

Charlotte Hawkins Brown



The AFRICAN
AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE
in North Carolina

North Carolina Freedom Monument Project

Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE: *To better understand the impact Charlotte Hawkins Brown had on education in North Carolina.*

Goals and Standards

Social Studies Objectives: 1, 8.5, 9.1, 11.1, 11.4

Social Studies Skills: 1, 3

NCSS Standards: I, IV, V

ELA Competency Objectives: 2.01, 3.02, 3.03, 4, 5.02, and 6.01

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch of Charlotte Hawkins Brown
- Multiple choice section of *Activities* page
- Palmer Memorial Institute: The Mission and the Legacy (VHS video available at the NC Museum of History; 27 minutes)

Procedures

- Students will read the biographical sketch of Charlotte Hawkins Brown.
- Students will answer questions on the reading.

Evaluation

- Class participation
- Successfully conducting an interview
- Final copy of "The Utopian Classroom" (Assess content, grammar and mechanics)
- Brochure/ad/commercial for Palmer Institute

Charlotte Hawkins Brown



Biographical Sketch

In 1967, North Carolina designated Palmer Institute a historic site, making it the first place in the state to spotlight the life's work of an African-American. Palmer Memorial Institute, located in Guilford County, was the educational mecca for African American school children in North Carolina for almost seven decades because of its founder, Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown.

The idea to improve the educational opportunities for southern African-American children came from Dr. Brown's brief stint as a teacher in the Piedmont area in 1901. She herself had had the good fortune of receiving a quality education. Although she was born in North Carolina some twenty years after the Civil War, her family moved to Boston, where she graduated from Cambridge English High and Latin School. She attended Massachusetts State Normal School to become a teacher and later went to Simmons College, Temple University, and Wellesley College.

After a year of teaching in rural Guilford County, she became determined to offer a quality education to students in North Carolina. She put her own life on hold as she furiously raised funds to make her dream a reality. With the help of her benefactor, Alice Freedman Palmer, the Palmer Institute opened its doors in 1902, and it quickly became an important institution in the life of African Americans. More than one thousand students graduated from this preparatory day and boarding school. Before the school closed, classes were offered from elementary grades to junior college.

Palmer Institute grew from its beginnings in a run-down church to a 350-acre campus of 14 buildings that enjoyed the status of an accredited institution, a feat quite unknown for many African-American high schools during that time. The school sought to make its students well-rounded citizens, who could make a difference in a world that judged people on skin color. The school stressed academic and cultural education and the necessity of competent leadership. Dr. Brown espoused the notion of "Black is Beautiful" long before it became a rallying cry for self-acceptance and pride in the 1970s. She showed her students that the culture of African Americans was one to be embraced.

A dedicated humanitarian, Dr. Brown was active in civic matters, promoting social, educational and economic growth among African Americans. Her work as an educator sparked her passion for betterment of the individual, which was reflected in her anti-segregation stance. Her efforts were a demonstration against the lynchings so prominent in the South during the twentieth century. Against the backdrop of the Jim Crow era, she labored endlessly to promote racial harmony.

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Activities

■ Have students (separately or in groups) list all the adjectives that apply to Mrs. Brown. As a class, come up with the top five adjectives. Then have students apply these adjectives to the concept of leadership. Discuss why people need the mantle of a leader to help others.

■ Using a map of North Carolina, students will locate Guilford County and Sedalia. Discuss why the Piedmont was chosen as a good place for Palmer Institute.

■ Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Each group will create five questions about education and educational practices. The students will ask these questions to at least two adults who attended high school in two different decades. It is best to have a wide variety of interviewees and responses, representing several decades. Have students report their findings back to the class. Students should construct a Venn diagram to compare education now and before. Allow the class to compare information and make judgments as to why there were changes and the effects of the changes.

■ Have students research the state of education for African Americans before the mass integration of schools in the 1960s. Share this information with the class. As a follow up, students can debate the benefits and drawbacks of school integration.

■ **Writing:** Assign the topic: "The Utopian Classroom." Be sure that students not only write about the ultimate classroom but also explain how this set-up will ensure a quality education.

■ Have students create a brochure, advertisement or commercial that will entice students to attend Palmer Institute. Include students when constructing rubric for grading.

■ **NCFMP:** During slavery, in most places, it was against the law for a slave to learn to read and write. Knowing this fact, how would you depict the role of education and its long-term results as part of the NC Freedom Monument? What symbols best represent education? What symbols for education have become clichés?

Multiple Choice

Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

___ 1. Which best describes the intentions of Charlotte Hawkins Brown?

- A. Mrs. Brown wanted to make Mrs. Palmer a wealthy woman.
- B. Mrs. Brown needed a way to make money.
- C. Mrs. Brown knew Southern students deserved to be educated.
- D. Mrs. Brown felt sorry for the students.

___ 2. The author's attitude toward the life's work of Mrs. Brown is that of

- A. pride
- B. despair
- C. jealousy
- D. anger

___ 3. Although Palmer Memorial Institute closed in 1971, its influence probably

- A. helped many students to have courage to leave the state after graduation.
- B. became part of the public school curriculum.
- C. had no effect on the adult lives of the students.
- D. can still be felt in the state today.

___ 4. One of the sentences in the last paragraph of "Charlotte Hawkins Brown" said; "Her efforts were a demonstration against the lynchings so prominent in the South during the twentieth century." This statement is similar to which of the following.

- A. The dragon spit fire at the helpless villagers.
- B. The mouse gnawed the rope and freed the lion.
- C. The sand blast smoothed the rocks.
- D. The gnat irritated the giant.

___ 5. There was a need for Palmer Memorial Institute in 1902 because

- A. African American students were not getting a quality education in public schools.
- B. there was no place for African American students to learn to read and write.
- C. the students did not get along with their parents and wanted to leave home.
- D. the school needed cheap labor to help erect the buildings.

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Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Activities

Responses will vary.

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