



OUR CITY OUR CULTURE

WRITTEN BY BRANDON VOGEL
ILLUSTRATED BY WANDA EWING
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OUR CITY, OUR CULTURE



Making Invisible Histories Visible

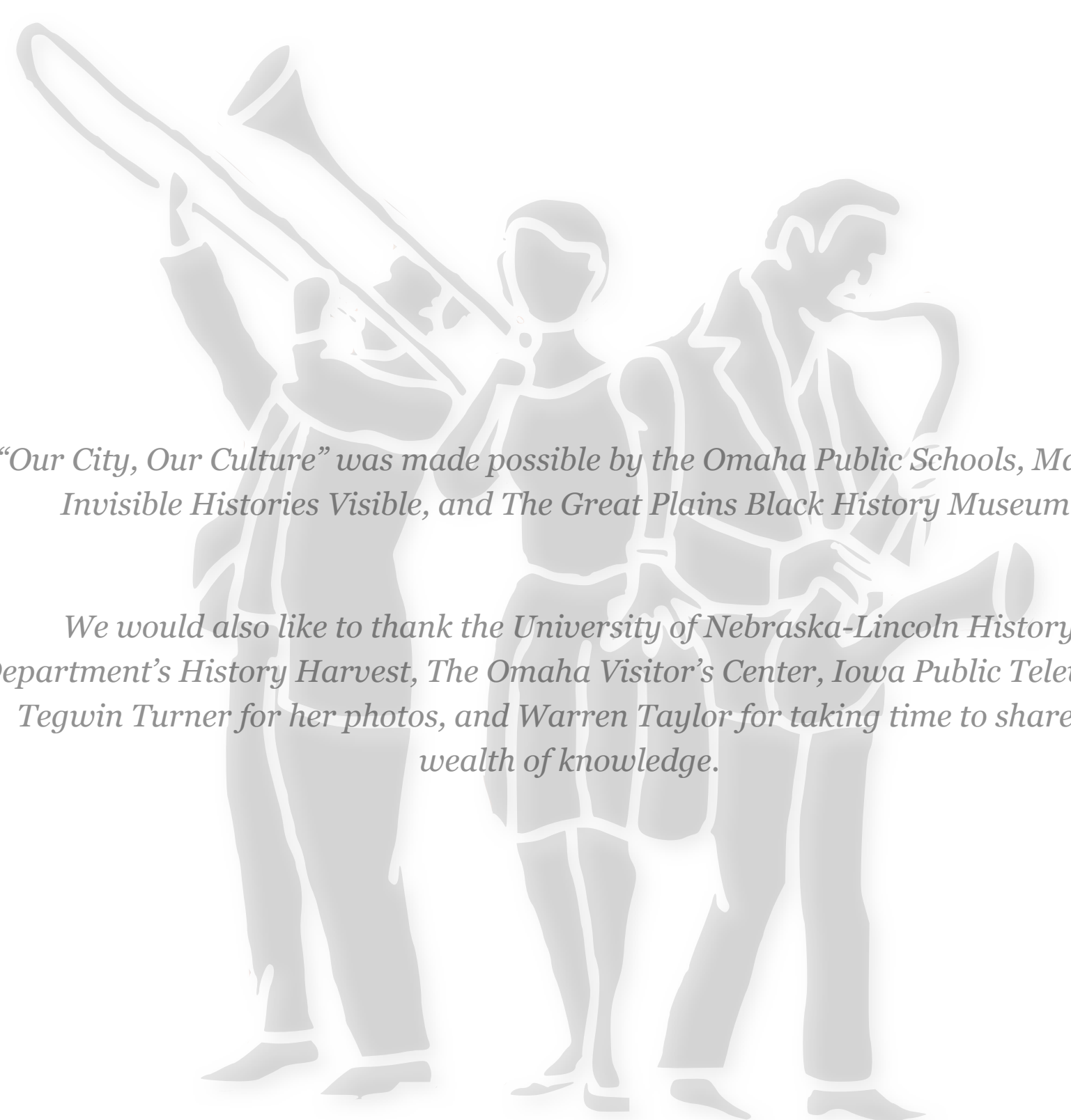


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Special Thanks to Harris Payne and Barry Thomas

Making Invisible Histories Visible is an initiative of the Omaha Public Schools.



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We would also like to thank the University of Nebraska-Lincoln History Department’s History Harvest, The Omaha Visitor’s Center, Iowa Public Television, Tegwin Turner for her photos, and Warren Taylor for taking time to share his wealth of knowledge.

RATIONALE

During the summer of 2013, eight Omaha Public Schools teachers each developed an iBook on a topic of Omaha and Nebraska history as it relates to African American History. The four 3rd grade books are: Then and Now: A Look at People in Your Neighborhood; Our City, Our Culture; Civil Rights: Standing Up for What's Right to Make a Difference; and The Great Migration: Wherever People Move, Home is Where the Heart is. The four 4th grade books are: Legends of the Name: Buffalo Soldiers in Nebraska; African American Pioneers; Notable Nebraskans; and WWII: Double Victory.

Each book was written by a local Omaha author, and illustrations were created by a local artist. Photographs, documents, and other artifacts included in the book were provided by local community members and through partnership with the Great Plains Black History Museum.

These books provide supplemental information on the role of African Americans in Omaha and Nebraska history topics. It is important to integrate this material in order to expand students' cultural understanding, and highlight all the historical figures that have built this state. Each book allows students to go beyond the content through analysis activities using photos, documents, and other artifacts. Through these iBooks, students will experience history and its connections to their own cultures and backgrounds.

You can use the iBook's **Speak Selection** function to listen to the iBook be read aloud.

To enable **Speak Selection**:

Launch the **Settings** app from the Home screen of your iPad.

Now tap on **General**.

Scroll down and towards the bottom, tap on **Accessibility**.

Tap on the **Speak Selection** option and turn it to **On**.

You can customize the speed the selection is spoken.

You can also choose to have each word highlighted as it is spoken.

To use **Speak Selection** in the iBook:

Highlight the text and in the text edit popup, select **Speak**.

Your iPad will now speak the text back to you.

iBook Navigation Guide

To navigate the iBook:

Swipe the page right to left, just like you would turn the pages of a physical book. To go back a page, swipe the page left to right.

Widgets

There are different kinds of widgets in each iBook. Widgets include pictures, image galleries, videos, interactive images, and more. The widgets vary between iBooks. Below is information on how to navigate some of the basic widgets.

Image and Video Widgets

Many images can be tapped to view them in full-screen mode. Images viewed in full screen mode can be viewed vertically or horizontally. Some images may have a pop-over feature; a small box with information about the picture will pop up when the image is tapped. Other images may be in a section with scrolling capability. Slide a finger up or down the scroll bar to navigate it. Tap on videos to play them.

