

EXHIBITION NOTES FOR TEACHERS

BLACK HISTORY MONTH :

BRITISH BLACK PANTHERS EXHIBITION

WEDNESDAY 16TH OCTOBER - SATURDAY 26TH OCTOBER 2013



Racist Graffiti, London ©Neil Kenlock 1970

An exhibition presenting the legacy of the British Black Panther movement will be coming to Brixton in October. Taking place at the Photofusion Gallery during Black History Month, the show will feature current portraits of Panther members and archive photographs shot by Neil Kenlock, the official photographer of the British Black Panther Movement. A documentary film will also accompany the exhibition.

The show has been curated by The Organised Youth project, a group of 13-25 year olds who were inspired by the youthful activism of the British Panthers and hoped to present their history to a new generation.

“Before joining the Black Panthers, I had absolutely no idea that black people wrote books”

Linton Kwesi Johnson - poet & former British Black Panther

Themes

KS 3 - 5

British Black History, Citizenship, Activism, Oral History, Feminism, The Justice System, Protest

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YOUTH

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INTRODUCTION

The British Black Panther exhibition gives your students a chance to interact with the stories and images of the British Black Power Movement, which was based in Brixton and the surrounding areas in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In visiting the exhibition, students will see contemporary photographs of the following Panthers:

- o Darcus Howe
- o Linton Kwesi Johnson
- o Altheia Jones Leconte
- o Neil Kenlock
- o Danny DaCosta
- o Liz Obi
- o Kenrick Goppy
- o Barbara Beese
- o Leila Howe
- o Farrukh Dhondy
- o Beverley Bryan

Alongside contemporary photographs are archive images taken by renowned photographer Neil Kenlock in the 1960s and 1970s. Photographs will include images of protest and demonstration.

Key subjects

The Mangrove 9 Trial

A landmark case in British legal history in which defendants successfully lobbied to have a black jury. Howe appealed to ancient rights enshrined in Magna Carta in the same way that the American Panthers cited the 14th Amendment in their battle with the state. Defendants in the trial include Darcus Howe, Barbara Beese and Altheia Jones Leconte who feature in this exhibition.

End of Empire and Immigrant Britain

Of the Panthers interviewed, 3 were born in Britain and all document their experiences of isolation and racism as one of the only non-white children when growing up in pre-Windrush Britain. All of the other Panthers came to the UK as British Subjects from the West Indies and have personal stories of the racial ordeals they experienced at that time.

Black is Beautiful

Through Neil Kenlock's Photography the emergence of 'new look' can be seen. In the early and mid-1960s hair was relaxed, wigs were worn and fashions followed a very white aesthetic. With the arrival of the Black Power Movement, inspired by activism in America the idea of Black is Beautiful started to filter into the fashion and styling of the Panthers. Afro hair was a statement of black power.

Protest

The British Panthers used their constitutional right to protest as their main weapon against what they perceived to be a racist state. The exhibition contains images of these protests taken by Neil Kenlock as well as re-makes of original protest banners featured in the photographs.

Oral Histories

This project has been supported by Oral Histories, these are the spoken stories of the former panthers. This project has had the stories transcribed and printed in a book, ensuring they are available for future generations. In doing this, the issues around who is placed in history and how this is decided have been raised and challenged.

Pre- Visit Activities

Who are the British Black Panthers?

In groups discuss and make notes in response to these questions:

What does Black Power mean to you?

Who were the Black Panthers?

What are the traits or characteristics of a Black Panther?

What were the Black Panthers fighting for?

What do you think a Black Panther would be doing now?

Who is responsible for the history we learn and how do we learn it?

What role does photography have in shaping our history?

If possible, please encourage your students to download, into ipods or phones the Exhibition Podcast, which is a free podcast containing extracts from each Panther's interview. This can be listened to whilst they are at the exhibition.

Visit Activities

Portraiture, Curation, Perception

Walk around the first room of the exhibition and look at the portraits. In groups/class discuss:

KS3

What do you think of the people in the portraits

Can you imagine what their history might be?

If these photographs were in colour, would they have a different effect?

KS4 & 5

What do you think that the photographer and curators were trying to communicate by presenting the work as they have.

