



Tulsa Race Massacre: 100 Years Later

Community and Parent Educator's Guide

Overview

Exploring the events that took place in Tulsa on the Greenwood District (“Black Wall Street”) on May 31, 1921, through media is an opportunity for families and communities to engage in historical thinking, art, and media-literacy building activities. OETA’s documentary of the unfortunate events provides historical context, firsthand accounts, along with other sources that speak to what Greenwood was at its height and what it is today – striving to recreate that sense of economic prosperity and empowerment. Throughout the documentary, art from the various art worlds is woven in to interpret the events of the past and to inspire a more inclusive and equitable future for all Oklahomans.

Learning Goals

This guide will help you bring creativity and the fun of learning history to your living room or learning space for youth ages 12 to 14.

Both adolescents and adults will learn together about...

- *The significance of the Tulsa Race Massacre and its effects on Tulsa’s Black Wall Street.*
- *The historical and present impact of the Tulsa Race Massacre on the City of Tulsa as a major event.*
- *How local artists have engaged in projects that express their sentiments and understanding of the Tulsa Race Massacre as a historical event.*

How to Use this Guide

This is divided into five activities to help you guide the learning of your adolescent. The estimated total learning time is approximately 6 hours. The chart below illustrates this lesson over a five-day duration. However, activities may be extended over longer periods to help incorporate them into your at-home or community learning engagement program.

Schedule of Activities

Day	Activity	Description	Duration
1	Review	Read and discuss background information with your adolescent to help gain a greater insight of the documentary's subject matter and formulate questions as you view and chat with your adolescent.	90 Minutes
2	Watch	Actively engage in viewership using guided viewing practices. <i>[see attached]</i>	150 Minutes
3	Create	Engage in hands-on activities with your adolescent for expression of learning.	60 Minutes
4	Share	Create opportunities for adolescents to share their learning with others.	30 Minutes
5	Extend	Guide your adolescent in more learning more about the topic on their own.	30 Minutes

Day 1 | Background: Read and Discuss Information Together

Background Information Instructions

Step 1: Review Vocabulary (define ahead of time)

Step 2: Read, Question, & Respond

- Read one passage at a time
- At the end of each passage pose a question for thought to the adolescent (example: “Why would the “accusation” of an assault anger people?” Or “How is art empowering to people?”)
- Allow the adolescent to freely respond to the question

Step 3: Share your thoughts to create dialogue

The History – “Black Wall Street”

Vocabulary:

Indian Territory

Oil Boom

Great Migration

Black Wall Street

Greenwood

Assault

Standoff

Retribution

In the years prior to Oklahoma’s statehood (formally established in 1907), many of the newly freed slaves in the southern states migrated north to a set aside known as **Indian Territory**; people of all races flocked to territory (the southern blacks were known as “Exodusters”). The territory was vast, and the vegetation was diverse; it encompassed the open and hilly characteristics of the prairie and the lush greenness reminiscent of the Mississippi Delta. Much of the land was undeveloped which created the opportunity for the now mass free population of blacks to write their own narrative in the burgeoning towns of Oklahoma.

Nationwide recruitment efforts were done to attract those with big dreams but little resources to share in the spoils of the discovery of oil. The center of the **oil boom** was in Tulsa, Oklahoma. With over 100 oil companies in Tulsa, the newly arrived residents were poised to make it the metropolis of the Midwest. The boom that was taking place

caught the eye of Perry, Oklahoma's Ottawa W. Gurley—who would go on to purchase 40-acres of land situated in the undeveloped area of North Tulsa. Gurley entered an informal partnership with John “The Baptist” Stradford to create an all-black district. Gurley and Stradford subdivided the plots of lands into housing, retail lots, alleys and streets made it available to the blacks, beginning the **great migration** to North Tulsa.

This economically thriving black enclave would be known across the country as “**Black Wall Street**”—the term was taken from Booker T. Washington after his visit to the Tulsa neighborhood (Black Fortunes. 2018. <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/origins-black-wall-street/>). **Greenwood** was where domestics and professionals alike would shop for the necessities in the many grocery stores and sundries, patron the entertainment late-night destinations, and commune within the boundaries of this black “Mecca”. As many blacks continued to migrate into Tulsa, it increased the black population from 10 to 12%--at its height Greenwood saw its population boom from 1,959 to 8,000. The population increase and outward displays of wealth and opulence (with the over-performing oil industry domestics were making unheard of amounts of money) caused some frustration and paranoia in their white counterparts.

