

# Short cartoons teach true tales about important African-Americans

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An image of Janet Collins from one of Sweet Blackberry's animated films. Collins was an African-American dancer. Photo courtesy of Sweet Blackberry.

Take a moment to think about these stories.

A man curls up inside a box. The man is a slave. A slave is someone who is owned by another person. He or she is forced to work. The man is mailing himself to a state where slavery is illegal. There, he can live as a free person.

A woman is a ballerina. She is a wonderful performer. She is also a person of color. For that reason, she is asked to paint her face white. It is the only way she is allowed to perform.

These are not made-up stories. They are true tales of American history. But many people do not know about them. Sweet Blackberry wants to change that. This group makes animated, or cartoon, films. The films tell important stories. They are a way for children to learn about African-Americans in history, and the incredible things they accomplished.

Kids learn a lot from movies and TV. They may get an idea for a job they'd like to have when they grow up. Or they might look up to a character on TV. But children of color do not get to see many people who look like them on TV or in movies. Studies show that African-Americans, Hispanics and other non-white groups are not shown as much as white characters.

Karyn Parsons wants to change that. She thinks it is unfair. Parsons is an African-American actress. She started Sweet Blackberry. The group's newest movie is "The Bessie Coleman Story." Bessie Coleman was the first female African-American and Native American pilot. The movie tells her story. It will be out in February 2018.

Parsons answered questions about Sweet Blackberry. She explained why she wants to share these stories with kids.

**Why do you think these stories are important to share?**

Many young people today feel very small and helpless. I want to inspire them with stories like the Bessie Coleman story. Bessie lived in the 1920s. She was a black woman in the United States. She wanted to be a pilot. But she was told, "No, you can't fly. You're black, you're a woman. We won't even teach you how to fly." But she learned how to fly anyway! She did not give up.



I think this shows kids that you can do anything you want in life. You just have to think beyond what is expected of you.

**How do you choose which stories to tell?**

I want to tell stories that people haven't heard yet. At first, I thought too many people already knew Bessie Coleman's story. But as time went on I found out that many people still did not know about her.

**What do you like best about telling these stories?**

It is very rewarding to share these movies with kids. Watching kids watch the film is the best. I also love talking to them about it after.

**What do you hope kids will learn from these stories?**

I hope it shows kids that they are strong. They can do great things. They can do more than they even imagine!

I also want everyone to understand that these are American history stories. They are not just African-American stories. We should not only learn these stories during Black History Month. They are part of the history of this whole country. I hope really young kids will grow up knowing this.



## Quiz

- 1 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-7].  
Select the paragraph from the section that explains the MAIN goal of Sweet Blackberry.
- 2 Read the section "What do you hope kids will learn from these stories?"  
Which question is answered in this section?
- (A) What is Sweet Blackberry's first movie about?
  - (B) What can kids do to learn about Black History Month?
  - (C) Why does Karyn Parsons think the movies are important?
  - (D) Why does Karyn Parsons think Bessie Coleman is important?
- 3 Which sentence from the article BEST states a MAIN idea of the entire article?
- (A) They are a way for children to learn about African-Americans in history, and the incredible things they accomplished.
  - (B) Studies show that African-Americans, Hispanics and other non-white groups are not shown as much as white characters.
  - (C) But as time went on I found out that many people still did not know about her.
  - (D) I also want everyone to understand that these are American history stories.
- 4 Finish the sentence below.  
One MAIN idea of the article is that \_\_\_\_.
- (A) Bessie Coleman learned how to fly airplanes even though people discouraged her
  - (B) Sweet Blackberry makes many interesting cartoons and animated movies for children
  - (C) Sweet Blackberry's newest movie, "The Bessie Coleman Story," will be out in February 2018
  - (D) Karyn Parsons believes it is important for kids to see African-American characters in movies