

Charlotte Hawkins Brown



The AFRICAN
AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE
in North Carolina

North Carolina Freedom Monument Project

Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE: *To better understand the impact Charlotte Hawkins Brown had on education in North Carolina.*

Goals and Standards

Social Studies Objectives: 1, 8.5, 9.1, 11.1, 11.4

Social Studies Skills: 1, 3

NCSS Standards: I, IV, V

ELA Competency Objectives: 2.01, 3.02, 3.03, 4, 5.02, and 6.01

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch of Charlotte Hawkins Brown
- Multiple choice section of *Activities* page
- Palmer Memorial Institute: The Mission and the Legacy (VHS video available at the NC Museum of History; 27 minutes)

Procedures

- Students will read the biographical sketch of Charlotte Hawkins Brown.
- Students will answer questions on the reading.

Evaluation

- Class participation
- Successfully conducting an interview
- Final copy of "The Utopian Classroom" (Assess content, grammar and mechanics)
- Brochure/ad/commercial for Palmer Institute

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Biographical Sketch

In 1987 Palmer Memorial Institute became the first North Carolina Historic Site opened in honor of an African American and a woman. Located in Sedalia, ten miles east of Greensboro in Guilford County, for almost seven decades this campus became the educational destination for African American children because of its founder Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown. She served as president of Palmer for fifty years, 1902-1952. The Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum is located on the once nationally renowned campus.

To improve the educational opportunities of African American children became Charlotte's mission when she was just eighteen. In 1901, while she was still registered at Salem Normal School in Massachusetts, she came to Sedalia to teach at Bethany Institute. This school that met in a Negro church was closed at the end of that year. Local parents urged Charlotte to continue her work there. Assisted by them and northern white donors, she opened a new school in a converted Sedalia blacksmith shop in the fall of 1902. When her New England mentor Alice Freeman Palmer, former president of Wellesley College, died that December, Charlotte named her new campus Palmer Memorial Institute.

Charlotte was no stranger to North Carolina. Born Lottie Hawkins in 1883 to descendants of slaves in Vance County, she moved with her extended family of twenty to the Boston area at age five. There she thrived. When in 1900 she graduated from Cambridge English High and Latin School, she changed her given name to Charlotte Eugenia. Mrs. Palmer agreed to pay her expenses to Salem Normal School in nearby Salem. From there her transformative return to her native state began.

Under her guidance Palmer Memorial Institute grew in fame and fortune. The small coeducational,

African American school with a curriculum emphasizing agriculture on a 300-acre farm became an accredited day and boarding campus with a diverse faculty offering classes from elementary grades through high school. A junior college, added during the Depression, closed in 1940.

President Hawkins had married Edward S. Brown in 1911. They divorced within five years, but her uplifting work continued, including her own higher education. She studied at Wellesley and received several honorary master's and doctoral degrees from northern as well as southern colleges and universities. Palmer Memorial Institute closed in 1971, a decade after Dr. Brown's death and almost two decades after she stepped down as president.

Palmer Memorial Institute sought to make its students well-rounded citizens who could make a difference in a world that judged people on skin color. Stressing academic and cultural as well as practical skills, Dr. Brown always guided her students in developing competent leadership. Her impact on Palmer graduates is still felt in North Carolina and elsewhere today. She espoused the notion of "Black is Beautiful" before it became a rallying cry for self-acceptance and pride in the 1970s. She showed her students and others how to embrace the culture of African Americans.

A dedicated humanitarian, Dr. Brown was active in civic matters, promoting social, educational and economic growth among African Americans. Her work as an educator sparked her passion for betterment of the individual, which was reflected in her anti-segregation stance. Her efforts were a demonstration against the lynchings so prominent in the South during the twentieth century. Against the backdrop of the Jim Crow era, she labored endlessly to promote racial harmony.

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Activities

■ Have students (separately or in groups) list all the adjectives that apply to Mrs. Brown. As a class, come up with the top five adjectives. Then have students apply these adjectives to the concept of leadership. Discuss why people need the mantle of a leader to help others.

■ Using a map of North Carolina, students will locate Guilford County and Sedalia. Discuss why the Piedmont was chosen as a good place for Palmer Institute.

■ Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Each group will create five questions about education and educational practices. The students will ask these questions to at least two adults who attended high school in two different decades. It is best to have a wide variety of interviewees and responses, representing several decades. Have students report their findings back to the class. Students should construct a Venn diagram to compare education now and before. Allow the class to compare information and make judgments as to why there were changes and the effects of the changes.

■ Have students research the state of education for African Americans before the mass integration of schools in the 1960s. Share this information with the class. As a follow up, students can debate the benefits and drawbacks of school integration.

■ **Writing:** Assign the topic: "The Utopian Classroom." Be sure that students not only write about the ultimate classroom but also explain how this set-up will ensure a quality education.

■ Have students create a brochure, advertisement or commercial that will entice students to attend Palmer Institute. Include students when constructing rubric for grading.

■ **NCFMP:** During slavery, in most places, it was against the law for a slave to learn to read and write. Knowing this fact, how would you depict the role of education and its long-term results as part of the NC Freedom Monument? What symbols best represent education? What symbols for education have become clichés?

Multiple Choice

Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

___ 1. Which best describes the intentions of Charlotte Hawkins Brown?

- A. Mrs. Brown wanted to make Mrs. Palmer a wealthy woman.
- B. Mrs. Brown needed a way to make money.
- C. Mrs. Brown knew Southern students deserved to be educated.
- D. Mrs. Brown felt sorry for the students.

___ 2. The author's attitude toward the life's work of Mrs. Brown is that of

- A. pride
- B. despair
- C. jealousy
- D. anger

___ 3. Although Palmer Memorial Institute closed in 1971, its influence probably

- A. helped many students to have courage to leave the state after graduation.
- B. became part of the public school curriculum.
- C. had no effect on the adult lives of the students.
- D. can still be felt in the state today.

___ 4. One of the sentences in the last paragraph of "Charlotte Hawkins Brown" said; "Her efforts were a demonstration against the lynchings so prominent in the South during the twentieth century." This statement is similar to which of the following.

- A. The dragon spit fire at the helpless villagers.
- B. The mouse gnawed the rope and freed the lion.
- C. The sand blast smoothed the rocks.
- D. The gnat irritated the giant.

___ 5. There was a need for Palmer Memorial Institute in 1902 because

- A. African American students were not getting a quality education in public schools.
- B. there was no place for African American students to learn to read and write.
- C. the students did not get along with their parents and wanted to leave home.
- D. the school needed cheap labor to help erect the buildings.

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Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Activities

Responses will vary.

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