An encounter in an elevator in the Drexel building located in downtown Tulsa would set forth a collision course that would devastate the community of Greenwood. Many stories have been shared to speculate as to what exactly happened on the elevator. The accusation of **assault** of a black man on a white woman was enough to send shockwaves through both white and black communities; thousands of men from both sides gathered at the courthouse. After a **standoff** in which a white man tried to dislodge a gun from a black man's hand, one of the most violent instances of racial conflict would occur. The ensuing struggle for **retribution** would last for 18 hours and leave over 300 dead; the property damage to over 12,000 homes and businesses are valued at \$32 million dollars today. Today, the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission and the Greenwood Arts Project commemorates the cultural contributions and remembers the lives lost in the historic district of Greenwood to amplify the voices of the past in hopes of creating a better future for the descendants of the massacre.

The Arts—Greenwood Resilience

Vocabulary:

Art Worlds
Empowering
Inspiration
Mixed Media Art
Collage
Assemblage
Interpret
Open Art Form
Consider

In the film, there were several **art worlds** on display to highlight how creative expression is **empowering** those in the community. The art worlds are dance, drama/theater, music, and visual arts. Artists from various disciplines used their voices, hands, and feet along with their imagination to bring to life the stories of Greenwood. Oklahoma's art community, inspired by the events that transpired in May of 1921, employed their artistic tools to create works of art that captured the spirit and resilience of this historic district.

Oklahoma is home to approximately 3.8 million people from all walks of life, residing in its two major metropolitan areas (Oklahoma City and Tulsa), surrounding suburbs, other cities, and rural areas. Norman, a small city just south of Oklahoma City, is home to the University of Oklahoma which is the State's foremost research institution and artist Skip Hill. Mr. Hill expresses himself through a visual art form known as **mixed media art**. The art generally takes on the shape of **collages or assemblages** from a variety of materials put together to express an idea, thought or **inspiration**. He finds himself in the company of other great artists such as Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Cornell, and many more as he inspires Oklahomans to reflect and consider the various topics expressed in his work.

Movies, television, plays, and poetic performances are all a part of the drama and theater world of art. People can **interpret** thoughts, feels, and situations through artistic performances in the drama and theater world. Spoken word performers combine displays of emotion, movement, vocal technique, and poetry to dramatically inform their audience on a variety of topics. Poetry can also be viewed as an **open art form** that allows for dialog, asking questions for the audience to consider. Not following conventional literary rules, poetry becomes an art as writers and performers use their language and bodies at will to give life to an idea. Poets like Deborah Hunter and Tony B used their voices to amplify the voices of the past through their spoken word poetry and use their art to create conversation engaging audiences in a variety of ways. Some

people, when participating in a poetic performance quietly **consider** the artist's questions as they reflect on their own experiences. Others are taken in by the physically dramatic interpretation used to accentuate the central theme and lean more towards an emotional connection with both the performer and subject matter.

Over 90% of all human communication is non-verbal in nature, meaning physical movements or cues are more often used to send desired messages to the receiver, or more simply put to express our feelings, values, interests, and opinions. Modern dance was formed in the early 20th century. At the time, ballet and other classical dance art forms were only available to the upper class—leaving a barrier of access for everyone else. As a result, those dancers who had limited exposure to ballet and other classical forms, and those who were not accepted into the ballet industry decided to instead create their own art form that would be available to all. Because of its summative nature, the movements in modern dance are derived from various dance art forms such as ballet, gymnastic floor routines, and other creative and athletic inspirations. At its core, modern dance gives the dancer and the audience the ability to freely communicate and develop new understandings of how humans can express their emotions, desires, values, and opinions. Ari Christopher uses her unique connection to Tulsa to capture and unearth the seemingly unknown history while reimagining the event that spurred on the destruction of Greenwood.

Day 2 | Watch: View the Documentary with Media Literacy Practices

Media Literacy is the ability to critically gather, view, and listen to various media content while also using media outputs e.g., social media, vlogs etc. to communicate or respond to the media messages. It builds on traditional literacy and equips individuals with the tools needed to be active and engaged citizens in the 21st century. Additionally, the processes for extracting information, themes, and key concepts from media are known as *guided viewing* and *co-viewing*. Like reading along with your child or student to highlight the character, setting and plot to uncover the moral of the story—when employing guided/co-viewing methods you are highlighting the character's interactions, historical context of the period, and social commentary to support questioning that ultimately uncovers the intended message from the content. Media literacy is about equipping media consumers with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the vast availability of digital information to extract learning and communicating interpretations and understandings.