Interactive images have labels on them with additional information for different parts of the image. Click on the label to zoom into that area and explore the image.

To navigate an Image Gallery:

Tap on the first image to open the gallery in full screen mode.

Images may be viewed horizontally in full screen mode.

Swipe right to left to scroll through the images.

You can scroll left to right to go back to a previous image.

To close the gallery, pinch across the surface of the iPad.

You may also tap the (x) in the top left corner of the screen.

Review Widgets

Some iBooks have built in Review widgets to check for understanding of the material. There are multiple choice and drag and label reviews. To complete a drag and label review, touch and hold down a label and drag it to the correct place on the review.

Some iBooks have additional activities as well. Be sure to explore every page!

Vocabulary Glossary

There are **bold** words throughout the iBook.

These are glossary words.

Tap on the **bold** words to see the definition, or meaning, of each word.

Please complete our survey by clicking on the link below:

https://ops.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_diBncGgPTCsGMTz



OUR CITY, OUR CULTURE

This was not a 10-year-old's idea of an exciting Saturday. Felicia could think of any number of things she would rather be doing than sitting on a bench on the corner of 24th and Lake Streets on a sunny morning with her grandmother, Anita, and her mother, Pam.

In hopes of **generating** some excitement, Felicia decided to ask a question.

“Why is that statue here?” she asked, nodding towards the **bronze** statue of a singer and two horn players directly in front of her.

“That’s the Dreamland Trio,” Pam said. “This is the Dreamland Plaza. It was built because Omaha is one of the great music cities in America.”

“Omaha?!” Felicia said, not fully believing what she’d just heard.

“Oh sure, all of the best jazz and blues musicians used to come through Omaha,” Anita said. “Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker – they all played here.”



“Where?” Felicia asked.

“Right there,” Pam said and pointed down 24th Street. They walked two blocks down to the Jewell Building. A boxy, brick building, it didn’t look much like a jazz club to Felicia. It’s full of offices today, but the Dreamland Ballroom used to be on the second floor. It was one of the great jazz clubs west of Chicago in the 1940s, 50s and 60s.



Mr. Warren Taylor remembers the Dreamland Ballroom

Not only was the Jewell Building the home of the Dreamland Ballroom, it was also a community center. Citizens from the neighborhood would come and hold meetings. Many social clubs also met here. A social club is a group of people who share a common interest.



To the left are excerpts from one of Preston Love's last interviews. He shares thoughts about the struggles and contributions of African-Americans during the 1940's. Interview courtesy of Iowa Public Television. Photo courtesy of History Harvest.



JACK SHEPARD: In a nutshell, can you tell me about your career.

PRESTON LOVE: Being 79 and being in the business all of the last 60-61 years, you have so much to say and so many stockpiles of experiences. It's hard to list them and numerate them. But I never exaggerate what I've done. I'm very proud of

As they were walking, Anita told Felicia the story of a boy she knew growing up in Omaha. He was a great musician who got the chance to play with Count Basie at the Dreamland one night and the next morning was on a train to Chicago, headed out on tour with one of the most famous artists of the time. His name was Preston Love and he went on to make a name for himself in jazz and R&B, playing with many of the biggest Motown artists of the 1960s and 70s. Motown was a record label based in Detroit and Los Angeles which released some of the best albums of soul, R&B, and jazz.



“Is that why it’s called Love’s Jazz and Art Center?” Felicia asked, pointing to the glowing neon sign in the window across the street.

“It is,” Pam said. “A lot of black Omaha musicians went on to make names for themselves after being taught by Mrs. Florentine Pinkston on the top floor of that very building. She was one of the best music teachers around, educated in Boston and Paris, but she came to Omaha to share her love for music for nearly 60 years.

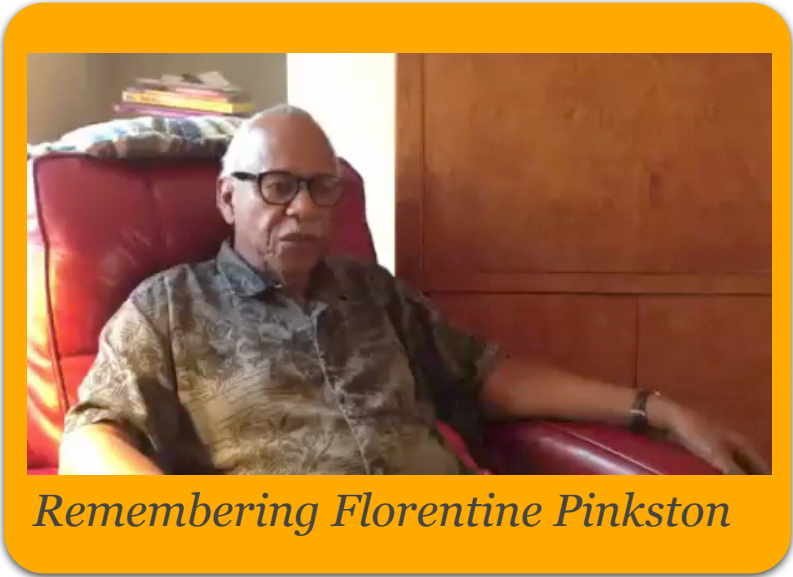
That building is a way to remember all of them.”

Felicia was interested now. “What else happened here?”

“Do you like movies?” Anita asked.

