated to the Irish Army Lodge No. 441 of

the Constitution of the Irish Grand Lodge.

***January 13, 1777***

Hall and eight other black men sign a petition requesting the Massachusetts state legislature to abolish slavery, being that it is incompatible to any patriotic cause.

***March 2 and June 30, 1784***

African Lodge No. 1 applied to the Grand Lodge of England for a charter.

***September 29, 1784***

A charter was granted for African Lodge No. 459. This order was executed by the authority of the Duke of Cumberland, the Grand Master of the Mother Grand Lodge in England.

***January 4, 1787***

Hall, as grand master, and eleven other members of his lodge, petitioned the House of Representatives proposing legislature which gave Negroes, who found themselves in very intolerable circumstances of nonequality as American citizens, a separate state abroad with its own Negro pastors and bishops. With the assistance of money from congregations or direct passage assistance to Africa, money to purchase land, etc., these colonized them to a more civilized way of life. The House defeated this novel request.

***October 17, 1787***

Once again, Hall petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for a means to be provided for the education of colored children, since their parents (as free people of color) were taxed as were white people. The request was denied.

***1807***

Prince Hall dies.

## LET'S DISCUSS YOUR THINKING ON PRINCE HALL

Students may need to do research in order to have a better insight on some questions.

These discussion questions can be applicable to any grade level.

### *Knowing when to help Yourself*

1. Was it right for Prince Hall to disregard the laws of his time and teach himself to read and write? Why?
2. How do you think this helped Prince Hall later in life?
3. Why do you think Prince Hall was attracted to Freemasonry?
4. Was Prince Hall different than other slaves? Why?
5. Do you think the white people had respect for Prince Hall? How was this shown?
6. Should Prince Hall have taken up arms against those who were against him being a free man?
7. Was it reasonable for Prince Hall and his followers to think of going back to Africa?

## GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING THE "PRINCE HALL LEGACY"

(According to grade levels)

Teaching the philosophical principles of Prince Hall to a broad range of grade levels calls for a variety of approaches. In this section, there will be at least two different approaches offered for grades 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12. Use your own discretion as to what approach is most effective.

Teaching third graders about Prince Hall will obviously call for a very different approach than teaching high school students about, say, the nonexistence of citizenship rights endured by free blacks; especially when there was such a blatant obstruction of freedom for one group, and, on the other hand, the U.S. was striving for its own freedom.

When preparing your plans for a unit on Prince Hall, I hope that you will think of your lesson objectives without too much complexity. Do not overlook the simple and basic principles that all men desire to live by.

Consider carefully questions which are going to stimulate your particular classroom's thinking in regard to the values of masonic philosophy and how this relates to the students' own personal values. Another objective of your lesson plans should be the teaching of critical thinking and/or decisionmaking.

The main idea for setting up a critical thinking activitt is to make sure that the students understand the main concept that I have been trying to outline in the *Prince Hall Legacy* , and that concept is to enhance character

development in each student who is exposed to this unit.

On the following page is an outline which I hope will help you reinforce character development in your students. At least it is hoped that they will start thinking about the attributes needed to make-up the good character traits needed to make a respected citizen for the future.

## CRITICAL THINKING ON CHARACTER

### CONCEPTUALIZING

*(figure available in print form)*

*Grade's 3-5*

The outline for this age group could consist of a series of interpretive pictures and brief paragraphs which would outline the meaning of each philosophy. Some suggestions would be using pictures with each child's interpretive paragraph of that particular philosophy.

Some suggestions for using the picture-paragraph:

1. An open, nonthreatening discussion for question-answer lesson.
2. Whole class activity of pasting up a mural of individual pictures and interpretive paragraphs.

For more capable students in this age group, the "Timeline" of important events in Black History during the life of Prince Hall could be used as a research project (one topic at a time).

*Grades 5-8*

The "Teacher or Group Leader Resource Guide" can be effective for this age group. The topics in this area are intended for group discussion and self-evaluation.

If you have students who are far below grade level for this age group, simply have them do the comprehensive strategy for grades 3-5. Don't forget to review the "Objectives for Teaching Critical Thinking."

*Grades 9-12*

This is my opinion for an age group that I have never taught, so I know that there are better strategies for teaching in this area than I probably have planned. Nevertheless, I would like to be consistent with the rest of the grade level teaching strategies and offer some follow through on this subject.\*

To follow up on the "Additional Shapers of History in Prince Hall's Time," I think it might be appropriate at this grade level to have your students use the *Timeline* and fill in prominent Black Americans, and what they have achieved during those important periods in the building of Americans to make us the great power that we are today. Please point out how these achievements were done despite the odds.

