

Portia White

Title: Portia White

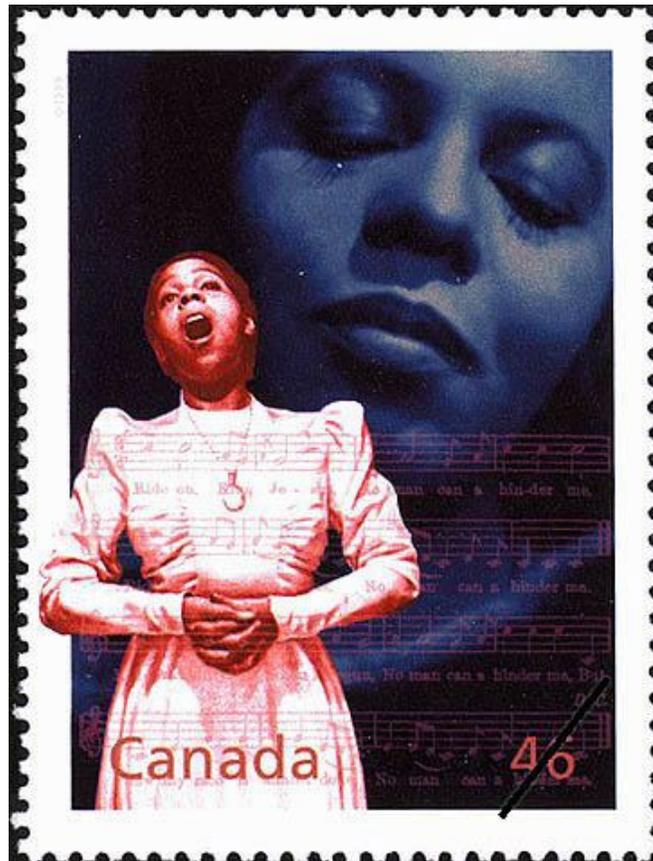
Subtitle: Reading/Writing/Research/Interview

Duration: 3- 5 classes

Best Courses Fit: Music, Grade 10 History, Grade 12 History, English

Background Knowledge

Portia May White was born on June 24, 1911 in Truro, Nova Scotia. A contralto and an educator, Portia White was the first Black Canadian concert singer to win international acclaim. She is considered one of the best classical singers of the 20th century. She passed away on February 13, 1968 in Toronto, Ontario. She was named a “person of national historic significance” by the Government of Canada in 1995.



Source: <https://postagestampguide.com/stamps/17187/portia-white-irrepressible-talent-1999-canada-postage-stamp-the-millennium-collection-extraordinary-entertainers>

Videos

Visit the websites and watch the two videos.

Portia White Video by Pines and Maples

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6NXTCXqNp8>

CBC Celebrating Portia White

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2202961578>

Document A – A New Star of Song

Source: *The Leader Post*, Regina, Saskatchewan, February 21, 1942.

An Impression of Portia White

A New Star of Song

A year ago Portia White was a young colored girl who taught a kindergarten class and sang in her father's church Sundays.

Today she is a young lady who sings with dramatic power and who handles an audience as if it were some vast musical instrument made expressly for her to play upon.

Listening to Portia White is like encountering some elemental force—a dynamo charged with electricity, a tropical storm that sweeps all before it, a mountain torrent which flows swift and full between deep containing banks, not wasting its strength in wild incursions to right or left, but driving straight on to its goal, the sea.

Portia White has that attribute of all great artists, restraint, but it is the restraint of the mountain stream to which she has been likened, and which flows quietly and smoothly because of the power in its depths.

That she has great gifts, that she is an artist of complete sincerity, that she gives unstintedly of her best, that she is a warm and compelling personality, she demonstrated convincingly in her Regina appearance. She does her job superbly well, with complete absorption and, when the occasion demands it, with immense enjoyment.

Portia White comes out to her audience, a gracious but dignified figure, smiling slightly. A change comes over her, her head lifts and a rapt expression steals over her face. She is attuned to that mysterious power which is the source of

her great gift. Then she sings. The notes roll out, low at first, then gaining in volume and power until the whole hall is flooded with a torrent of sound like the notes of a pipe organ played with all the stops out, but musical and pleasant to the ear. Then the thunder of applause, quick, generous, spontaneous, but insistent.