While watching the documentary (<https://www.pbs.org/video/tulsa-race-massacre-100-years-later-ygtwbn/>) here are a few questions that you can pose to your learners:

1. How did the Greenwood District become the cultural and economic “hub” of North Tulsa? What people, places or things were put in place to develop the infrastructure?
2. What influence did the oil boom have on the developing city of Tulsa?
3. What attracted Black Americans to Oklahoma? What resources were available? And what resources needed to be created to develop the Greenwood District?
4. How did the Greenwood District benefit the developing State of Oklahoma? And what threat, if any, did it pose to Oklahoma?

Day 3 | Create: Hands-on Learning or Expression

The Tulsa Race Massacre sent shockwaves through communities in Tulsa that are still felt today. Using what you have learned from the documentary select one project from the options below to create your interpretation of what “Black Wall Street” meant back then and its significance today.

Option 1: Mixed Media (Collage)

Using a variety of materials e.g., newspaper clippings, magazine articles, beads, etc., create a collage that captures what the Greenwood District (“Black Wall Street”) represents to you.

Option 2: Poetic Expression

Using a pen or pencil, write a poem that conveys your thoughts and emotions surrounding the Tulsa Race Massacre or displays your thoughts concerning Black Wall Street before the event. After you have written your poem, record* yourself (on cell phone/tablet device or camera) performing your originally written piece.

Option 3: Modern Dance

By yourself or with a group of 2-3 people, develop a dance routine that captures your interpretation of daily life on Greenwood or expresses your emotion after learning about the Tulsa Race Massacre. After you have developed your routine, record* the dance (on cell phone/tablet device or camera).

**Note: Practicing before recording is recommended*

Day 4 | Share: Show New Understanding

Take a few moments for the learners to share their work. Create opportunities for adolescents to present their work by

- Engaging in person with family, friends, social organizations, or church groups and have Q&A sessions afterwards.
- Use social platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media platform for adolescents to post videos showing their work and explaining their learning.

Day 5 | Extend: Review and Discuss Additional Resources

For more information of “Black Wall Street” you can visit the links below:

- **Black Fortunes:** Excerpts <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/origins-black-wall-street/>
- **Oklahoma History Center:** Tulsa Race Massacre <https://www.okhistory.org/learn/trm1>
- **Tulsa Historical Society & Museum:** Tulsa Race Massacre <https://www.tulsaohistory.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/>
- **PBS Learning Media:** Tulsa: The Fire and the Forgotten <https://oeta.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/Tulsa/>



Guided Viewing: Adolescence & Youth

A Parent's Guide to Watching Television with Adolescence & Youth

The media landscape is ever-changing--there are more outlets for information than ever before. To successfully navigate, what could seem like clutter of media messaging, and extract the learning from the various forms of digital content families must be able to employ media literacy strategies. As children enter adolescence and their latter teenage years much of the media that they consume will help shape their understanding and perception of themselves and the world around them. These strategies will help to guide the viewing and learning experience at home.

Step 1: Identify Historical Context

When viewing media, especially media with a strong historical focus, it is important to understand that moments in history are and can be interrelated with other social phenomena. Before watching the program, take time to place the program in its proper historical context by considering time period, social customs of the day, major social movements, and governmental policy changes that influence character behavior and interactions as well as the setting of the program. In doing so, it provides an accurate lens to view the program.

Step 2: Notice the Social Commentary

Because media is constructed, the content has embedded values and perspectives. While viewing together, it is important to notice the explicit use of words, gender, race and other cultural usages to connect to character setting and how the setting is utilized to uncover the "hidden" messages in the program.

Step 3: Question Intended Message

All media content is designed to share a specific message. Media content is constructed and has its own language. While viewing the program, periodically, pause to uncover word choice, and consider who created message and for what purpose. This decreases the likelihood that you be vulnerable to manipulation.

Step 4: Respond

People can experience the same media message differently, so it is important that those viewing share how they are thinking and feeling immediately after the program ends. During this time, this is where your A&Y should share with you how they interpreted the program and whether they agreed or disagreed with the content and why. Encourage your A&Y to use their social media accounts to further respond to the media content by sharing their thoughts, reflections, and perspectives after watching the program.