

Black History Month Science Celebration Assembly

This presentation lasts for about 12 minutes, but can be adapted according to time available. Dialogue and movement are provided as a guide only, and can be further developed as desired. This Assembly idea requires a minimum of 10 students.

Scene 1: A Room

Two pupils chatting about a current topic (Football results, the weather, going to the movies...). There is a light bulb hanging above them, or a lamp placed nearby. The light goes out. (If you can find or create a light bulb sound effect to play at this point, do so- or have the actors shout 'PING!' when the light goes out).

One student then mimes changing the light bulb whilst continuing to chat. The Light comes back on. A minute later, the light goes out again – this time the other pupil changes the bulb. They continue to chat. The light goes out again. The pupils can be heard sighing in disgust.

Scene 2: Space

The light comes on. The two pupils have gone, to be replaced with a space scene. Two pupils mime being astronauts on the moon. They play catch with a ball suspended on a string from a stick, held by a third student. It seems to float more than an average ball – indicating low gravity. If you want to you can play a 'space music' sound effect here. After a short while the light goes out.

In between scenes 2 and 3 the actor playing Lewis Latimer comes on in costume (round specs and a waistcoat). He looks at the light bulb, frowns and shrugs, before going off.

Scene 3: A Busy Intersection

The light comes on again and this time the scene is of a traffic crossroads. In this scene an old man and lady with walking sticks are trying to cross the road – they teeter on the edge of the pavement, but never cross. The rest of the pupils represent traffic. A few pupils cross one way, and one of them, the Signal Man, shouts 'STOP!' As soon as 'stop!' has been shouted other pupils flow backwards and forwards at right angles to the original. The pupils make the sound of horses, motor cars, bike bells etc as well as screeching noise of brakes. Each time 'STOP!' is shouted again, the traffic switches direction, with much squealing of brakes and honking of horns. At the end of the scene 'STOP!' is shouted again, and this time everyone piles into each other. The old couple look at the pile-up and wipe their brows as if to say 'Phew!' The light goes out.

In between scene 3 and 4 Lewis Latimer comes on again, this time looks all round the light bulb and scratches his head, thinking. He goes off again.

Scene 4: A WW2 Battlefield

Light on. In the battlefield, two American soldiers crouch low. They are talking about sweethearts back home and chewing gum, and mention how Hitler's going to get his ass kicked and so on. An American flag waves in the background. The Soldiers can have camouflage make up on their faces or other appropriate props.

There is a bang – one soldier mimes getting shot and losing blood. The second soldier helps him. A Doctor comes on the scene (red cross on his arm), and asks the second soldier what blood type he is. 'O type, doctor sir!' The doctor mimes setting up a transfusion between the two. There is another bang and the second soldier mimes being shot. The doctor says – 'don't worry I'm O type as well' and mimes setting up another transfusion. There is a third shot and the doctor mimes getting shot. The first soldier says 'don't worry, set up a transfusion to me. I'm an O type!' They all look at the audience as they are all joined together. The light goes off.

In between Scene 4 and 5 Lewis Latimer comes on with a notebook and takes a few measurements of the bulb and makes some notes.

Scene 5: A Railway Line

Two pupils are driving a steam train (can be indicated by standing on chairs) on the American railroad. They mime shoveling coal into the engine and so on. They have red neckerchiefs to indicate their jobs. Other pupils provide steam train noise and form the train in two lines either side of the chairs, being the wheels. They are going fast.

One driver says: 'can you smell the engine burning?'

The other says: 'yep – le's shut this baby down and re-oil her!'

The train slows and halts. Just as this happens the sound of another steam train coming up behind is heard. The two drivers look at each other and panic, shouting 'Holy Cow! The 3.59 is right behind us. Aaaaggggh!'

They freeze as the light goes off.

Scene 6: Space

The light comes on again, revealing the astronauts from Scene 2. One of them throws the ball too high and it floats off the stage. The astronauts stand and stare, or start to blame each other- then they freeze. In front walks a woman who says:

"Hello – my name is Katherine G Johnson. Back in the 1950's and 60's NASA used me to calculate the complicated mathematics involved in planning the trajectories that its astronauts took to reach the moon. And back! Without me, these two might never have come home!"

