

The Oblate Sisters of Providence and Early African American Education in Baltimore

Objective:

Students will gain an understanding of educational opportunities for free African Americans in early nineteenth-century Baltimore and the efforts of the Oblate Sisters of Providence to educate free African American girls.

Grade Levels: 4, 7, and 8

Archdiocese of Baltimore Social Studies Standards

Grade 4:

SS.4.5.4: Demonstrate an understanding of the origin & early growth of the Catholic Church in the United States

Grade 7:

SS.7.5.1: Recognize the influence of Catholicism in the world and in the United States

Grade 8:

SS.8.2.10: Develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts

SS.8.4.6: Recognize examples of altruism in history

SS.8.5.8: Recognize the role of institutions in furthering both continuity and change

SS.8.5.9: Apply knowledge of how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs and promote the common good

Estimated Time:

Two 45-minute sessions

Advance Preparation:

- Obtain an overhead projector
- Locate and photocopy a current map of Baltimore
- Make an overhead of the pictures of [Mother Lange and Father Joubert](#)
- Make an overhead of the document, "[Classes for the Academic Year 1871-1872](#)"
- Photocopy "[Oblate School for Colored Girls: Historical Background](#)"
- Photocopy the worksheet, [Find It!](#)
- Photocopy the following primary source documents:
 - Photographs of school buildings at [5 St. Mary's Court](#), [George Street](#), and [St. Frances Academy](#)
 - "Prospectus of a School for Colored Girls, Under the Direction of the Sisters of Providence" (both the [newspaper article](#) and [Original Version/Modern Version](#))
 - "Catalogue of Pupils" pages [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)
 - 1830 [Frances Bush Sampler](#)

New Vocabulary:

Boarder – a person who pays money to live in a home and get meals

Caulker – person who seals the cracks on a wooden ship

Mariner – a sailor

Novitiate – period of waiting before taking vows to become part of a religious order

Revolt – to rebel against something or someone

Stevedore – person who loads or unloads a ship's cargo

Sulpician – members of the society of priests of St. Sulpice

Tradesman – a skilled worker; craftsman

Motivation:

- Ask students to consider why it was so important for free African Americans to have access to education in the early 1800's. Discuss the importance of education in terms of getting a better job, reading newspapers, writing letters, etc.
- Ask students to consider why many white people in Maryland and throughout the United States did not want enslaved and even free African Americans to have an education. Discuss the fear of slave revolts and the belief that education was “wasted” on African Americans.

Procedure:

Part One

- Have students read the *Oblate School for Colored Girls: Historical Background*. While they are reading, have them answer the following focus questions:
 - Describe education for free African Americans in the early 1800s.
 - Why didn't the government establish schools for African American children?
 - Who were Father Joubert, Elizabeth Lange, and Mary Balas?
 - Why did Joubert, Lange, and Balas decide to create the Oblate School for Colored Girls?
 - Who were the Oblate Sisters of Providence?

As a class, review the answers to the focus questions. As you are discussing the answers, put up the portraits of Father Joubert and Elizabeth Lange on the overhead projector.

- Pass out the document, “Prospectus of a School for Colored Girls,” and the handout that has an original version and a modern version of the document. Instruct students to read the section marked, “Section #1.” Instruct students to try to read the original version of the document, but look at the modern version if they are having difficulty reading the original. As the students are reading, they should try to answer the focus questions: Why does the Oblate School feel that it was important to educate young African American girls?
- Pass out the worksheet, Find It!, and the 3 photographs of the school buildings. Using the addresses below, instruct the students to find the different places where the Oblate School for Colored Girls/St. Frances Academy and the Oblate Sisters of Providence's convents were located during their history. Instruct the students to pair the images of the schools with their locations.

1828: 5 St. Mary's Court

Location: Instruct students to locate St. Mary's Court on the map. Hint: It is located near St. Mary's Seminary.

1829: 610 George Street

Location: Instruct students to locate the intersection of George Street and George Alley on the map.

