

The Harlem African Burial Ground

Youth Workshop Series Curriculum

Curriculum Overview

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The Harlem African Burial Ground Youth Workshop Series introduces students to the historical significance of the Harlem African Burial Ground through age-appropriate, interactive sessions that promote historical inquiry, cultural reflection, and civic engagement.



This curriculum supports students in understanding the vital role of African-descended people in shaping the history of Harlem and New York City. It also recognizes the importance of acknowledging the Indigenous peoples, particularly the Lenape, who originally inhabited this land and whose presence is interwoven into the fabric of New York City's history.

Through structured, hands-on learning experiences, students reflect on their own family histories, engage with historical narratives, and explore the importance of preserving memory and honoring ancestors.

A Unique Approach



This youth curriculum offers a dynamic and age-appropriate way for young people to connect with history, heritage, and their own sense of place. Unlike traditional classroom lessons or adult-centered workshops, these sessions are designed specifically with young learners in mind - combining creative expression, personal storytelling, and hands-on exploration.

Each workshop meets students where they are developmentally, sparking curiosity and reflection through activities like family tree building, analyzing historical artifacts, and designing symbolic memorials. Students aren't just learning about history—they are actively discovering how their own stories fit within it.



Through this curriculum, young people are invited to consider their role in preserving memory, honoring ancestors, and shaping the future of their communities. It's an experience that blends personal identity with historical understanding, offering a meaningful entry point into local history and civic awareness.

Workshop Structure by Grade Level

The HABG Youth Curriculum provides developmentally appropriate workshops for the following age groups, incorporating family tree exploration as a key component for each level.

Grades K - 5 (30 minutes) – Exploring Family & Heritage

This introductory workshop is designed to help young children begin thinking about the people who shape their lives, both relatives and chosen family, and understand the importance of memory and connection. Grounded in storytelling and personal reflection, this session encourages students to explore how their own family and community relationships contribute to a shared sense of history.

Facilitators should create a warm and welcoming environment where children feel safe sharing their thoughts and experiences. The emphasis is on making history feel personal and relevant by connecting big ideas like heritage and remembrance to everyday relationships and familiar routines.

Key Learning Objectives

- Introduce the concept of family history and the importance of elders.
- Help students identify and document their family members through an age-appropriate family tree activity.
- Begin to develop an understanding of historical preservation and why remembering our ancestors matters.

Workshop Run of Show

Theme: “Who are we connected to, and how do we remember them?”

Run of Show:

- **Welcome & Connection Circle (5 minutes)**
NYCEDC & HABG Introduced (BPC Team Member)
Children are welcomed and introduced to the day's theme. (NYCEDC Team Member)
Question asked: “Who are you connected to at school, in your neighborhood, or at church?”

1. Storytelling & Family Talk (8 minutes)

Facilitator presents a short, age-appropriate story about the Harlem African Burial Ground.

Focus: “A long time ago, people in Harlem were buried in a special place that was forgotten for many years. Now, we’re remembering them to honor who they were and what they gave to our community.”

Follow-up discussion: “What makes someone feel like family, even if they’re not related to you?”

2. My Family & Friends Tree (12 minutes)

Students fill in a simple family and friends tree using pictures, words, or drawings. Facilitator provides examples of how people like godparents, neighbors, or family friends are often seen as family too.

3. Reflection & Sharing (5 minutes)

Prompt: “What is something special someone in your family or community has taught you?”, “What is your favorite memory?” A few students will share their thoughts with the group.

4. Closing (5 minutes)

Recap message: “We’re all part of a bigger story. Remembering who came before us helps us feel proud of where we come from.”

Grades 6 - 8 (45 minutes) – Understanding the Historical Significance of the HABG

This workshop guides students through an exploration of the Harlem African Burial Ground as a historical site that reveals powerful stories about ancestry, community, and resilience. Students begin to make connections between their personal histories and broader historical narratives, deepening their understanding of how African and Indigenous people have shaped New York City.

Facilitators should encourage curiosity and dialogue, helping students think critically about how history is remembered, whose stories are preserved, and why certain places hold deep meaning. This session invites students to see themselves as part of history and to imagine ways they can contribute to honoring and protecting important cultural spaces.

Key Learning Objectives:

- Develop an understanding of how African and Indigenous People lived and built communities in New York City.
- Explore the importance of historical preservation and commemoration.

- Connect personal family histories to broader historical narratives through family tree reflection.

