

Social Studies Extensions

YORK: THE FIRST BLACK MAN TO CROSS THE CONTINENT

- Visit the heroic bronze of York by Louisville sculptor, Ed Hamilton, to be unveiled on the Belvedere in Louisville October 14, 2003. Learn about this project to honor the black explorer of the Corps of Discovery on the artist's Web site: www.edhamiltonworks.com. (E/M)
- Read *In Search of York: The Slave Who Went to the Pacific with Lewis & Clark* by Robert B. Betts, revised edition, University Press of Colorado, 2000. (M/H)
- Read and discuss William Clark's feelings about York and slavery, as evidenced in the letters he wrote to his brother Jonathan on November 9, November 22/24, December 10, 1808 and May 28, 1809, published in the book, *Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark*, Jim Holmberg, Ed., Yale University Press, 2002. How do these primary sources provide insight into the institution of slavery and the perspectives of the slave and the master? (M/H)
- Include a performance arts interpretation of York's life in your classroom studies. Many organizations have performance pieces that feature the character of York, including the Youth Performing Arts School, Kentucky Humanities Council Chautauqua Program, Derby Dinner Playhouse, and Stage One. Create your own performance piece as a tribute to York. (E/M/H)
- Read and interpret poems about York by Louisville writer Frank X. Walker, published in the collection, *Buffalo Dance, the Journey of York in Poems* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003), samples attached. Visit the poet's Web Site: <http://frankxwalker.com/index.htm>. (M/H)
- Compare and contrast York's life and experiences with those of a black explorer who lived 100 years later, Matthew Henson (1866-1955). Resources: www.matthewhenson.com; *Dark Companion: The Story of Matthew Henson* by Bradley Robinson (Widget Magic, 1997); *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* by Matthew Henson (Invisible Cities Press, 2001); *The African-American Century: How Black Americans Have Shaped Our Country* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Cornel West (The Free Press, 2000). (E/M/H)

Wind Talker

from **Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York in Poems** (University Press of Kentucky, 2003)
written by Frank X Walker, reproduced with permission

If I could make my words
dress they naked selves in blackberry juice
lay down on a piece of bark, sheep
or onion skin, like Massa do
If I could send a letter home to my wife
float it in the wind, on wings or water

I'd tell her about Katonka
and all the wide and high places
this side of the big river.
How his family, numbering three
for every star in the sky
look like a forest when they graze together
turn into the muddy Mississippi
when they thunder along, faster than any horse
making the grass lay down
long after the quiet has returned.
How they don't so much as raise a tail
when I come round with my wooly head
and tobacco skin, like I'm one of them
making the Hidatsa and Mandan think me
"Big Medicine"
Katonka, who walk like man.

Today, we stood on the edge of all this
looked out at so much water
the mountains we crossed to get here
seem a little smaller.

As I watched fish the size of cabins dance in the air
and splash back in the water like chil'ren playing
I thought about her and if we gone ever be free
then I closed my eyes and prayed
that I don't live long enough
to see Massa make this ugly too.

God's House

from **Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York in Poems** (University Press of Kentucky, 2003)
written by Frank X Walker, reproduced with permission

When we first left Kentucke
the trees had commenced to dressing up
he fall harvest and the garden
was already full of pumpkins and squash.

Massa Clark didn't ask me to go on no expedition.
He just say "pack" and pointed to the door.
So I gather up what little I got and more than I can carry of his
and head off to a sail-bearing keelboat
where his friend Massa Lewis is waiting.
That boat was so big
you could lay any ten of the sixteen men on board
or eight of me head to toe and still have enough
room for the dog.

We start out on the Ohio, swing up the Big Muddy
'til we gets to the mouth of the river they call the M'soura
and set up winter camp a good canoe ride from Saint Louie.
That spring when the rains come we cross the Muddy
and commence to climbing the M'soura
and float right up through what seem like heaven on earth
more sky than I ever seen, rocks as pretty as trees
and game so plentiful they come right down to the river bank
and invites they selves to dinner.

Now, I ain't what you would call
a scripture quoter, but the first time
I seen the water fall at M'soura,
felt a herd of buffalo stampede and looked down from top
of Rock Mountains, it was like church.

And where else but God's house can a body servant
big as me, carry a rifle, hatchet and a bone handle knife
so sharp it can peel the black off a lump a coal
and the white man still close his eyes and feel safe, at night?