

Celebrating Black History Month at DGN

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DOWNERS GROVE – February is Black History Month, and the Downers Grove North Fine Arts Department is spending the month celebrating and spotlighting the pioneering work of African-American artists.

English teacher Britni Mitchell has led the initiative for the department. She said as a biracial female she struggled to find people who looked like her in children's books, history texts or on television.

"My mother always bought black history books for my sister and I, and the things we learned were so fascinating, I wondered why I never learned them in school," she said.

One of the spotlighted artists this month is photographer Addison Scurlock, who lived from 1883 to 1964 and migrated from North Carolina to Washington, D.C. He opened a studio in the black community, and his photography of elite black events such as ballets and operas provided a contrast to traditional caricatures of black life.

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Artists such as Scurlock will be featured by the Downers Grove North Fine Arts Department through the month.

The department also celebrates Black History Month in other ways. For the past seven years that Mitchell has taught English, the department has collaborated to teach poetry by black authors during February.

For several of those years, the department hosted an open mic night, and last year, it linked it to the National Council for Teachers of English event, The African-American Read-In. This year, the event will be held Feb. 24.

Mitchell also said she worked with social studies teacher Amy Bugner O'Dell to find facts for each department to share with their classes.

"What I found is that naturally, social studies and English lend themselves to exploring these monumental accomplishments and figures. However, other departments may not be aware of the contributions of these individuals," Mitchell said.

To remedy this, Mitchell and Bugner O'Dell put together a fact sheet and shared it schoolwide to highlight interesting achievements the students would find interest in. It also has been shared on Twitter so that parents can see it.

"My goal overall is for black history to be perceived as everyone's history – it has influenced the lives of all people, and the sooner we can get students to unite, the better off we will all be," Mitchell said.

To view the Downers Grove North Fine Arts Department blog and see which African-American artists have been spotlighted, visit <http://northfinearts.blogspot.com/>.