**February… The month to commemorate Trailblazers**

**February is Black History Month and February 17th is Presidents’ Day**

Step 1: Read *Giant Steps to Change the World*

February’s two civic holidays are inextricably interwoven. Black History Month and Presidents’ Day both celebrate individuals who were trailblazers who made our country a better place.

Read or [watch on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dDxx9L1ljg) *Giant Steps to Change the World* by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee. This read-aloud emphasizes the fact that we all can be trailblazers. The book highlights the fact that you don’t have to be the bravest or the strongest; you simply have to believe in something enough to overcome all odds, to conquer every obstacle and succeed.

Step 2: STAR Card Discussion Question

Imagine that your principal is asking for ways to improve your school. You hear many of your friends say that the principal won’t really listen to any of their ideas so why bother to give them. What do you think? How might you encourage your classmates to share their ideas with the principal?

Step 3: History’s Trailblazers

Trailblazers are individuals who are the first to do something. That something can be as simple as designing a new idea for school uniforms, or as complex as developing a cure for the common cold. Trailblazers are adventurous risk-takers who keep trying until they reach their goal.

Below are examples of trailblazers we celebrate in February for Black History Month and Presidents’ Day, with links to online bios. Go the websites linked to show some of these examples.

* [Jesse Owens](https://jesseowens.com/) - First African American athlete to win 4 gold medals at a single Olympics, doing so in 1936 in Nazi Germany;
* [George Washington](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Washington) - First President of the United States; also first U.S. president to be a military veteran; willingly gave up power at the end of his second term
* [Josephine Baker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine_Baker) - A Vaudeville dancer who performed in France during World War II, while secretly serving as a spy for the Allies, passing along critical information about the Nazis. After moving back home to the United States, she faced both racism and sexism, prompting her to be one of the two women speakers at the 1963 March on Washington in 1963, speaking just before Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.
* [Charles Young](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Young_(United_States_Army_officer)) - A trailblazer in the military and with the U.S. National Park Service. His father escaped slavery when Charles was a very young boy. Charles wen on to become the third graduate of the United States Military Academy and first Black superintendent of a national park.
* [Abraham Lincoln](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abraham-Lincoln) - Our 16th President, Lincoln was the first member of the Republican Party to be president of the United States. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863, which declared that people held in slavery in the Confederacy were free. It allowed Black men to serve in the military. His administration also led the passage of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States.
* [Theodore Roosevelt](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theodore-Roosevelt) - First President to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize;
* [Mae Jemison](https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/mae-jemison) - She became the first Black woman in space when she orbited the earth on the spaceship *Endeavor* in 1992. She had been inspired by the Apollo moon trips but discouraged by the lack of female astronauts, so she decided to become one herself.
* [Barack Obama](https://www.obamalibrary.gov/#event-number-86) - Elected in 2008, he was the United States’ first African American President. With a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas, he often said that “in no other country on earth is my story even possible… But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts—that out of many, we are truly one.”
* [Sadie T.M. Alexander](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadie_T._M._Alexander) - She was the first Black woman to receive a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and the first Black woman to practice law in the Commonwealth. She was later appointed by President Harry S. Truman to serve on the President’s Committee on Civil Rights.
* [Misty Copeland](https://mistycopeland.com/) - In 2015, she became the first Black woman to be promoted to principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre (ABT).
* [Kenny Washington](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kenny-Washington) - Athlete who was the first African American to sign a contract with the NFL. He studied at UCLA and was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

Can students think of other examples of trailblazing Black leaders or U.S. Presidents?

Step 4: Discussion

Every trailblazer shares the following characteristics.

* They are resilient; that is, they bounce back if they fail.
* They are adaptable; that is, they are willing to make changes.
* They are curious; that is, ready to learn new things.
* They are observant; that is, they pay attention to details.
* They are courageous; that is, brave enough to try innovative ideas and share them.

What characteristics do you share with the trailblazers? (Allow the students some time to brainstorm and then invite them to write or share out.)

Step 5: Trailblazer Activity

The month of February is dedicated to trailblazers. Each of us has the capacity to be a trailblazer; that is, an innovator who has an idea that can help make their world a better place. Think of something you can be the first to do that helps your school and/or community such as:

* Finding a new pathway to get to school;
* Planting a garden to grow healthier alternatives to be offered at lunch;
* Creating a bulletin board to share all of the highlights that happen in your school or community;
* Finding a more efficient way to store everything in your backpack, room, school organizer, etc.;
* Designing a new school uniform;
* Creating a welcoming package for students to use when new students come into the school.
* Designing wayfinding signs that better guide visitors around your school or community.