

People

James E.K. Aggrey



The AFRICAN
AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE
in North Carolina

North Carolina Freedom Monument Project

Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE: *To become familiar with the life and accomplishments of James Aggrey and his relevance to the state of North Carolina.*

Social Studies Objectives: 5.02, 5.05

Social Studies Skills: 1, 2, 3

Language Arts Objectives: 1.03, 1.04, 2.01, 5.01, 6.01, 6.02

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch of James E.K. Aggrey
- *Activities* page

Procedures

- Students will read and discuss the biographical sketch of the life of James E.K. Aggrey independently, as a small group or as a whole class.
- Students will complete the *Activities* page
- Discussion and extensions follow as directed by the teacher.

Evaluation

- Student participation in reading and discussion
- Student performance on the *Activities* page

Bibliography

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Biographical Sketch

James E. K. Aggrey was an educator, a pastor, and an advocate of cooperation between the black and white races. He was born October 18, 1875, in Ahamabu, Gold Coast (now known as Ghana). Aggrey was educated in Wesleyan Methodist schools in Africa and taught in mission schools until he came to the United States in 1898. He studied in Salisbury, North Carolina, at Livingstone College, an institution sponsored by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. He graduated first in his class in 1902 receiving honors for his academic accomplishments. The next year he met Miss Rose Douglas of Virginia, and in 1905 they became husband and wife. Shortly thereafter, he became a member of the faculty of Livingstone College in Salisbury. In addition to teaching, James also was pastor of Miller's Chapel and Sandy Ridge, African Methodist Episcopal Zion rural churches in Rowan County, North Carolina. In May 1912, Aggrey was awarded a master's degree by Livingstone College and the Doctor of Divinity by Hood Theological Seminary. Eventually he moved to New York City and enrolled at Columbia University to begin work on a doctorate degree and was invited to become a member of the Phelps-Stokes Commissions on education in Africa. Aggrey was the only black member of the commission and toured Africa in 1920 and in 1924. He attracted immense interest when he spoke to audiences in Africa, Great Britain, and the United States. Upon returning to his homeland, Ghana, Aggrey's dream of creating a school for Africans came true. It was called the Achimoto School or Prince of Wales College and School.

In May 1927, Aggrey went on leave from the Achimoto School intending to complete his dissertation. He arrived in Salisbury, North Carolina, where for two weeks he tried to begin writing. However constant visits with old friends made his task impossible. Soon Aggrey returned to New York where he was asked to make several speeches at Columbia University. At the same time, he continued to work on his dissertation. After a brilliant address at Columbia on July 29, 1927, he returned to his room deeply fatigued. The next day, July 30, James E. K. Aggrey died. His life is an example to African children of what can be achieved through education and cooperation between the races. His contributions in North Carolina have made him one of Rowan County's most effective African activists of the twentieth century.



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"The kind of Christianity we have to practice is to go 'round helping people, and then when you pray they will say, 'Amen.' There is too much talking; talking is cheap." This quote by James E. K. Aggrey explained to his rural congregations in Rowan County his beliefs. Most members of his congregations were illiterate, poor, and suffering from a segregated society. Pastor Aggrey interacted with his congregations and with the help of his colleague, Thomas B. Patterson, formed community leagues at the two churches, Miller's Chapel and Sandy Ridge. The purpose of the leagues was to raise the economic and education level of their members. The community leagues built a school for the children. Some of the students from the school attended Livingstone College. Aggrey also organized a credit union, the first of its kind to assist farmers. The credit union bought large quantities of fertilizer and seed at wholesale prices enabling farmers to buy necessary supplies at comparatively low rates. In addition, the credit union would receive deposits and lend money to its members. Aggrey was instrumental in helping black farmers purchase land through his association with the Rowan Realty Company. Through the love and hard work that Aggrey advocated, the education, health, and economic status of the Miller's Chapel and Sandy Ridge congregations greatly improved. Aggrey often spoke of cooperation between races. "You can play a tune of sorts on the white keys; and you can play a tune of sorts on the black keys; but for harmony you must use both the black and the white." His analogy of racial harmony was emphasized throughout his life as he directly improved the lives of North Carolinians.

Fly, Eagle, Fly is an African tale attributed to James E. K. Aggrey. In the story an eagle chick is captured by a farmer and raised among chickens. The eagle thinks that he is a chicken, until one day a friend goes to the farmer insisting on helping the eagle to discover his true identity. The eagle does discover his true potential and soars into the sky. Aggrey would tell this story to a captivated audience and would conclude the story by saying: "My people of Africa, we were created in the image of God, but men have made us think we are chickens, and still we think we are; but we are eagles. Don't be content with the food of chickens! Stretch forth your wings and fly!" James E. K. Aggrey's life centered on helping others to recognize their potential by encouraging them to spread their wings and reach for the sky.

