

Traveling Trunk- Camilla Williams

SUBJECT	TEACHER	GRADE	DATE
Camilla Williams	Ms. McDannold	K-8	2020

Overview

This traveling trunk is designed to introduce students to **opera star Camilla Williams, whose life highlights regional history, the arts, and civil rights**. It will draw upon Williams' life and experiences to discuss difficult topics from segregation to the civil rights movement in the United States. Students will become familiar with a barrier-breaking Danville resident who inspired countless audiences around the world. They will also learn about theater and opera specifically— both as a way for Williams to shatter racial prejudices as and as a historical, cultural influence. By the end of the traveling trunk lesson, students should be more familiar with Williams' challenges and triumphs, especially those pertaining to her role as a civil rights activist and opera star.

Expected Learning Outcomes and Virginia Curriculum Standards

Students who complete this traveling trunk activity set should be able to:

VUS 1A, 1E, and 1J: Review, analyze, and discuss historical materials in order to develop new insight, perspectives, and knowledge centered on historical events and figures.

VUS.13C and 13G: Use primary sources to further explore civil rights through local figures to examine how the movement impacted all Americans, thus reaching a deeper understanding of both Danville and national history through the story of Camilla Williams.

VS1.A, VS1 C-J: Explore Virginia history through an analysis of primary artifacts, the impact of an individual's actions, and the legacy of a local figure who shattered racial barriers.

VS9.B-C: Discuss local history and figures to further understand the civil rights movement and changes in both Virginia and Danville during the mid-twentieth century.

Trunk Contents

USB.....	1
Laminated Photographs.....	5
Record Player.....	1
Record.....	1
Story Accessories.....	40
Copies of Performance Pamphlets/Flyers.....	40
Educational Artifacts.....	5
Large Padded Envelopes.....	5

Setting Up the Traveling Trunk

The traveling trunk is meant to supply an easy, engaging activity for teachers. To set up the trunk, remove the record player, record, and the five artifact packets. Set the artifact packets aside and focus on the record player first. This simple record player is meant to be easy to operate for the purposes of this trunk.

Plug in the USB and open the video clip for the introduction to the trunk. This is a quick clip- not longer than 5 minutes- that will simply introduce students to the topic at hand.

Before class officially starts, divide children into five groups. These groups will each receive an artifact later on in the class, so it is important that there are no more than five groups. The purpose of dividing the children is to make sure that each member of the group can see, interact with, and explore the information packets that will be passed out later.

Introduction

Begin with the record player. Ask the class: What is this?

- Who can name what it is?
- How does it work?
- Has anyone ever used one?
 - If so, when? Where? Did they like it? Why or why not?

Tell the children:

Today, we are going to learn about Camilla Williams, a famous opera singer who was born and raised here in Danville, Virginia. Has anyone ever heard of her before? What have you heard? Why do you think she was so famous and important?

Brief bio of Williams: Born in Danville on October 18th, 1919, Camilla Williams became the first female African-American opera star to work for a major United States opera company. She debuted in 1946 in the opera “Madame Butterfly,” where she played the title character.

- What challenges do you think Williams faced?
- What was the United States like in 1946? What is the same? What is different?
 - Emphasize the role of segregation, race, and discrimination during the period.
 - During the production of Madame Butterfly, the director, Laszlo Halasz, received death threats for casting a black woman in a leading role.

Play the Camilla Williams record. We have supplied a copy of “City Called Heaven,” one of Williams’ most famous concert pieces.

- What did you think of the record? Did you like Williams’ voice? Why or why not?
- Do you hear a lot of people who sing like this today? If so, where? If not, why do you think so?

Play the video for the class.

Learning From Camilla Williams

Pass around the historical packets for each group. The contents include one photograph, one educational artifact, one quote from Williams, and one picture. The contents of each packet relate to one another to give perspective and information on Williams' life.

Historical Packet 1

- Photograph of Williams having her face painted
- Newspaper article: "Invitation to Tan Artists..."
- Quote from Williams about her face being painted
- Artifact: Cloth bracelet from Aida performance

Historical Packet 2

- Photograph of Williams and Marian Anderson together
- Quote from Williams about opening the way for other African-American performers
- Newspaper article: Marian Anderson awards
- Artifact: Award with Lyre Decoration

Historical Packet 3

- Photograph of Charlie Beavers in his office
- Photograph of Williams and Beavers at the beach
- Quote from Williams about singing for civil rights
- Artifact: Book owned by Camilla Williams about civil rights

Historical Packet 4

- Photograph of Williams teaching students at Indiana University
- Magazine article: IU faculty in China
- Quote from Williams about traveling in Beijing
- Artifact: Williams' desk calendar (German text)

Historical Packet 5

- Photograph of Williams waving at camera by plane
- Newspaper article about Williams traveling in Africa
- Quote from Williams about her travels/being a US ambassador
- Artifact: TBD

What can we learn from these? What do they mean? What is your artifact?

Group Activity

Create a timeline of Williams' life together. Which group comes first? How do you know?

- Each student group receives one laminated picture to examine and discuss.
- **Older learners: Also receive supplemental newspaper clippings and background information for their photo to aid with analysis.**
 - What is their picture showing? What does it mean? What can they learn about history from the images they are seeing?
- Some of the pictures are difficult to talk about because they show more difficult histories, such as Williams' face being painted white. What does that mean?

Photos To Be Used



Group Discussion

- What do these historical photographs and documents teach us? What can we gather about the time period from these photographs?
 - Allow children to lead discussion amongst their peers. What do they still have questions about? How can we find answers to those questions?
 - Did any of the pictures stand out? Why?

<p><i>Opera: A Brief History</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overview of Camilla Williams and opera- her characters, roles, performances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use PowerPoint on trunk USB for photo references ○ Pass around copies of Williams’ flyers and performance pamphlets ● Has anyone ever heard opera music before? If so, where? Can they think of any modern media that contains opera (Looney Tunes, movies, TV, etc.)?
<p><i>“Create Your Own Opera” Activity (Can be removed if desired)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pass out the “story accessory” objects to the children. Each child should receive one. Ask them to think of a character and a story that they could base around the object. Does the character own that object? Why is it important to them? Etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children may also draw a character or a scene if they would prefer to do so. ● While children are writing, softly play the songs within the USB in the “Camilla Williams Songs” folder.
<p><i>Concluding Discussion</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage students to share the characters and stories they created. Why did they pair their writing with their objects? ● What kinds of roles did Camilla Williams play? Why do you think she chose them? What did they mean for her? ● What can we learn from Camilla Williams’ life and story?