



761st Tank Battalion: The Original Black Panthers **Education Guide**

Executive Produced and featuring Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman, *761st Tank Battalion: The Original Black Panthers* will tell the true story of the 761st Tank Battalion, the first Black tank unit to serve in combat during WWII and explore in-depth the major battles they faced both overseas while in combat and back home in the United States. It features an interview with one of the last surviving members of the 761st Battalion, as well as the current and first Black Secretary of Defense, Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, alongside new and archival interviews, period footage, still photographs and new commentary and stories from family and relatives of the Black Panther soldiers. The documentary will also feature insights and opinions of prominent historians on WWII and experts on race and inequality in America.

Curriculum Links:

761st Tank Battalion: The Original Black Panthers would be useful for American History, Black History, and Political Science courses and lessons. It is appropriate for middle school, high school and college students.

Pre-Viewing Activity:

Students can watch this segment from CBS Sunday Morning to learn more about this documentary:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/morgan-freeman-on-rescuing-a-black-wwii-tank-battalion-from-obscurity/>

Oral History Excerpt:

View this lesson plan created by history teacher Paul LaRue focused on Black soldiers during World War II, including an oral history with Buddie Branch, who served in the 761st and received a Bronze star.

General Patton's Forgotten Troops: African American Soldiers in WWII in Their Own Words

Terms to Define:

Battalion

Deployment

Civil Rights

"Double Victory" campaign

Desegregation

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think the members of the 761st Battalion wanted to fight in World War II?
2. What do you think would have been the pros and cons of military service for Black Americans generally during World War II?
3. What were some of the methods used by the 761st to prepare for tank warfare? What kinds of skills do you think they needed to enter World War II ready for battle?
4. Some would say the 761st had a lot to prove when they embarked for war. What do you think they had to prove, and to whom? Do you think they achieved this goal?
5. Despite their service, Black soldiers still faced discrimination and racism at home and in the military. What role do you think the 761st played in helping African Americans achieve civil rights?
6. This documentary explores efforts to acknowledge the service of the 761st Tanker Battalion. Why is it important to commemorate the accomplishments of the 761st and other heroic units?
7. How does learning about the 761st change your perspective about World War II?
8. How would you describe the role and results of the 761st battalion during World War II? What legacy do you think they left behind?

Activities:

1. **Spotlight on Ruben Rivers.** Students can read this article about 761st Platoon Sergeant Ruben Rivers. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/761st-tank-battalion-guebling-1944> Based on this article, students can write a short essay about Rivers, his role during World War II, and how and when he was awarded the Medal of Honor.
2. **Double Victory.** What were the "Double Victory" or "Double V" campaigns and what role did the 761st play in these efforts? Individually or in small groups, students can research these campaigns. Students can then write an essay, create a poster, or develop a visual presentation about the Double Victory campaigns and their impact.
3. **Presidential Unit Citation.** The 761st Battalion received a Presidential Unit Citation years after World War II to honor their service. Imagine that it is your job to write an official proclamation describing the contribution of the 761st to the victories of World War II. In small groups or individually, write a proclamation which you feel captures the role the 761st played in World War II and U.S. history.

4. **Jackie Robinson and the 761st.** Jackie Robinson was the first African American professional baseball player to play Major League Baseball, breaking the “color barrier” and integrating the sport in 1947. During World War II, Robinson was drafted into the U.S. Army and was an officer in the 761st Tank Battalion before being court marshaled for refusing to give up his seat on a military bus to a white officer. Ask students to research Robinson’s military service and the role this chapter played in his life. (The National World War II Museum has background information for students to explore here: [United States v. 2LT Jack R. Robinson | The National WWII Museum | New Orleans \(nationalww2museum.org\)](#))
5. **Executive Order 9981.** The 761st Battalion helped pave the way for the desegregation of the United States Armed forces in 1948. Ask students to read this document [Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces \(1948\) | National Archives](#) and discuss its significance in U.S. history.

Additional Reading:

History.com:

[“The Original Black Panthers Fought in the 761st Tank Battalion During WWII”](#)

National World War II Museum:

[“The Black Panthers Enter Combat: The 761st Tank Battalion”](#)

National Park Service:

[“761st Tank Battalion: The Original Black Panthers”](#)

U.S. Army:

[“The 761st Tank Battalion: Fighting the Enemy, Beating Stereotypes”](#)