

Paired Text Teacher's Guide

Kayleigh Pendrick

Department of STEM Education and Professional Studies, Old Dominion University

LIBS 644: Literature & Media for Young Adults

Dr. Angela Branyon

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Pre-Reading Warm-Up Activity

To introduce the students to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, start by discussing the Greenwood District, aka Black Wall Street, before the Massacre.

1. Ask students what they think life was like for Black Americans in the 1920s. If they need prompting, ask them what Black historical figures they know from the early 1900s, what laws they think were in place, and if they think that Black people had different experiences in different parts of the United States.
2. Show students this video: [What Is Black Wall Street? | Forbes](#) (Forbes, 2021)
3. Discuss what they just saw. Had they heard of the Greenwood District? The Tulsa Race Massacre? Did they know that there was a place full of prosperous Black Americans? How did seeing that video open their eyes?

Bulletin Board Idea

Create a list of relevant Black historical figures from the early 1900s and from the Greenwood District. Have students choose someone off that list and write down three facts about the person on an index card. Post the index card on the class bulletin board.

Examples of Black historical figures: W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, O. W. Gurley, J. B. Stradford, A. J. Smitherman, Mabel Little, John and Loula Williams, Dr. A. C. Jackson, B. C. Franklin, Madame C. J. Walker, Bessie Coleman, James Weldon Johnson, Jack Johnson, and Langston Hughes

Book Reviews

Colbert, Brandy

Black Birds in the Sky: The Story and Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre
2021. 224pp. \$19.99 hc. Balzer + Bray. 9780063056664. Grades 9-12

Can a violent historical event ever truly be covered up and erased from history? Oklahoma's history textbooks refused to acknowledge the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre until the year 2000. Brandy Colbert's fascinating and well-researched young adult nonfiction book attempts to truly dive into the raw history that was denied for so many years. Colbert's book starts before Oklahoma's statehood with information about the Indigenous tribes who lived in the Oklahoma area before white settlers stole their land, bringing enslaved people with them. She narrates the development of the Greenwood District, often called Black Wall Street, an exclusively Black area of Tulsa in which Black people had prosperous businesses, a good school, and a strong community. Colbert then tells the story of the June 1st Race Massacre in painstaking detail, sharing the stories of individual Tulsans during the rapid chain of events. This unflinching and person-centered dive into a long-ignored massacre will teach young adults what happens when

institutional racism continues to build over time and racists are not held accountable for their actions. Young adults will be able to make timely connections between the incidents leading up to and during the Race Massacre to Eric Garner's death and the Black Lives Matter movement, showing them just how easily history can repeat itself if we do not learn from it. **Kayleigh**

Pendrick, MLIS Candidate, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia

Highly Recommended

Pink, Randi

Angel of Greenwood

2021. 304pp. \$18.99 hc. Feiwel & Friends. 9781250768476. Grades 9-12

A 1920s opposites-attract romance between two Black teens is anything but simple when the two are thrown into the chaos of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Troublemaker Isaiah Wilson and kind-hearted Angel Hill are both residents of the Greenwood District and students at Booker T. Washington High School. Isaiah falls in love with Angel when he sees her free-spirited dancing at church. However, Angel, who spends her time caring for her terminally ill father, taking care of her neighbors' children, and helping out at church, is not interested in being near Isaiah, who is known for being the number two to his manipulative and bullying best friend. When Isaiah and Angel's English teacher convinces them to help her start a mobile library, Angel starts to learn about Isaiah as more than the town bully. The night of the Memorial Day parade, though, everything changes when white men breach the safe borders of Greenwood and start burning and looting the town. Isaiah and Angel must do all they can to save as many people as possible while grappling with the reality of their home and community being destroyed before their eyes. This book is rooted in true history, from the characters' patronage of stores that existed in the real Greenwood to Angel and Isaiah's debates about the philosophies of W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. In addition to the facts, readers will experience the events of June 1st through the eyes of characters they have learned to love, making history feel more personal and perhaps even more real. **Kayleigh Pendrick, MLIS Candidate, Old**

Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia

Highly Recommended

Discussion Questions

Black Birds in the Sky: The Story and Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre

1. Why do you think the author started the book with the history of the Native Americans who lived in Tulsa first?
2. What aspects of the Greenwood District did you find most interesting?
3. What are some specific factors, besides just racism, that influenced white anger towards the Greenwood District?
4. How did you feel when you read chapter 5, which details the Race Massacre? Did anything that happened truly surprise you?
5. Why do you think the US, and Oklahoma and Tulsa specifically, worked to erase the Tulsa Race Massacre from history?

Angel of Greenwood

1. What are your opinions about Angel and all she does for the community?
2. Why is the book mobile important?
3. Angel and Isaiah are both coping with grief during the book. How do you think this shapes their characters? Does this contribute to their connection?
4. What did you think about Isaiah and Angel's debates about the philosophies of W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington? Did you find yourself agreeing more with one of them than the other?
5. Do you think that Isaiah is able to atone for his previous bullying throughout the second half of the book?