1829: 48 Richmond Street (A photograph of this school building does not exist.)
Location: Instruct students to locate the intersection of Richmond Street and Park Avenue on the map.

1871: Corner of Chase Street and Constitution Street

Location: Instruct students to locate the intersection of Chase Street and Constitution Street on the map.

- After the students have found these different locations on the 19th-century maps of Baltimore, have them look at a current map of Baltimore to see where these locations are today. Explain that many of the streets have changed and the buildings no longer exist.

Original Location	Current Location
5 St. Mary's Court	Located on Seminary Court, near Mother Seton House
610 George Street	Located where George Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard meet
48 Richmond Street	Located at the intersection of Read Street and Park Avenue
Corner of Chase Street and Forest Place	Located at the corner of Chase Street and Forest Place

Part Two

- Pass out the document, "Catalogue of Pupils." Ask the students to tell you where the students who are attending the school came from. Why did the students go to a school that was located in Baltimore? What does this tell us about the Oblate School and schools for free African Americans? Ask students to compare this to school today—How far do students travel to go to school today? Do most students stay overnight at their schools?
- According to the school's mission, what types of subjects do you think the students might have taken? What kinds of classes do you take today? List the students' current classes on the board.
- Have the students look at Section #2 from "Prospectus of a School." What kinds of classes were students taking in 1829? List the classes on the board. Put up the overhead, "Classes for the Academic Year 1871-1872." Ask the students to tell you how the classes that were offered in 1829 differed from those offered in 1872. What kinds of things were girls learning? Why are these things important to their education? Why do they think these differences existed? What subjects were added by 1871? Why did the school change what it was teaching its students? How are these subjects different from what we learn today?
- Some of the primary skills young girls learned at the Oblate School were sewing and embroidery. Explain that this type of education was similar to the type of education that young, white girls were receiving. White girls from working-class families were taught basic sewing and embroidery skills that would prepare them to be servants and maids. However, the Oblate students were being taught the types of sewing skills that wealthy, white girls typically learned rather than those skills learned by working-class girls. Ask students to think about what this tells them about the type of training that the girls were receiving?
- Young girls made samplers to both practice and demonstrate their sewing skills. Pass out the picture of Frances Bush's sampler to the students. Explain that this is an example of a sampler that was made by a young girl named Frances Bush in 1830 while she was a student at the Oblate School for Colored Girls. Ask the students to describe the sampler.

What kinds of details does a sampler include? Why do you think girls were taught how to make samplers?

- Following the Oblate School's/St. Frances' curriculum, have the students participate in a mock lesson. For example, have the students complete a lesson in sewing or embroidery. Instruct the students to design their own sampler on a piece of paper.
- Ask the students to think about why the Oblate School was so important to African Americans. Why were the Oblates' contributions so important to Maryland's Catholic history?

Closure/Assessment:

- Why was the Oblate School for Colored Girls so important? How did it affect African Americans in Maryland and the country? Why was this school such an important contribution to Maryland history, Maryland Catholic history, and African American history?
- Using what they have learned, instruct the students to pretend that they are students at the Oblate School for Colored Girls. Instruct them to make a student newspaper that includes information about the classes they are taking, information about the founding nuns who run the school, the importance of their education, and more! Encourage students to be creative and put themselves in the shoes of the former students.

Resources:

Banks, Willa Young. "A Contradiction in Antebellum Baltimore: A Competitive School for Girls of 'Color' within a Slave State." *Maryland Historical Magazine* Vol. 99, No. 2, (2004): 132-163.

Gardner, Bettye. 1976. "Ante-bellum Black Education in Baltimore." *Maryland Historical Magazine* Vol. 71, No. 3: 360-366.

Morrow, Diane. *Person of Color and Religious at the Same Time*. United States, University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Sherwood, Grace. *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1931.

<http://oblatesisters.com/>

<http://www.sfacademy.org/about/oblates/>