And here let us rid ourselves for all time of the fiction that Regina audiences are cold, critical and unresponsive. They may be all that, to the mediocre and the meretricious, but when the real thing comes along they recognize it and express their approval with almost embarrassing vigor.

Near the end Portia explains in a few words the story of an aria she is to sing, and an old lady beside me says, "She has a nice speaking voice." It is that, of course, as well as a great singing voice.

Finally it is over, and I walk homeward pondering the mysterious ways of Divine Providence, by which this negro girl from a humble home is singled out to be the recipient of such a gift as is given only to a few.

Much credit is due the Oxford University Press in the case of Miss White, for it is through their help that this Nova Scotia singer has been enabled to display her talents to Canadian audiences. It is their plan to encourage other Canadian artists of outstanding ability who might not otherwise have an opportunity to reach the public.—G. H. C.

Document A

Contextualization

How does the author generally feel about Portia White? Provide examples.

Why might Portia White not have had the opportunity to “reach the public?”

What was different back then? Write three things.

Close Reading

Write five facts you learned about Portia White.

Document B – New York Debut

Source: *The New York Age*, New York, New York, March 11, 1944.

Portia White Makes First New York Debut At Town Hall Monday

Portia White, contralto, will make her New York debut at Town Hall, Monday evening, March 13, in a varied program of early Italian and English classics, a group of Brahms and Wolf, the aria "O don fatale" from Verdi's "Don Carlos," contemporary English songs, and a final group of French-Canadian and American folk-songs and spirituals.

A native of Halifax, N. S., she studied voice with Dr. Ernesto Vinci at the Conservatory of Music in that city, and has given concerts in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, and throughout Western Canada.

She is a daughter of the late Rev. William White, who was the only

Negro chaplain in the British Army in World War 1. Dr. White was born in Virginia, the son of slave parents and one of twelve children. While a student in Baltimore, he was encouraged by a Canadian missionary to study for the ministry, and went to Nova Scotia for his theological training, later making Halifax his home.

Document B

Sourcing

When and where was this article written?

Contextualization

What does this article reveal about Portia White?

Corroboration

What are some of the differences between Document B and Document C?

Close Reading

Based on this article, what did you learn about Portia White's family?

Document C

Source: *Calgary Herald*, Calgary, Alberta, July 16, 1948.

Portia White Leaves On European Tour

HALIFAX (CP) — Portia White of Halifax, contralto and one of Canada's best known singers, left for Europe aboard the *Aquitania* Thursday for a two-months concert tour of "Oh I don't know where all."

After a few days in England, she will go to Paris, headquarters for her European tour. Though she does not know her exact itinerary, she expects to give about 15 concerts and has her passport for "all countries, including Germany."

