



Elijah McCoy: The Real McCoy

Teacher's Guide

Overview: Elijah McCoy was a prolific inventor and innovator, the holder of 57 patents, mostly on designs related to locomotives. Born in Canada and educated in Scotland, he spent most of his professional life in and around Detroit, Michigan, working in the railroad industry while also continuing to produce new inventions. The son of escaped slaves, McCoy overcame early discrimination to become an internationally respected authority in his field. His innovations in automated lubrication systems for trains are credited with helping to radically improve efficiency and travel time, and he was widely celebrated by his contemporaries as a leader and model for Black America in the first generation after Emancipation.

This is an appropriate lesson for Black History Month, studies on the Civil War or Underground Railroad, the Fugitive Slave Act, Westward Expansion, railroads, internal American migration, the Industrial Age, inventions, patents, and technology advancements.

Lesson Prompt: Have you ever wondered where many of the inventions we take for granted came from, and who created them? Here is the story of one very prolific and financially successful inventor who became a role model for other Black Americans in the years after emancipation. His name became synonymous with real quality.

Share the prepared PowerPoint presentation on the life of Elijah McCoy and/or have students watch the suggested videos about his life.

Have students consider and answer the critical thinking and discussion questions.

Vocabulary

Students can look up and define the following vocabulary words:

Prolific

Synonymous