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TEACHER RESOURCES

Planting Seeds of Freedom in the Pecos Valley of New Mexico: How Blackdom Grew Its Roots through Dry-Farming

by Maya Allen (University of New Mexico)

These educational materials were designed to accompany the video seminar “Planting Seeds of Freedom in the Pecos Valley of New Mexico: How Blackdom Grew Its Roots through Dry-Farming” by Maya L. Allen (University of New Mexico), presented on October 14th, 2020 as part of a virtual Holden Forests & Gardens Scientist Lecture Series, Growing Black Roots: the Black Botanical Legacy. Learn more about the lecture series [here](#). Access the talk [here](#).

COMPREHEND & CONNECT - Imagine what it would be like to start a new life in a strange new land.

1. Listen to the talk to find out: how far did the residents of Blackdom travel to get to their new home, how did they get there, what was their new home like, and what was challenging for them about their new home?
2. Use google maps to find a place that is the same distance away from your current home as Blackdom was for the people who settled there. Make sure to pick a place where you have never been. Describe how you would get there, how long you think it would take, and draw a picture of what you imagine it looks like (Do this before you zoom in to the map or look at any images!)
3. Next, zoom in on Google maps, look at the images on google maps, look up this new place on Wikipedia and learn more about what that place is really like. Describe what you think would be challenging about this new place compared to where you live now.

TO-DO – Evaluate your local growing conditions and find a crop to grow at your home.

1. Listen to the talk to find out: what crops were grown in Blackdom? What role did climate and soil play in the fate of the town?
2. Determine the soil properties where you live.
 - a. Visit the Soil Science Society of America K12 Teaching Resources page, to read [Soil Basics](#) and [Soils and Food](#)
 - b. Use soil science techniques to evaluate two soil properties important for dry farming
 - i. **Soil texture** is an important factor determining how much water plants can take up from the soil. Texture terms used to describe soil include sandy, clay, or loam (a mix of sand and clay). Use this protocol to estimate the soil texture.
 - ii. **Soil water holding and drainage** also determine water availability for growing plants. Once students have determined the soil texture from their sample, the class can work together to determine which soils hold the most water or drain the fastest.

3. Determine climate type where you live.
 - a. Find the mean annual rainfall for your location by searching the internet for “Mean annual rainfall <<name of your city and country>>”.
 - b. Find the mean annual temperature for your location by searching the internet for “Mean annual temperature <<name of your city and country>>”.
 - c. Determine your biome type. Search the internet for a Whittaker Biomes Diagram. Use your precipitation and rainfall averages to locate your biome type on the diagram and report the biome type where you live. Make sure that your rainfall and temperature data are in the same units as the diagram you chose to use.
 - d. Determine your current drought level. The average climate in your area gives you a sense of what the climate is generally like, but what about drought years, like those experienced by the residents of Blackdom? During a drought plants that normally can grow in a region may die from lack of water. The longer the drought lasts, the more plants will die. Check out these maps and decide what the drought level is in your current location. If your region is experiencing a drought, make sure to note if it is short-term or long-term.
 - e. Find out how your region compares to other places on Earth where plants grow. Search the internet for the Biome type you determined from your climate analysis. Compared to other places on Earth, is your Biome particularly cold or dry? Wet or hot?
4. Pick a crop to grow. Pick one plant-based food that you like to eat, could it grow where you live?
 - a. Search the internet for how to grow this plant.
 - b. Draw a conclusion about whether you think you can grow this crop in your region.
 - c. Draw a conclusion about what the current drought situation would do to your plant, speculate about the effects of more intense or longer droughts.
 - d. Suggest farming techniques that you could use to improve the success of your crop in the climate and soil where you live.

FOLLOW UP WORK – Conduct in depth classwork and independent study to understand the founding of Blackdom as part of a larger picture of Black Pioneers in the American West.

1. Listen to the talk to learn about the Pioneers that founded Blackdom in the early 1900's
2. Read about the Exodusters
 - a. Who were the Exodusters? Summarize the story in your own words in groups of 2-4.
 - b. As a class, contextualize this account of the Exodusters:
 - i. When and where was this writing created?
 - ii. What was different during the time of the Exodusters, compared to when the document was written? What was the same?
 - iii. How might the circumstances in which this document was created affect its content?

3. Compare and contrast the experiences of the Boyer family in New Mexico described in the talk (early 1900's) with those experiences described for Black families settling in Kansas in the 1870's in this writing, consider the following:
 - a. Reasons for Black migration out of the south
 - b. Opportunities available in the new location (jobs, education, etc.)
 - c. Racism and segregation experienced by the pioneers
 - d. Do you think the earlier migration of the Exodusters influenced the settlers of Blackdom? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
4. View the video and poem "O Nicodemus" by Sunni Patterson, a modern poem about the town of Nicodemus, Kansas, founded by former slaves in the 1870s.
 - a. Write down what you see in one of the images shown in the video. If you give you an interpretation—e.g. the people look joyful— identify what in the photo shows you the people look joyful, i.e. write down your evidence. Next, talk with a partner about what you see.
 - b. Get into groups of four. Each group should work to transcribe a portion of "O Nicodemus" based on the spoken word video of the poet <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTGMFRrUcb8> . Make sure at least two people are in each group. Circle the words that jump out, either because they seem important or because you don't know what they mean. Once the transcription is finished, each group then reads their section aloud to the class.
 - c. Have a class discussion about what this poem about Black history is saying to modern-day Black Americans. What important words are used to say this? How do the video clips and the poem combine to deliver this message?
5. For even more extended work on the topic of Black Pioneers in the American West, see the complete PBS lesson plan on African Americans in the west