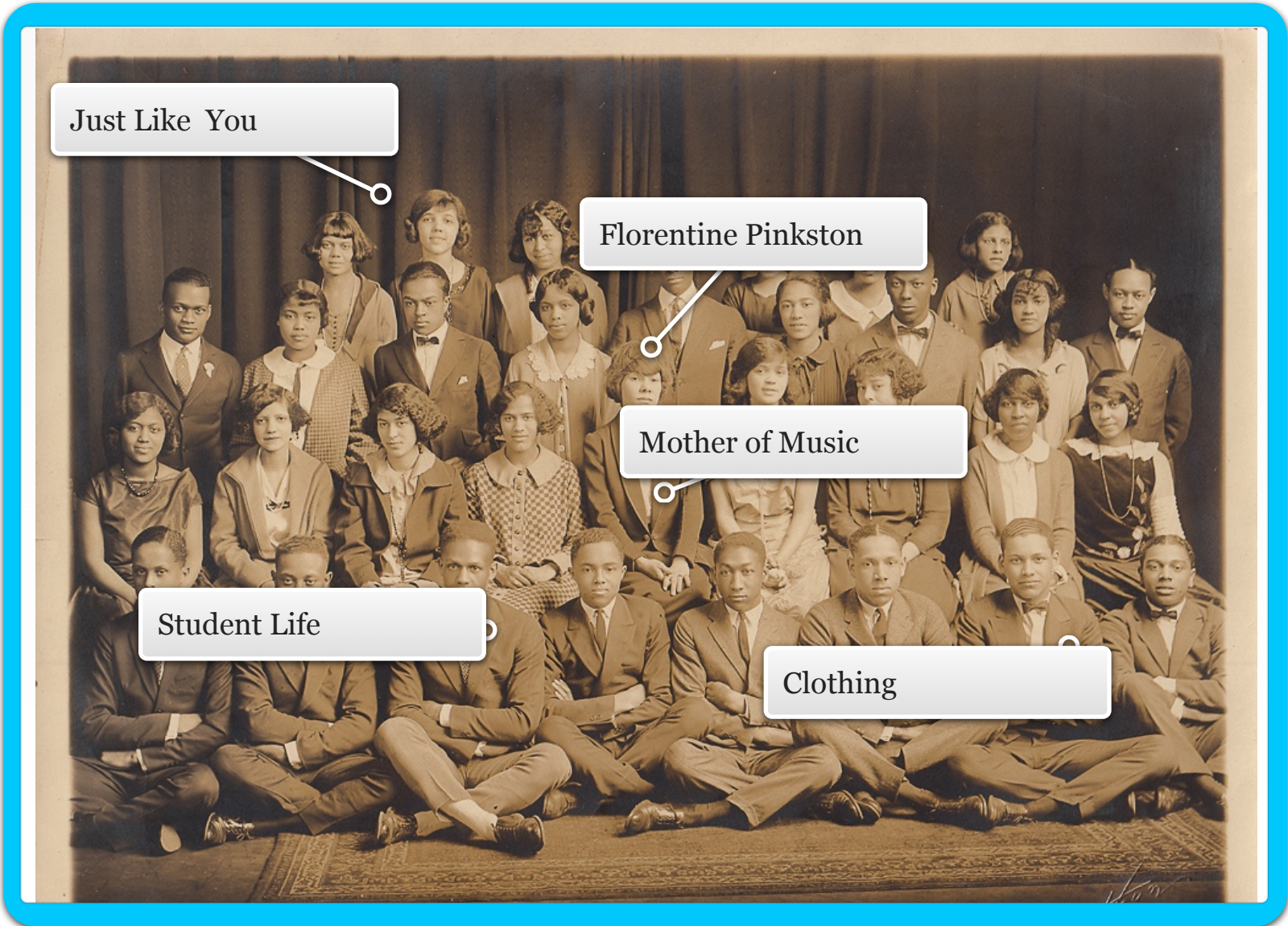
Felicia nodded.

“Come with me.



Remembering Florentine Pinkston

Click on the bubbles below to learn more information about Mrs. Florentine Pinkston. Click anywhere else on the photo to return to the full view. Photo courtesy of the Great Plains Black History Museum.



The three walked a little further down 24th Street to a row of houses.

“This is where the Ritz Theater was,” Anita said. “It’s hard to picture it now, but when I was young, Omaha had a handful of black-owned theaters up and down 24th Street. Big glowing **marquees** and lines out the door on Fridays and Saturdays. Because of **segregation**, it was important to have theaters that catered to black audiences.”



Remembering the Ritz Theater



Felicia also learned about the Lincoln Motion Picture Company, the first African American film company in the country, founded in 1915 in Omaha by brothers Noble and George Johnson. While the company relocated to Los Angeles, George Johnson, a postal clerk in Omaha, remained its publicity manager. The Lincoln Motion Picture Company was the first company to make serious films featuring black actors for black audiences. Its first film screenings outside of California were in several neighborhood theaters in Omaha.

FEATURING NOBLE M. JOHNSON

Film Studio

**Makes You More Money
And Satisfies Your Patrons**

Hollywood Star

Displaying
Beautiful
Photographs
of Your
Favorite Star
Means Perpetual
Popularity and
More Profits
For You

They Will Prove
Effective on
Your Walls in
Your Lobby, on
Your Programs
and as Souvenirs

Place Your Order
Now While Low
in Price

Noble M. Johnson

Hope

Every Single Reel Spells
PROFITS

LUBIN
"Mr. Carlson of Arizona"—3 reels.

UNIVERSAL
Regulars
"The Heart of a Tigress"—3 reels.
"The Lion's Ward"—3 reels.
"The Indian's Lament"—3 reels.
"Who Pulled the Trigger"—3 reels.
"Lady of the Sea"—1 reel.
"Last of the Night Riders"—3 reels.
"His Master's Wife"—3 reels.

Features
"The Soldier of the Legion"—3 reels.
"The Caravan"—3 reels.
"Kincaid-Gambler"—5 reels.

**Red Feather
Specials**
"Fighting for Love"—5 reels.
"The Red Ace"—30 reels.
"The Bull's Eye"—36 reels.

LINCOLN
Lincoln Features
"The Realization of a Negro's Ambition"—2 reels.
"The Trooper of Troop K"—3 reels.
"The Law of Nature"—3 reels.

NOBLE M. JOHNSON
"The Favorite of Millions"

This is the opportunity you have long desired; so get busy. Write, wire, phone or call your local exchange. If no results, place your requests in writing with the

