

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY

For more than 40 years, Mayme A. Clayton collected items related to African-American history. She said she started her collection so that “children would know that black people have done great things.” Read about four famous African Americans featured in the collection. Then complete the activities and answer the questions.

Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784)

Phillis Wheatley was born in Africa and raised as a slave in Boston, Massachusetts. At the age of 14, she became the first African-American poet to publish a book in the United States. It was published in Boston in 1767. The book appeared in England six years later.



George Washington Carver (1860–1943)

George Washington Carver was an inventor, a botanist and a teacher. He is best known for creating more than 325 products from peanuts. Born in Missouri three years before the end of slavery, he grew up to attend Iowa State University. He later taught at the Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama.



Althea Gibson (1927–2003)

In 1957, Althea Gibson was the first black woman to win the U.S. Open tennis championship. She won it again in 1958. Born in South Carolina and raised in New York City’s Harlem neighborhood, Gibson went on to become a major sports star. She was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1971.



James VanDerZee (1886–1983)

James VanDerZee was a talented photographer. Originally from Massachusetts, he later moved to Harlem. There, he set up a photography studio in 1915. His photographs documenting the Harlem Renaissance were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1967.



- Write one fact about Phillis Wheatley. _____

- “Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.” Who do you think said this?

- “Being champion is all well and good, but you can’t eat a crown.” Who do you think said this?

What did this person mean? _____
- Sort these famous African Americans into one of four categories. Write each person’s name next to his or her area of achievement.
Art: _____ Sports: _____
Literature: _____ Science: _____

5. Which of these people would you like to know more about? Explain on the back of this page.