Black Birds in the Sky & Angel of Greenwood

1. What elements of the real Greenwood do you recognize in *Angel of Greenwood*?
2. How was the experience of reading the nonfiction and fiction versions of the Tulsa Race Massacre? What parts of either book stood out to you?
3. Which statement feels truer to you and why:
 - a. Reading *Black Birds in the Sky* helped me understand the events of *Angel of Greenwood* better.
 - b. Reading *Angel of Greenwood* helped me connect to *Black Birds in the Sky* more.
4. Mount Zion Baptist Church is an important location in both books. How is the importance of the church shown in each book?
5. How do the events that happened in the books relate to recent history and the current climate of the United States?

Instructional Ideas

History and Social Science

USII.4b - The student will apply social science skills to understand how life changed after the Civil War by explaining the reasons for the increase in immigration, growth of cities, and challenges arising from this expansion.

Students will join groups of three to research the experiences of Black Americans during this time of change. Students will use at least three resources to put together a 5-8 slide PowerPoint. They will be given three class periods to complete this assignment. If they cannot finish it during that time, they need to meet during their free time. Some ideas for research topics are: Why did many Black people move from rural land to cities? What difficulties did Black people have in cities? How did Jim Crow Laws and/or the reemergence of the KKK affect the choices Black people made about where and how to live?

English

10.5g - The student will read, interpret, analyze, and evaluate nonfiction texts [and] analyze and synthesize information in order to solve problems, answer questions, and generate new knowledge.

The students will read this June 1, 1921 [New York Times article](#) about the Tulsa Race Massacre. After reading the article, they will break into small groups and compare what the article says to how *Black Birds in the Sky* describes the Massacre. Students will discuss:

1. What are some differences between the reporting in this article and the reporting in *Black Birds in the Sky*?
2. How do you think the time affected the article? Think about both the biases a newspaper writer would have in 1921 and about how long after the event that this article was published.
3. Who is the audience for this article? Who is the audience for *Black Birds in the Sky*?
4. How did you feel when you read the article?

At the end of the discussion, each group will share the parts of their discussion that they think were unique or interesting to spark a class-wide discussion.

Fine Arts: Visual Arts

AI.6 - Analyze art in relation to events, places, cultures, and historical periods.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Harlem was the central location of Black art during a time called the Harlem Renaissance. The Renaissance started when Black people migrated to New York City, as mentioned in the History and Social Studies SOL. Students will look at two important pieces of art, [Gamin](#) (Savage, ca. 1929) and [Let My People Go](#) (Douglas, ca. 1935-1939). The teacher will tell students what the artists said about the pieces of art. Then, they will start a discussion with the class about what the students think the art says about the lives of Black Americans during this time period. After the discussion, students will write a paragraph about how they think the art and their discussion connects specifically to the Greenwood District, its residents, and/or the Tulsa Race Massacre.

Professional Reviews

Kornberger, M. (2021, January 22). Angel of Greenwood. [Review of the book *Angel of Greenwood*, by R. Pink]. *School Library Journal*. <https://www.slj.com/review/angel-of-greenwood>

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<https://www.slj.com/review/black-birds-in-the-sky-the-story-and-legacy-of-the-1921-tulsa-race-massacre>

Additional Resources

[Black Wall Street Virtual Art Exhibit](#)

Artist Dawn Tree tells the story of the Greenwood District before, during, and after the Tulsa Race Riot. The artist uses graphic art that contains real pictures and newspaper articles in order to showcase this history. This combination of art and storytelling from a Black person's point of view is a valuable resource for students.

[Greenwood Cultural Center](#)

The Greenwood Cultural Center website is a mix of the past and present of the Greenwood District. It features information about what Greenwood is like today and has many online historical exhibits. The exhibits include a picture gallery, information about the Mabel B. Little Heritage House, and stories of Tulsa Race Massacre survivors.

[Tulsa Historical Society & Museum: 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre](#)

This website features photographs, documents, audio recordings, and other resources about the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The information has been compiled by a trusted resource. This site also discusses “What’s in a name? Riot vs. Massacre” and “Mass Graves Investigation,” two topics that have not been covered fully in previous materials.

[Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors Plead For Justice](#)

In this YouTube video, three survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre tell their stories to Congress. These testimonies are part of the lawsuit that several survivors and descendants of the Race Massacre filed against Tulsa 100 years after the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Students will have the chance to directly hear from three people in their 100s tell stories from their childhoods that still affect them today.

[Tulsa Star](#)

The *Tulsa Star* was a newspaper run by Black editor A. J. Smitherman (Colbert, 2021, p. 66). Because of this, the newspaper covered topics and events important to Black Tulsans from a Black perspective. This collection features 209 pages from different issues of the *Tulsa Star* throughout the 1910s and 1920s. This gives students an idea of what it was like to live in Tulsa as a Black person during this time.

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- Forbes. (2021, June 21). *What is Black Wall Street? | Forbes* [Video]. YouTube.
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