PUBLICITY MANAGER
OMAHA, NEBRASKA 2816 PRATT STREET OMAHA, NEBRASKA

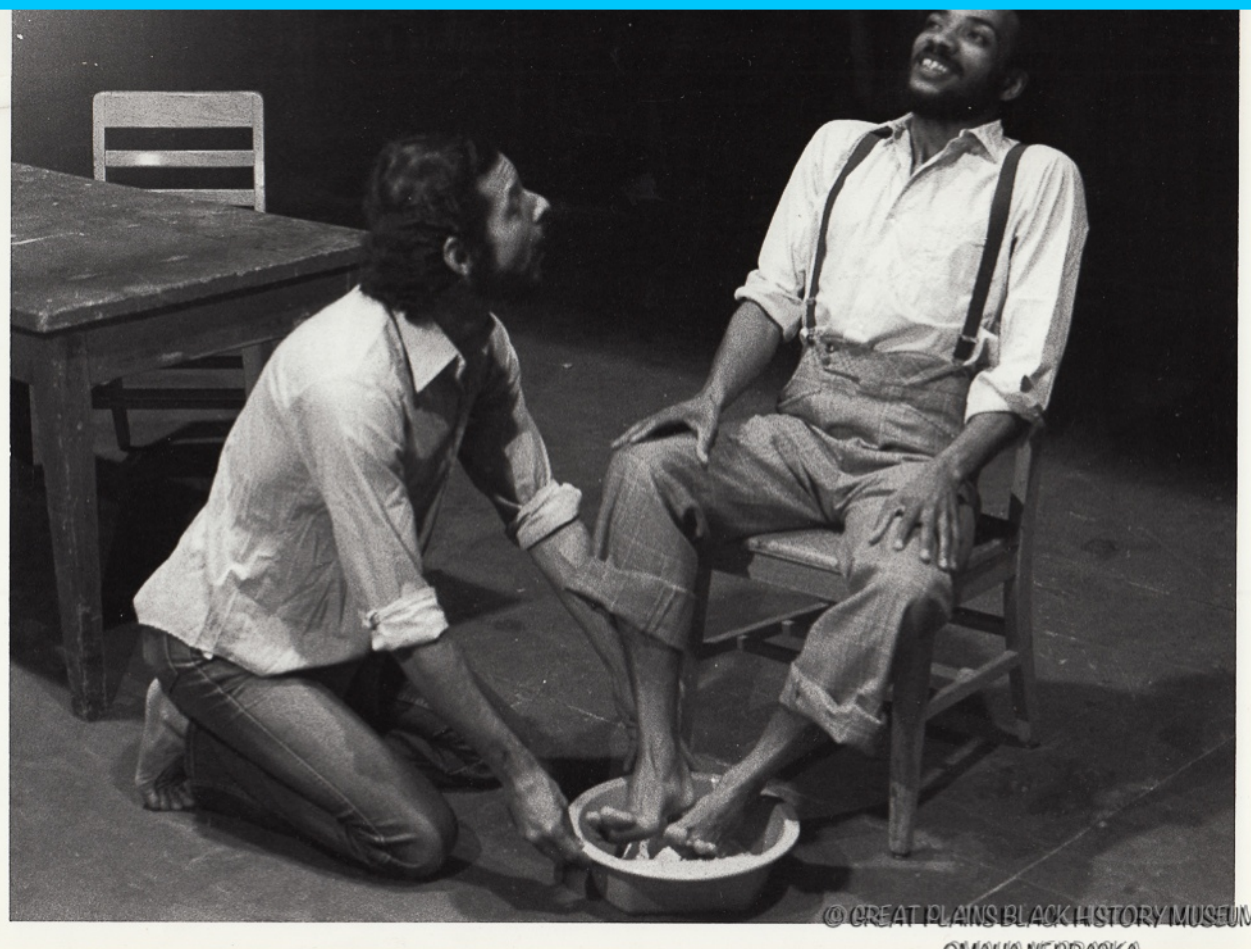
www.gpblackmuseum.org

Above is an ad featuring Noble M. Johnson which encouraged individuals to hire Mr. Johnson for movies. This was a way to advertise his talents as an actor. How would you advertise your talents? Photo courtesy of The Great Plains Black History Museum.

Decades later, when Pam was growing up, the Afro Academy of Dramatic Arts displayed the creative gifts of black Omahans in live theater. Dorothy Eure and her sons, Harry and Darryl, founded the Afro Academy as a way to showcase all of the talented black actors and writers in Omaha. The Academy performed plays written by local Omaha artists as well as the plays of some of the most famous black playwrights in the country. Nearly 10 years later, the Center Stage troupe, another all-black theater group, formed and went on to win first place at an international theater competition in Japan.

“All of that happened in Omaha?” Felicia asked as they walked back to Dreamland Plaza.

“It all happened in Omaha, but there’s more...” Pam said.

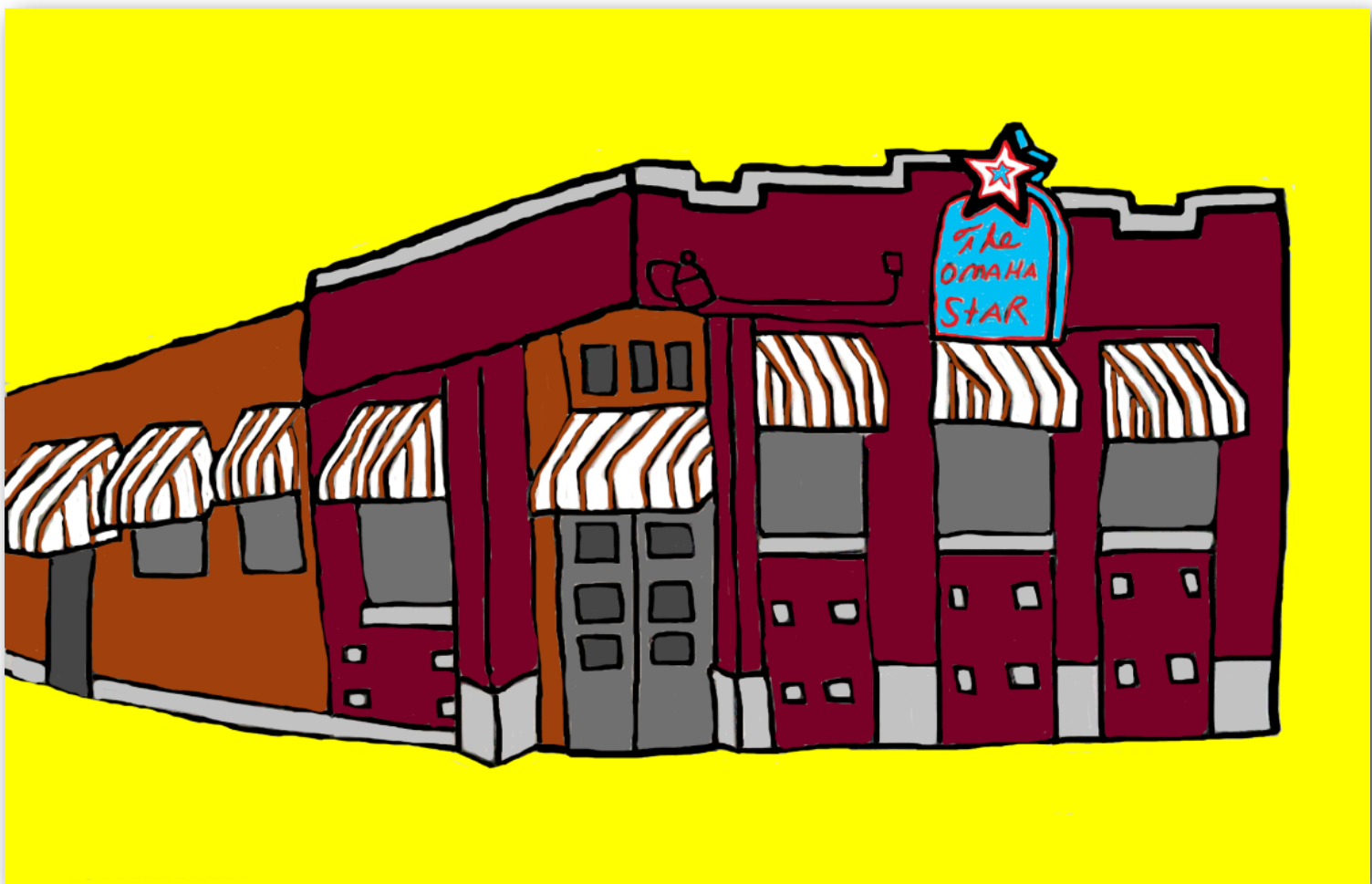


Rod Freeman and Harry Eure acting in a play for the Center Stage troupe. The Center Stage allowed African-American actors to play roles they may not have the chance to play elsewhere. Photo courtesy of The Great Plains Black History Museum.