\* To those who teach on this grade level—I would appreciate any input that you have after having used this "Prince Hall Legacy" unit. Thank you.

## *TEACHER OR GROUP LEADER RESOURCE GUIDE*

1. Does one have to be a slave, one who is the property of someone else, in order not to have freedom? Expound on how drugs make a person lose their freedom, and become a slave to an invisible substance is just as another person holding you against your will; only you're doing it to yourself.
2. Why is it an asset to have a working knowledge of some basic vocational skills? Are you more valuable to yourself and society? Why?
3. Depending on the grade level, there should be some discussion on this dual contradiction facing our country at this time, and how Prince Hall must have felt having to make some decision as to what his role should be in such an important time in history. (What decision would you have made based upon your students' present knowledge?)
4. Does the runaway slave who is seeking his freedom have any other alternative to becoming a soldier? Other positive alternatives should be taken into consideration, i.e., working to buy one's freedom, but unlikely; trying to run away, also risky and unlikely.
5. Again, why do you think these two factors are important in establishing oneself as a productive member of society?

## *ADDITIONAL SHAPERS OF HISTORY IN PRINCE HALL'S TIME*

(for child research)

Thomas Fuller of Virginia, the great mathematician.

Benjamin Banneker, a noted astronomer, surveyor and mathematician.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, gallant soldier and prudent statesman.

Phyllis Wheatley, poetess.

Dr. James Derham, eminent physician.

Crispus Attucks, was shot by British soldiers in the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770. This was the first military action in which black Americans participated.

Can you name additional prominent black Americans who have shaped America's history, and who, in the process, whether or not they were masons, pursued the principles of the masonic guidelines? Which principles did they embrace?

## *TEACHER OR GROUP LEADER RESOURCE GUIDE HELPER SHEET ON FAMOUS BLACK AMERICANS*

***Introduction These people did not accomplish what they did in life by not having specific guidelines to obtain their goals. Can you associate the Masonic philosophy?***

1. John Hope (1868-1936, know his education background)?
2. Constance B. Motley (appointed to what in 1966)?
3. Hiram Revels (elected to what in 1870)?
4. W.E.B. DuBois (born 1868, why is he famous)?
5. Dred Scott (reason for famous decision made in his name)?
6. Robert L. Vann (founded what in 1910)?
7. Dr. Charles Drew (died 1950, why)?
8. Matthew Henson (what area of exploration)?
9. Hank Aaron?
10. Robert Smalls (captured what in 1862)?
11. George Edwin Taylor (nominated for this in 1904)?
12. Leroy (Satchel) Paige (signed onto this team in 1948)?
13. Nat Turner (noted for what and why)?
14. Alain Locke (1886 given this academic honor)?
15. Ralph Bunche (given this in 1950)?
16. Thurgood Marshall (nominated to this post in 1961)?
17. Levi Jackson (Yale University 1948)?
18. P.B.S. Pinchback (became acting governor of what state in 1872)?
19. Carter G. Woodson (born 1875, famous for)?
20. Andrew Young (1976)?

## ACTIVITIES

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### *TIMELINE HISTORICAL RESEARCH*

It may be difficult for children beyond the sixth grade to comprehend the difficulties Prince Hall faced as a slave and a free man during this era.

For grades 6 and on, though, I think that this is a wonderful opportunity to acquaint students with the building of America as a whole, but then to look at what was happening to a part of America's population who was totally at a disadvantage as to . . . .

### *MAP LOCATIONS*

Younger students and older students should be able to locate all of the geographic locations having to do with the life of Prince Hall.

Also, a brief discussion of what the United States' boundaries, geographically, were might be interesting to discuss.

### *CHARACTER CARDS*

Depending on the grade level, I would suggest this for grades 4-12: pick out some of the Masonic philosophies and describe a person you know who practices these traits. Elaborate also on how this person has personally affected you.

### *READINGS IN RESEARCH*

(Adults)

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Huggins, Nathan. *Black Odyssey* .

Mackey, Albert G. *Jurisprudence of Free Masonry* . Chicago, Ill. The Masonic History Co., 1962.

Meltzer, Milton. *The Black Americans* . New York. Thomas Y. Cromwell. 1984.

Norman, Diane. Prudence Crandalles School. *Cobblestone, The History Magazine for Young People #4*, (February 1983), Pages 24-27. Introduces children (grades 5-9) to the difficulties free blacks faced in gaining an education.

Ofosu, Appiah L.H. *People in Bondage* . Minneapolis, Minn., Lerner Pub. Co., 1971.

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