Now take a few minutes to listen to some of the podcast/read the transcriptions

In groups/class discuss:

KS 3, 4 & 5

Has your opinion of the people in the portraits change at all? If so, how?

Oral History Interview Techniques

These interviews were all carried out by young people aged 14 – 18. Your students can do this too, by using the Organised Youth Oral History tips (embedded)

Activity

Break your class into pairs and give them 10 minutes to carry out a mini-oral history interview with their partners. At the end of the 20 minute session, ask your students to report back to the group with their experiences.

KS3

How did you find the experience as an interviewer?

How did you find the experience answering the questions?

What did you learn about your partner?

KS4 & 5

Knowing what you do of history, where do you think Oral History, or stories passed down through generations, stand in relation to more formal histories?

How can memories and stories inform our history?

What are the benefits of recording and saving Oral History?

What are the limitations of it?

Banners

Ask your students to look at the banners, look at the material, the fabric, the slogans.

In groups discuss:

KS3

The choice of materials – what does it say about the people making them?

Who were these banners for?

KS4 & 5

Consider the choice of language and tone of the slogans.

What was their audience?

Can you think of any other groups in history that have used banners and placards to similar effect?

Can you create your own slogans and design your own banner?

Neil Kenlock's Photography

Activities

Ask your students to select one of Neil Kenlock's photographs.

Either on their own or as a group ask them to:

KS3

Explain what they think the photograph is about (and its relevance to the Black Panthers)

Why do they think Neil Kenlock took this photograph?

If you had to write a headline for this photograph, what would it be?

What do the poses made in some of the photographs say about the people in them?

KS4 & 5

What is your initial response to this photograph?

If you could interview the person in this photograph, what would your questions be and why?

What makes this photograph significant to the things you have learned about the British Black Panthers?

What does the hanging of the photographs say to you?

Does the wallpaper and domestic setting have any links to the stories of the Panthers from the podcast or the photographs?



Neil Kenlock, self portrait ©Neil Kenlock 1970

Post Visit Activities

Knowledge & perception of the Panthers

Return to initial notes from Pre-Visit tasks; have any of those ideas or opinions changed? If so, how?

Banner Making

Using cheap and available materials, make a banner with a personal slogan.

Photography

Using camera phones or digital cameras, document and event or subject that is important to you.

Oral History Interviews

Carry out a short Oral History interview on an older relative or neighbour and see what you find out!

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Activity

As a group review these tips. Now break into pairs and spend 5 to 10 minutes interviewing each other. Set an alarm or timer on your phone to keep to time.

Start the interview with the opening interview for the tape:

“Today's date is the interview is being carried out by THEN (ask the interviewee to spell their name and state their date and place of birth)

Think about eye contact and body language – remember you (the interviewer) not allowed to talk, so everything else has to be positive to keep the interviewee talking freely.

Encourage stories from your interviewee, so use phrases like ‘can you give me an example of that’ or ‘is there a particular day you remember’.

Avoid closed questions that can be answered with “Yes” or “No”.

Keep your questions short and clear.

Avoid, making any sound yourself as this will affect the recording. You should be totally silent apart from when you are asking questions.

Let the interviewee finish their sentence, don't interrupt or speak over them.

This is not a conversation.

Ask for details: ‘do you remember where you met?’, ‘which street was that on?’ will bring the history alive.

Listen to what they are saying and develop your next question from this.

Once both pairs have completed their interviews, return to the group and reflect on the experience.

Additional Information

Location

Photofusion is in central Brixton, less than 1 minute from the tube station. There is restricted parking in the area, we would recommend you arrive here by public transport.

Class sizes

Photofusion is a small gallery. If you would like to bring your class here, please do so using the embedded booking link. Classes must be no larger than 30 students. We cannot accept your visit without a booking, this is to ensure that there is plenty of space in the gallery for other visitors.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/event/8318872973>

Photofusion is not responsible for your students whilst on our premises and you must ensure you have adequate staff to supervise your trip.

Organised Youth led-workshop

A limited number of curator-led guides are available for school groups. If you would like to book onto one of these guides, please call Lizzy on 0207 738 5774 to discuss this. £50 for up to 30 people.

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