“See that newspaper building?” Anita asked, pointing out the bright red sign of The Omaha Star. “Mildred Brown started that paper in 1938 to tell the stories of our community. The Omaha Star was the longest-operating black-owned newspaper run by a woman.”

To the right is a statue of Mildred Brown. This statue was created by Littleton Alston, the same artist who created The Jazz Trio at the Dreamland Plaza. Photo courtesy of Littleton Alston.



“See that building over there?” Pam asked. “That used to be Metoyer’s BBQ, one of the best barbecue restaurants north of Kansas City. Food has always been a way for the community to come together.”

“Sort of like Chef Mike’s,” Felicia said. She’d been to Chef Mike’s Community Cafe many times, eating his delicious cheeseburgers and **marveling** at all of the people who would show up just to be together.

Pam said it was exactly like Chef Mike’s

“The black **community** has been shaping the culture of Omaha for a long time,” Anita said as the three of them sat back down on a bench in Dreamland Plaza.

Breakfast Menu

Lake Street Special 2 thick slices of Big Mama’s signature French toast, 2 eggs, & your choice of bacon, pork sausage or turkey sausage 7.29

Ms Carter’s Special Buttermilk pancakes, 2 eggs & choice of bacon, pork sausage, or turkey sausage 7.19

North Omaha Special Skillet fried hash browns, 2 eggs, your choice of bacon, pork sausage, or turkey sausage, & wheat toast or Big Mama’s biscuits 7.39

24th Street Special 2 eggs, grits, & your choice of wheat toast or Big Mama’s biscuits 6.29

Big Mama’s Biscuits & Sausage Gravy Our famous golden biscuits are made from scratch & smothered in Big Mama’s sausage gravy 5.29

***Mother Dear’s Breakfast Casserole** Made to order with your choice of bacon, pork sausage, or turkey sausage, eggs, cheese, skillet fried hash browns, peppers, & onions

Big Mama’s Cafe is a current well-known restaurant in North Omaha
Look over the menu. Can you see the neighborhood influence on the menu?



Metoyer’s Bar B Que was a restaurant located on North 24th St. Photo courtesy of Tegwin Turner.



Felicia sat down. They hadn't walked more than 10 minutes from the Plaza, but she felt like she had opened the door to an entirely new world.

"That's a lot to happen on just one street," she finally said.

Anita and Pam shared a quiet laugh.

"That's why 24th Street is one of the most important streets in America," Pam said. "It's almost like a city within a city."

"Our city," said Anita.

Felicia smiled. This wasn't a bad way to spend a Saturday at all.



Question 1 of 12

Where is the Dreamland Plaza located?

- ☐ A. Dreamland, USA
- ☐ B. 42nd and L
- ☒ C. 24th and Lake
- ☐ D. 10th and Pratt



Check Answer



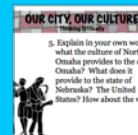
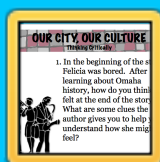
Thinking Critically

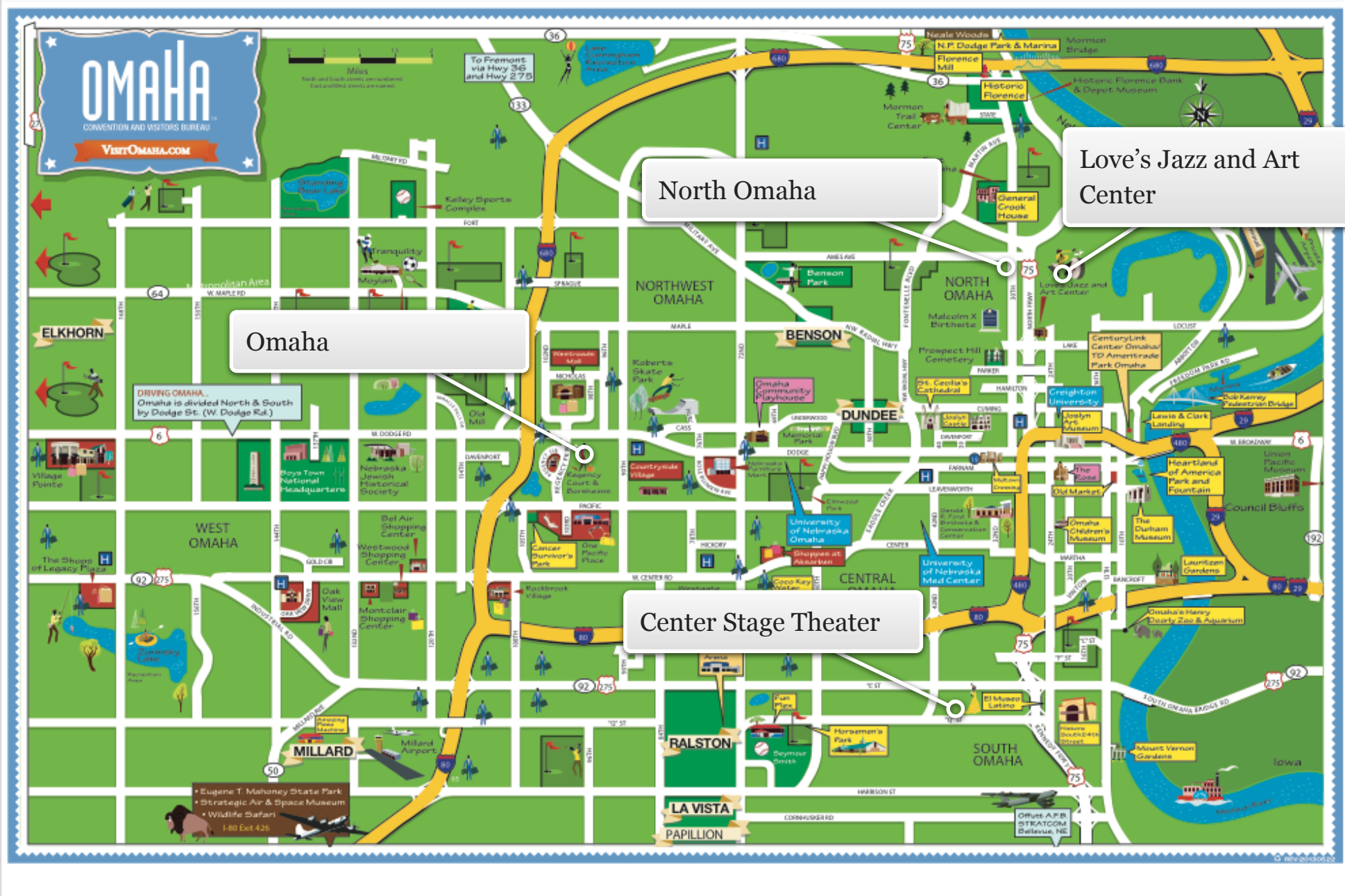
After reading “Our City, Our Culture” answer these questions to help you better understand what you just read. Click on the photos to enlarge them.