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Activities

Personal Response

James Aggrey was an advocate of harmony among people of different races. What could you do to create greater cooperation among people of different races? Give examples.

Analyzing Biographical Information

Directions: Answer each question in a complete sentence.

1. Explain Mr. Aggrey's accomplishments and his educational background.
2. Identify three major goals that Aggrey worked to accomplish.
3. Assess the meaning of Aggrey's "kind of Christianity."
4. Describe how Aggrey transformed the lives of the rural congregations of Rowan County.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the terms in the passage. Copy the sentence that contains the word. Using context clues, match the word and its meaning.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. advocate | A. not able to read or write |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. doctorate | B. support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. dissertation | C. something that can become real |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. illiterate | D. a degree, title |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. colleague | E. a person who directs action in support of an issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. league | F. written research on a subject |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. analogy | G. a comparison |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. activist | H. an associate in a profession |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9. potential | I. An organization |

Creative Response

1. Directions: Read these inspirational quotations from James Aggrey.

As you analyze each quotation, select the one that has the most meaning for you. Create a cartoon sequence, a billboard, or a bumper sticker, or you may write a summary explaining the quotation. Share your response with your class.

"If I find a man scowling at me, I just smile back. He scowls again, and I smile. I don't often find any scowl a third time."

"The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family."

"Remember, my brothers, to live and to work."

"Be patient, don't lose heart, don't hate anybody, make yourselves worthy of good things and good things will come to you."

"You can never beat prejudice by frontal attack. Always flank it. You can catch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar."

2. NCFMP: As a preacher, Aggrey used many metaphors to help illustrate his ideas about race relations. In the biographical sketch there are at least two powerful metaphors he used. Look up the term metaphor in the dictionary. Write down the definition. Visit <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/p/paul-mccartney/105526.html> and read the lyrics to the song "Ebony and Ivory" by Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney located there. If you were to pick a metaphor for race relations based on Aggrey's beliefs, how would you illustrate it visually on the NC Monument to Freedom?

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Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Personal Response

James Aggrey was an advocate of harmony among people of different races. What could you do to create greater cooperation among people of different races? Give examples.

Responses will vary and may be used as a springboard for discussion.

Analyzing Information

Directions: Answer each question in a complete sentence.

1. Explain Mr. Aggrey's accomplishments and his educational background.

Accomplishments: Teacher in mission schools in Ghana; teacher at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina; pastor of Miller's Chapel and Sandy Ridge Churches in Rowan County, North Carolina; noted speaker for the Phelps-Stokes Commissions on education; created the Achimoto School of Prince of Wales College and School in Ghana; public speaker; activist for harmony between the black and white races.

Educational background: Wesleyan Methodist schools in Ghana; Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina—awarded a Master's degree; Hood Theological Seminary—awarded Doctor of Divinity; Columbia University in New York—completed a Doctorate degree except for the dissertation.

2. Identify three major goals that Aggrey worked to accomplish.

His major goals were to educate people, minister to their spiritual needs, and to support efforts to bring the black and white races together.

3. Assess the meaning of Aggrey's "kind of Christianity."

The "kind of Christianity" Mr. Aggrey referred to encourages others to help people, not just talk about helping people.

4. Describe how Aggrey transformed the lives of the rural congregations of Rowan County.

Mr. Aggrey changed the lives of people of Rowan County by the following methods: forming leagues to raise the economic and education levels of the members of two churches, organizing a credit union to aid members in purchasing large amounts of fertilizer and seed at wholesale prices, receiving deposits and loaning money to the members, and helping black farmers purchase land through his association with the Rowan Realty Company.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the terms in the passage. Copy the sentence that contains the word. Using context clues, match the word and its meaning.

1. James E.K. Aggrey was an educator, a pastor, and an advocate of cooperation between the black and white races.
2. Eventually he moved to New York City and enrolled at Columbia University to begin work on his doctorate degree and was invited to become a member of the Phelps-Stokes Commissions on education in Africa.
3. One part of his life that he had left undone was the completion of his Columbia University dissertation.
4. Being known as an interpreter of African culture to western audiences, he returned to his homeland, Ghana.
5. Most members of his congregations were illiterate, poor, and suffering from a segregated society.
6. Pastor Aggrey interacted with his congregations and with the help of his colleague, Thomas B. Patterson, formed community leagues at the two churches.
7. The purpose of the leagues was to raise the economic and education level of their members.
8. His analogy of racial harmony was emphasized throughout his life as he directly improved the lives of North Carolinians.
9. His contributions in North Carolina have made him one of Rowan County's most effective African activists of the twentieth century.
10. James E.K. Aggrey's life was centered on helping others to recognize their potential by encouraging them to spread their wings and reach for the sky.

Matching Answers:

1. B; 2. D; 3. F; 4. J; 5. A; 6. H; 7. I; 8. G; 9. E; 10. C

Creative Response

See *Activities* page for quotations. Responses will vary.