

Have you heard of the No. 2 Construction Battalion?

By *Serena Virk*

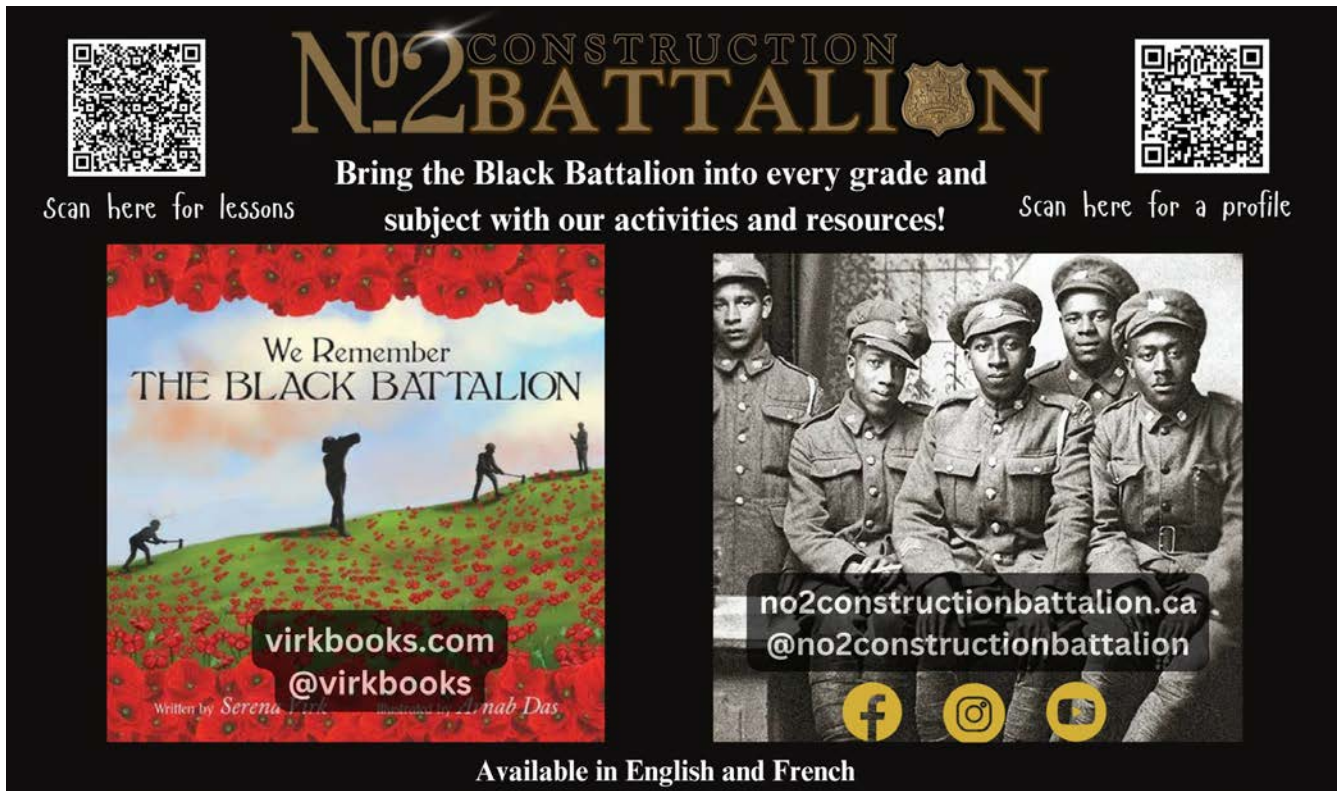
It is never too late to learn about No. 2 Construction Battalion, also known as the Black Battalion. In the First World War, when so many brave young men enlisted to fight, there were many Black men who wanted to join, but many were denied. Instead, the Black Battalion was created. A labour unit that helped cut the lumber and mill the logs. These men were still soldiers, and they served Canada proudly. This free verse poem about Black Canadian soldiers introduces topics like racism and discrimination, in an easy-to-digest format suitable for young readers. A glossary and reflection questions section help educators engage with students on the issues raised in *We Remember The Black Battalion*.