OUR CITY, OUR CULTURE

Thinking Critically

1. In the beginning of the story Felicia was bored. After learning about Omaha history, how do you think she felt at the end of the story? What are some clues the author gives you to help you understand how she might feel?





Omaha is a thriving city made of wonderful neighborhoods. Click the map to see where our story “Our City, Our Culture,” takes place. Look on the map and see where your school is. Is your school close to any of the landmarks mentioned?
Map courtesy of the Omaha Visitors Center.



NORTH OMAHA

The neighborhood of North Omaha is one of the most vibrant and historic neighborhoods in the state of Nebraska. In the story, “Our City, Our Culture” Felicia was exposed to the history that makes North Omaha so important and wonderful. The following pages will provide supplemental information and activities to help bring the magic of North Omaha alive!

Dreamland

The Dreamland Ballroom was host to many great musicians from near and far. The gallery below shows just a few of the many musicians to grace the Dreamland stage. All photos and captions courtesy of History Harvest.



This is a publicity shot of jazz musician Andy Kirk, who performed at The Dreamland Ballroom with his 12 Clouds of Joy. Andy Kirk and His 12 Clouds of Joy was a musical act that played at the Dreamland Ballroom in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The photo was given to Jimmy Jewell, owner of the Dreamland Ballroom.



History Alive

Living Sculptures

For this activity you will get to create your own statue to commemorate an important individual. Think back to the story “Our City, Our Culture.” Was there an individual you learned about that you would like to honor? Think of that person. Now as a group you will form a committee to help get that statue built! Read below to see the jobs needed to complete this task!

The Sculptor leads a discussion on how the statue should look. The statue must show how the person made his or her community a better place to live. He or she will lead the group in making a list of four props to use in the statue. The Sculptor assigns each person to bring one of the props. The sculptor will assign each person a role in the statue.

The Writer leads a discussion to write a sentence that will go on a plaque for the statue. The sentence should tell what the person did to improve his or her community.

The Geographer will research and provide a reason for where in the city or state the statue should be placed.

The Speaker will take all of the information compiled by the other members and will present it to the class.

All four students should be a part of the statue. The Speaker will break their pose to present the group information.

Create a museum with your class and take a tour through history!

Review Littleton Alston’s statues for inspiration. Photos courtesy of Littleton Alston



The Jazz Trio



Omaha Star

Below are some original news clippings from *The Omaha Star*. These articles show how important it was to share good news with the community.



This collage is composed of several advertisements for music events in North Omaha. The musicians and bands pictured include Louis Armstrong, T-Bone Walker, and Bullmoose Jackson and his Buffalo Bearcats. These events took place at the Dreamland Ballroom. Photo and caption courtesy of History Harvest.





History Alive

Tell Me Something Good



The Omaha Star shows us the importance of reporting positive news in your community. Sometimes it can be hard to find the good news, so it is the reporter's job to find it out. With some classmates you will form a news writing team. You will find the good news of your school to share with your classmates. Although the Omaha Star was a print newspaper, you will present your news story to your classroom.

As a team, you will all decide on which story from your school or neighborhood you would like to share. Maybe there is a student who received an honor? Maybe highlight a dedicated teacher? Is there a new park or store in your neighborhood? Those are some of the positive news stories *The Omaha Star* would have reported. As a group, members will interview and gather information. Once information is gathered it will be time to break out into parts.

Each student will take on one of these roles.

The Writer will complete the text for the story. Taking the information gathered from the investigation, the writer will decide how to communicate the story. The writer will tell important details such as: who, what, where, and when.

The Photographer will decide which image will be used to represent the story. The photographer can take a picture or he or she can draw. Check with your teacher to see if access to a camera is possible.

The Editor will make sure the story the writer has written is correct and free from errors. This means he or she will have to check for spelling and punctuation. The editor will also approve the image chosen for the story.