Document C

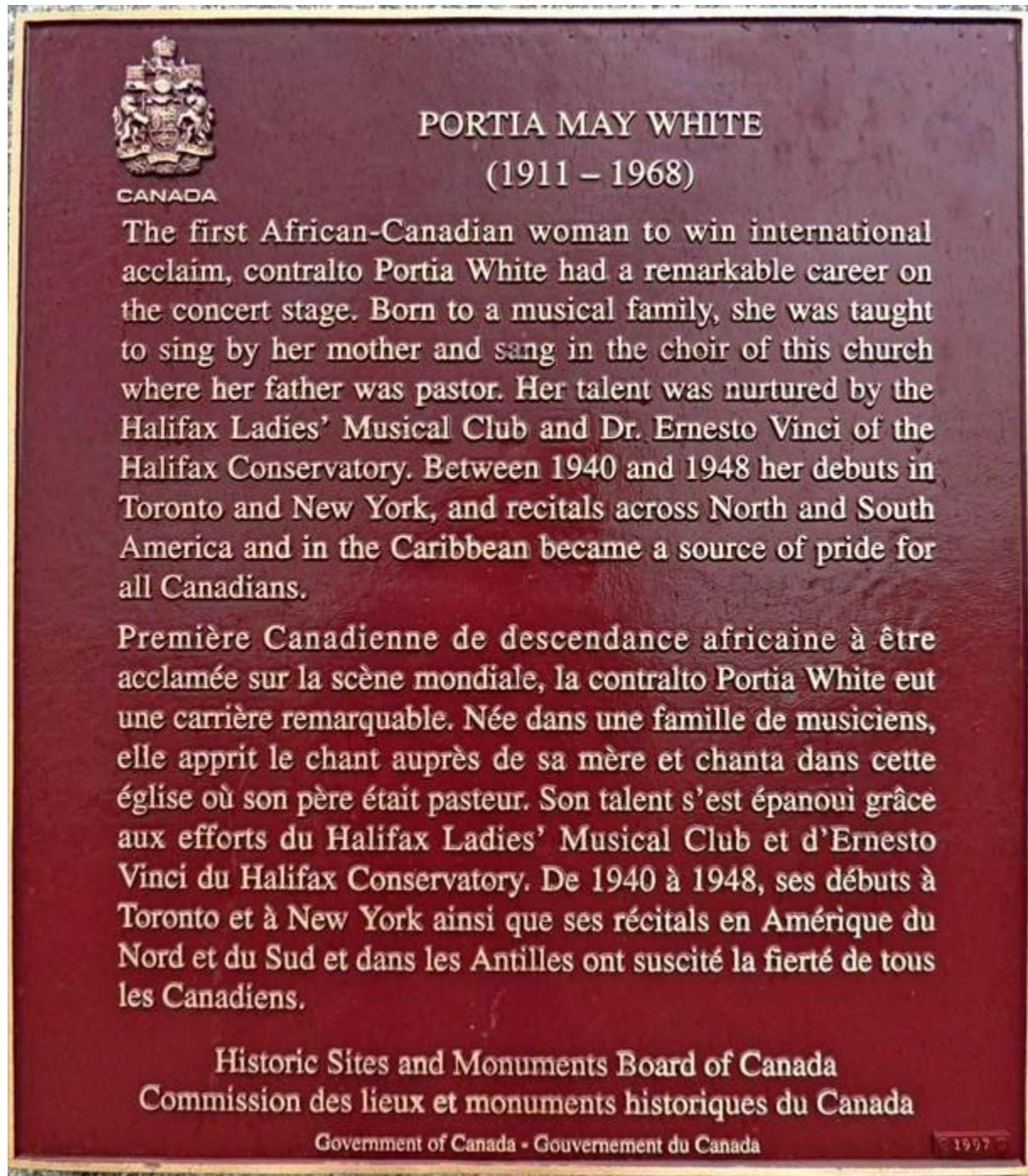
Contextualization

What does the article reveal about Portia White's fame?

Close Reading

What is the main message of the article?

Document D



Source: <https://www.waymarking.com/gallery/image.aspx?f=1&guid=1a31dcde-5027-4ae4-a937-258e5fb99038>

Document D

Sourcing

Who produced this historic marker?

Contextualization

Why would the government have honoured Portia White with this plaque?

Why might the term “African Canadian” have been used on the plaque? In articles, other terms were used to describe the race of Portia White.

Close Reading

What should Portia White be remembered for?

Assignment - Interviewing Portia White

If you had been able to interview Portia White during her lifetime, what would you have asked her? For this assignment, you will put yourself in the shoes of an interviewer who lived during the same time as Portia White.

Directions: Write down at least 10 questions that you would have asked Portia White. Then, use available resources to research and find the answers to your questions.

Suggested questions:

- ? family
- ? heritage
- ? education
- ? leadership qualities
- ? contributions
- ? personal experiences
- ? character traits
- ? music training
- ? career

Suggested Resources

(see the two videos from the beginning of the assignment)

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/portia-white-emc>

<https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/dalhousie-originals/portia-white.html>

<https://vandsa.ca/trailblazers/portia-white/>

Portia White Interview

	Question	Answer
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