The light goes off.

Scene 7: A Busy Intersection

Back to the traffic pile up, and the old people - frozen.

In front walks a man who says "Hello – my name is Garrett Morgan. I am an inventor and a businessman. Back at the beginning of the 1900's I saw a terrible accident that looked a lot like this, and I determined to do something about it! I invented a set of automatic traffic signals.

Automatic was a good idea because before then a man was in charge at each intersection. And he could be lazy or stoopid or fall asleep even! (The Signal Man looks sheepish). So I had the brilliant idea to make signals automatic, and though you wouldn't recognise my signals now that they have been replaced with lights, I helped save a lot of lives out there on the roads in America. Let me show you how!"

The pile-up untangles itself – the pupils go back to being two streams of traffic. Morgan becomes the signals with the help of Stop and Go paddles, and stops them all. The old people get to cross the road (and take a bow!) then he starts the other stream in an orderly fashion.

Morgan says: "See!"

The light goes out.

Scene 8 WW2 Battlefield

The two soldiers and the doctors are busy giving blood to each other. They all look at the audience and say together 'I feel a bit faint...' and pass out! The scene freezes.

A man walks on in a white coat. He says "Hello – my name is Dr Charles Richard Drew. Back in the 1930's I did some research into blood and became the world's expert on separating and safely storing donated blood. In the second world war they called on me to set up the first blood bank to help save the lives of American and allied soldiers fighting Hitler. My work saved thousands of lives." He looks at the frozen scene. "These guys really needed me!"

The light goes off

Scene 9 Railway Line

Frozen action showing the steam train about to be crashed into.

A man walks on, he carries a spanner. He says "Hello – my name is Elijah McCoy. Have you ever said the expression the 'real McCoy' – well that's me! Way back in the 1870's I had a job on the rail road like this man here (Points to the one shoveling the coal), despite the fact that I was a

dang fine qualified engineer. That's what it was like being African American in the 19th Century. I saw this problem all the time, you had to stop the train to oil the parts, which led to accidents like this one happening, a lot! So I invented the oil cup, to oil the engine parts as they went along. I developed a company making other machinery for engines too and I was so good that people wanted my inventions, not pale imitations – that's where the 'real McCoy' came from. Well, too late to help this lot now! Carry on gentlemen!"

The panic onstage continues until the light goes off.

You can add further sound effects at this point, if desired.

Scene 10: Whole cast

The assembled cast share out the following lines:

What did all these people have in common?
They were all African Americans.
They all worked to help advance science and invention
And to make the world a better place
They all had to struggle through prejudice and discrimination to get their education
They are all now famous in the USA because of their work.
Where can I find out more about them?
On the Planet Science Website!
To celebrate BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

The light goes off again and back on again.

All together - 'why does the light keep going out?!

Lewis Latimer walks on - "Hello – I'm Lewis Latimer and I was a man of many parts. Poet, musician, playwright and teacher, AND I invented the filament for the light bulb that kept on glowing – otherwise your light bulb would have done this ALL THE TIME!"
Light goes off.

Lights come up – cast take a bow!

End.

Props and equipment:

For this assembly idea you will need...

- Your pupils
- The speeches printed out or learned
- A lamp or wire with an obvious bulb – connected so it can be turned off remotely.
- (You can also make use of any ambient lighting available, so that each time the light bulb goes out all the room lights dim. You should still be able to see Lewis Latimer, however.)
- Sound effects such as a PING for the light bulb, space music and other assorted effects.
- Home-made space helmets- such as ice-cream containers covered in foil- for the astronauts
- Round specs, a waistcoat, a pencil and a notebook for Lewis Latimer
- Walking sticks for the elderly couple
- A Stars and Stripes Flag
- Camouflage make up for soldiers
- A Red Cross arm band for the doctor
- A plain white coat for Richard Drew
- Red neckerchiefs for the engine drivers
- A spanner for Elijah McCoy
- Two chairs
- A ball on a string on a stick
- Stop and Go paddles for Garrett Morgan to hold up as traffic signals.