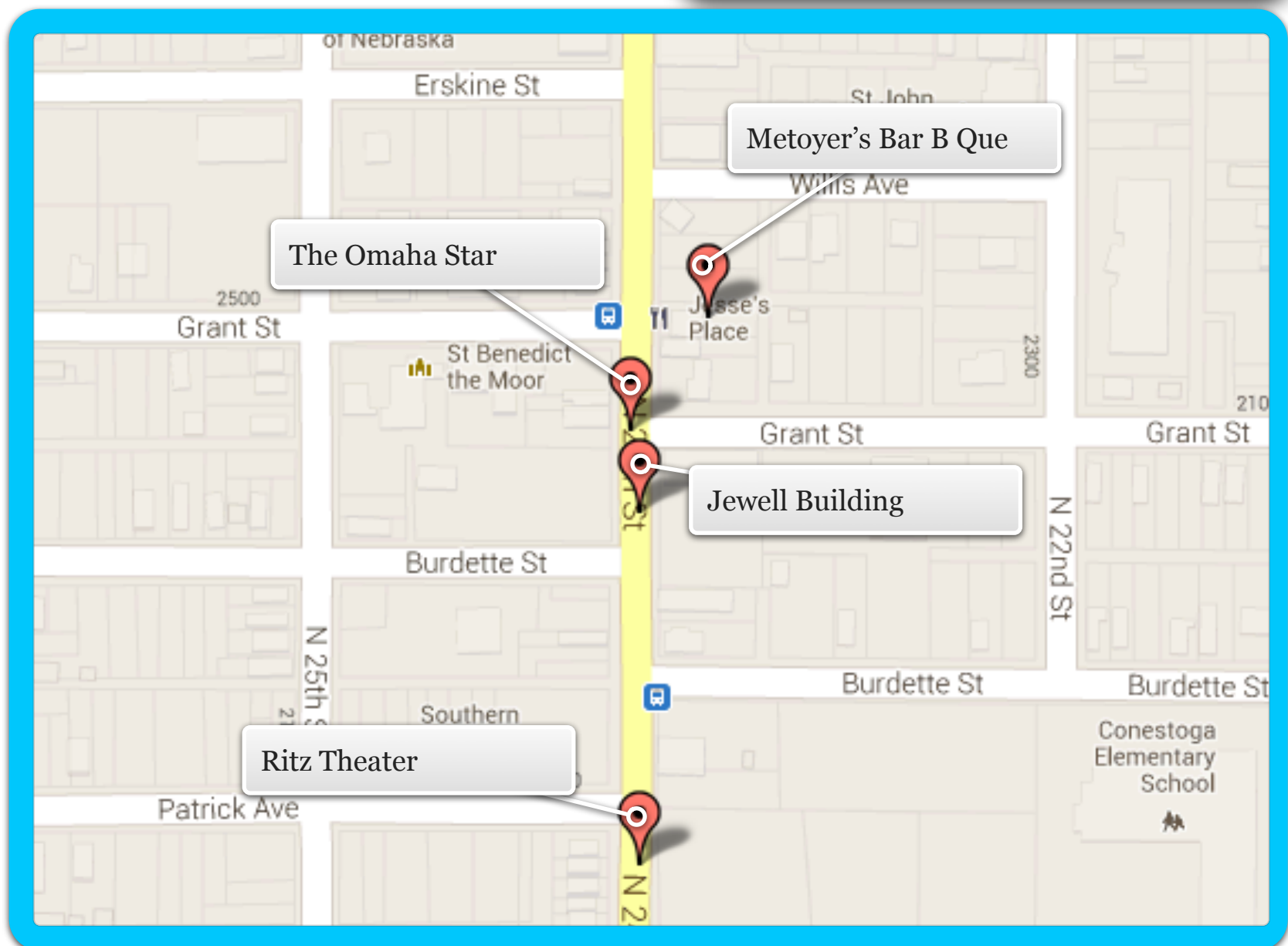
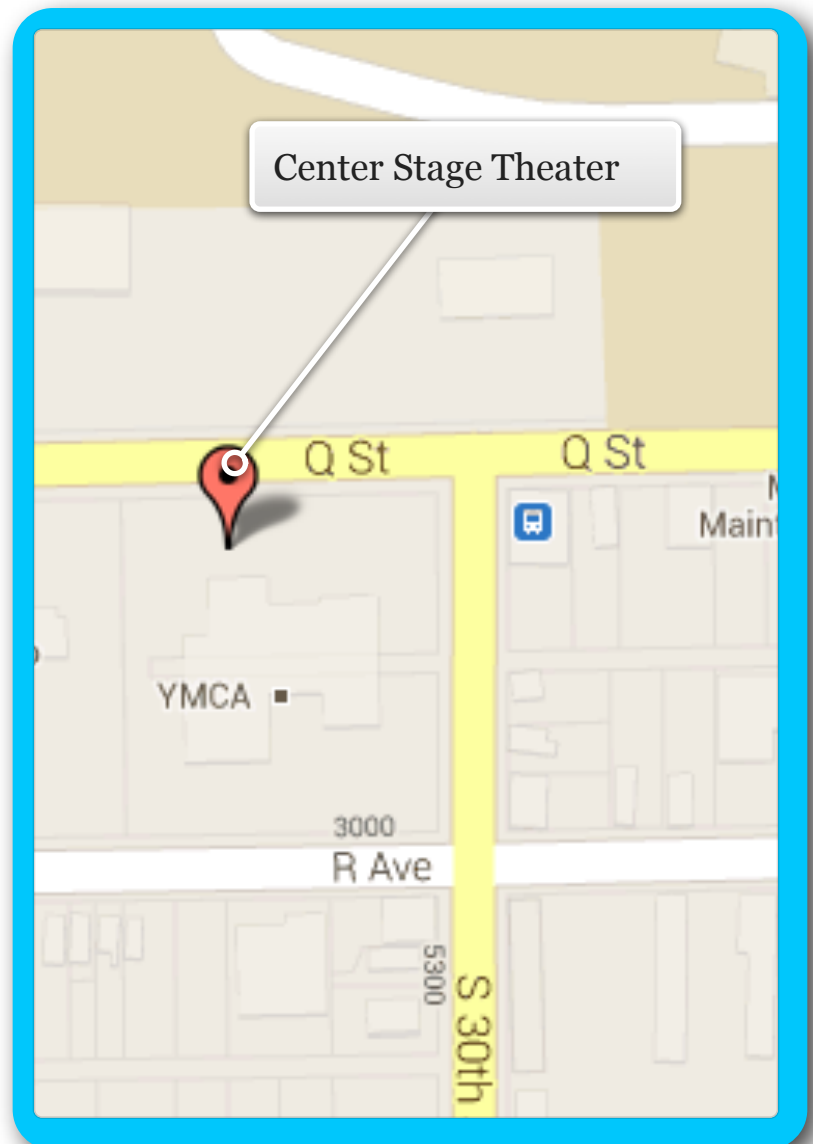
The Reporter will present the story to the class. He or she will read the news story out loud and share the selected image.

Then and Now

These maps show the locations mentioned in our story. Not all of the locations are still around today. Click on the interactive images to see what has happened to some of our most treasured locations.

Why were some places able to survive to this day?

How can we remember and honor those historic places that are no longer around?