Workshop Run of Show

Theme: “How do we protect history and honor the people who came before us?”

Run of Show:

1. Welcome & Discussion (5 minutes)

Prompt: “What happens when people forget—or don’t know—someone’s story?”

Facilitator introduces the New York African Burial Ground and the Harlem African Burial Ground, briefly sharing how both were rediscovered and why communities chose to protect and honor them.

2. Harlem African Burial Ground Discovery (10 minutes)

Facilitator presents photographs of the NYABG and HABG sites, including images of the excavation, the monuments, and community commemorations. Key message: These burial grounds tell us stories that were almost lost—but were brought back to life through remembrance and action.

3. Family Tree Activity & Discussion (15 minutes)

Students complete the same family tree activity used in the K–4 workshop, with a deeper focus on reflecting where their family is from, what traditions they know, and how their families connect to Harlem, New York City, or a shared sense of place.

Prompt questions for discussion:

- “Where are some of your family members from?”
- “What are some traditions or stories that have been passed down in your family?”
- “How does your family’s story connect to the place where you live now?”

4. Commemoration Discussion (5 minutes)

Facilitator introduces the idea of a memorial and shows photographs of the NYABG monument.

Group discussion prompts:

- “What do you notice about the memorials?”
- “Why do you think people wanted to build something to remember the burial grounds?”
- “If you could design a way to remember your own family or community, what would it include? What symbols or words might you use?”
- “Why is it important to have public spaces where we remember people who came before us?”

5. Closing Reflection & Sharing (5 minutes)

Students are invited to share their thoughts about the session.

Group discussion prompt: “Why does remembering matter, and how can we help protect important stories and places in our own lives?”

Grades 9 - 12 (1 hour) – Historical Inquiry & Civic Engagement

This workshop invites high school students to critically explore the Harlem African Burial Ground as both a historic site and a space for contemporary reflection. Through inquiry-based activities, students examine how history is uncovered, interpreted, and commemorated, and consider the role they play in shaping public memory and civic responsibility.

Facilitators should approach this session as an opportunity to deepen historical thinking while encouraging students to draw connections between personal identity, local history, and social change. The workshop challenges students to think about the power of narrative, the meaning of legacy, and the ways in which communities work to reclaim and preserve what was once lost.

Key Learning Objectives

- Develop an understanding of how African and Indigenous People lived and built communities in New York City.
- Explore the role of archaeology and historical discovery in reclaiming lost histories.
- Connect personal family histories to broader historical narratives through family tree reflection.

Workshop Run of Show

Theme: “How do we reclaim stories—and what stories do we want to tell?”

1. Welcome & Identity Reflection (10 minutes)

Prompt: “If you had to tell someone who you are without saying anything, what would help them understand you?”

Students respond by describing three personal objects, memories, or moments that represent who they are.

Follow-up discussion: “What do these things say about your story? What would someone learn about you if they discovered these 100 years from now?”

Bridge to HABG: Facilitator connects the activity to how archaeologists and historians use artifacts and spaces like burial grounds to uncover forgotten stories.

2. The Story of the Harlem African Burial Ground (10 minutes)

Facilitator gives a verbal overview of the discovery of the Harlem African Burial Ground and the community efforts to preserve and honor it.

Key message: Sites like the HABG help restore African and Indigenous people's place in the history of New York City and the nation.

3. Collective Interpretation & Historical Reflection (10 minutes)

Group discussion prompts:

- “Why do you think some histories are remembered while others are forgotten?”
- “What does it mean to reclaim a story that was lost or ignored?”
- “How does public memory shape how we view the past—and how we see ourselves today?”

Facilitator supports students in connecting these questions back to the HABG and their own neighborhoods.

4. Family Tree & Personal Reflection (15 minutes)

Students complete a family tree, as used in earlier grade levels, but with space to reflect on what their family's story means to them.

Prompt: “What do you know about your family's story that you think is worth remembering or passing down?”

Follow-up prompt (verbal): “How does your story fit into the bigger story of Harlem, New York City, or the world?”

5. Closing: Civic Engagement & Legacy (5 minutes)

Group discussion: “What are ways we can preserve history today—in our schools, families, or neighborhoods?”

Facilitator closes by encouraging students to think of themselves as storytellers and protectors of memory, inviting them to take action in their own lives to remember and honor those who came before them.

Students are encouraged to stay engaged by following the Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative on Instagram and sharing what they learned with their peers and families.