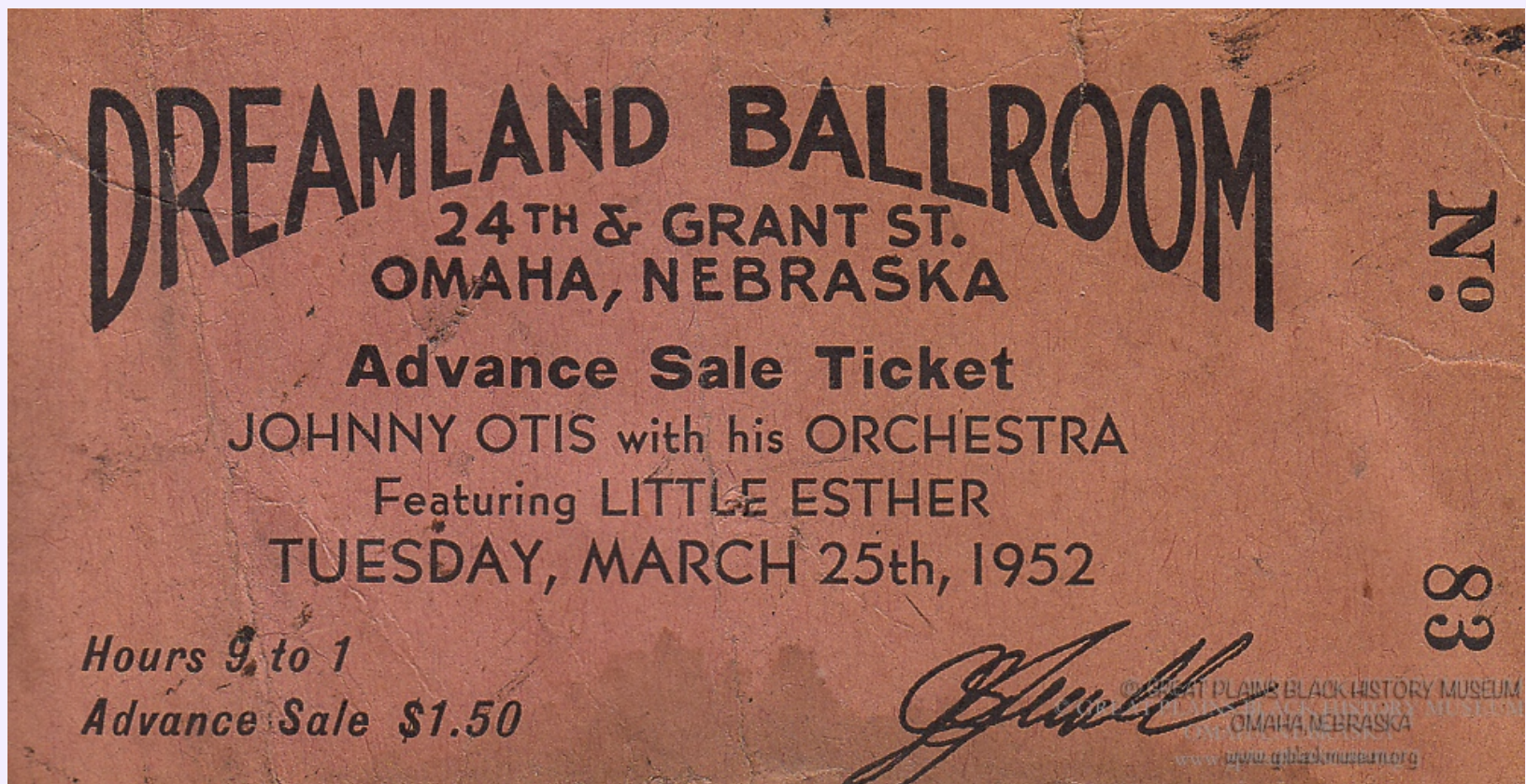


Artifact Analysis

The job of a historian is to understand the past. One way to do that is by analyzing artifacts. An artifact is an object that was once used by someone in the past.

The Historian's greatest tool are questions! The Historian must know what types of questions to ask to figure out what an artifact was used for!

Let's take a look at an artifact from The Dreamland Ballroom! Artifact courtesy of The Great Plains Black History Museum.



Click on the Jazz Trio to complete your analysis.





Positive Portrayals



During the time of segregation, African Americans faced extreme prejudice. Prejudice is when groups of people are judged harshly just because they are a certain way. For African Americans that meant many people, most of whom were white, viewed African Americans as lesser people.

It was important for African Americans to create and define their own culture to combat those negative views. African Americans chose many different ways to fight the negativity.

Noble Johnson and the **Lincoln Motion Picture Company** had a mission to create films that showed African Americans in an extremely positive manner. They wanted to show African Americans as successful, talented, and kind people. At the time, African Americans in film were portrayed as poor, unemployed, uncivilized, and unkind.

Harry Eure and **The Center Stage Theater** produced plays about African Americans by African Americans. It was important for them include blacks in every part of the production process. Harry Eure wanted to produce plays that were realistic. The characters in the played were often flawed, meaning that they were not perfect. Harry Eure felt that it was important for African Americans to express their stories and creativity in an honest and authentic way. The viewpoints were not always positive, but they were honest because they came from African Americans.

Mildred Brown founded ***The Omaha Star*** as a means for African Americans to read an unbiased news source. If something is biased, it means that it is only telling one side of the story. Brown felt that the regular newspapers in Omaha did not care about the stories of African Americans. If they did, they only wanted to talk about the bad things. The Omaha Star made an effort to show the good things happening with African Americans.

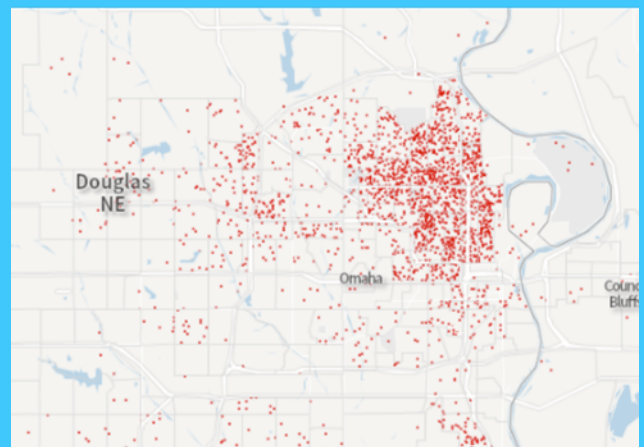
Segregation

During the early 1900's, African Americans had to deal with segregation. Segregation is when groups of people are kept separate. For people in Omaha, that meant that people who were Black could only live and work in certain places. Black individuals were not allowed to visit places that were meant only for White people. Due to this segregation, people in North Omaha had to create their own stores, entertainment, and community.

The Dreamland Ballroom was created so that African Americans could have a place to relax, socialize, and listen to music. It was also a place for African Americans to perform. It was difficult for even famous African American musicians to play in the popular and wealthy white venues.

The Ritz Theater was one of the most famous theaters in Omaha. At this time, theaters would cater to either Blacks or Whites. African Americans could come to the Ritz and sit in any seat they wanted to. They may have been able to go to another theater, but chances are if they were allowed, they would have to sit in a selected area. The Ritz Theater allowed African Americans the ability to view movies in peace.

All of these places were prominent up until the 1960's when segregation lessened. Now that African Americans were able to freely visit other parts of town, places such as the Dreamland Ballroom and the Ritz Theater became a thing of the past. While they were important for African American culture, they existed partly due to segregation.



Click on the map to see how African Americans have become more dispersed throughout the city from 1970 to 2010.

Review

Below are two fun activities to help you review all of the information you have read about. One fun way to review is to make a drawing. Click on the icon to the right and draw a picture of something that you have learned. Maybe it's a picture of a person, or of a place. Whatever it is, have fun making it!



A fun way to help you remember is to complete a word search. Click on the icon to the left to complete a fun word search.



Creators



Author - Brandon Vogel

Brandon Vogel is a staff writer for Hail Varsity Magazine and website editor for HailVarsity.com. As a freelancer, he has written for FoxSports.com, MSN.com, CBSSports.com and others. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College in 2005.



Illustrator - Wanda Ewing

Omaha native Wanda Ewing is an artist and educator. Her artwork has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. The images she creates are social-political with a humorous narrative.



Producer - John-Paul Gurnett

John-Paul Gurnett is a fourth grade teacher at Liberty Elementary in Omaha, NE. He has a M.Ed. from Creighton University and a B.A. in Theater Performance.

Bronze

A substance consisting of two or more metals united by being melted together.
Usually yellowish-brown in color.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Find Term

Community

The group of people living in an area or who have a similar background

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Generating

To create or make.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Marquees

A sign usually over the entrance of a theater or arena that displays the featured attractions

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Marveling

To become filled with surprise or astonishment.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Segregation

The separation or isolation of a race, class, or group.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here