To complement the book, I have created [VirkBooks](#), a website offering year-long, cross-curricular lesson activities for teachers. The lesson activities are designed for primary, junior, and intermediate grades. By connecting history to multiple subjects, VirkBooks empowers educators to teach about the Black Battalion while meeting curriculum goals in Social Studies, Language Arts, Math, French and Technology.

Expanding Learning Across Subjects

VirkBooks extends the learning opportunities by offering activities in multiple subjects:

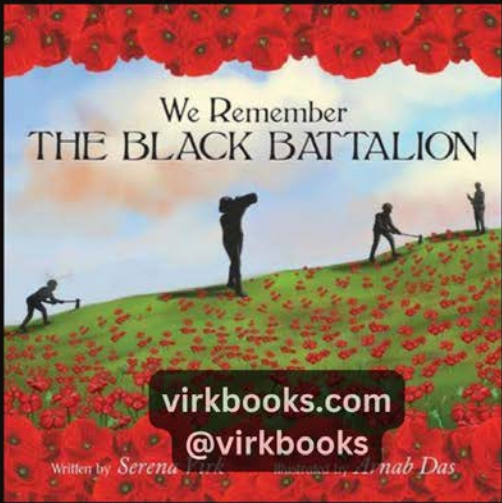
- **Social Studies:** Students learn about the geographic diversity of Black Battalion members and what it reveals about Black communities during that period. They also develop mapping skills by identifying and understanding where Black Battalion members originated and traveled across Canada.
- **Language Arts:** The book serves as a springboard for literacy development, encouraging students to respond to prompts that reflect on key themes like courage, gratitude, and friendship, while also making connections to their own lives.
- **Math:** By working with datasets showing where Battalion members lived across Canada, students will learn to analyze their locations and demographics, drawing conclusions about migration patterns and community distribution. They



NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION


Bring the Black Battalion into every grade and subject with our activities and resources!

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Available in English and French

can also represent this data visually by creating pictographs or bar graphs

- **French:** Core and Extended French students can explore translated excerpts from the book and practice vocabulary related to the Black Battalion's labour unit. This bilingual learning approach helps students make meaningful connections between language and history.
- **Technology:** Students design, build, and code projects inspired by the Battalion's history and key events.
- **Kindergarten:** Play-based learning activities help younger students explore concepts like teamwork and perseverance through hands-on construction and building projects.

Using Digital Resources to Enhance Research

In addition to the book and lesson activities, educators are encouraged to use the No. 2 Construction Battalion website (no2constructionbattalion.ca) as a research tool. This resource provides historical insights into the member profiles, battalion's myths and a video gallery. Teachers can guide students in exploring archival materials, photographs, and stories to build a deeper understanding of the soldiers' experiences.

For example, students might use the website to research where individual battalion members lived and map their journeys to enlistment. This activity can be tied to the curriculum and fosters critical thinking about the social and geographic diversity of Canada's Black communities during the early 20th century.

Why This Story Matters

Teaching about the No. 2 Construction Battalion is an opportunity to highlight the contributions of Black Canadians to the nation's history. By integrating *We Remember the Black Battalion* into the classroom, educators can spark meaningful discussions about fairness, representation, and how history shapes the present. The book's lessons encourage students to reflect on the importance of inclusion and the value of remembering those who paved the way for a more equitable future.

Sample Writing Lesson Activity: (Grades 1-3) Sequencing & Connecting Words

After reading *We Remember the Black Battalion*, discuss with the students the various labour roles that members of the Black Battalion performed during WWI. Focus specifically on the role of working in the mill. Ask students to identify the steps involved in processing logs—such as cutting trees, transporting them to the mill, and milling the logs (debarking, cutting the logs into lumber boards, drying). Then, have students complete a sequencing worksheet based on these steps.

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Sequence-of-Events-Graphic-Organizer-1510183>

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Story-Sequencing-4-part-template-cut-and-paste-9485055>

Watch the following 8 min. video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zJxMmfrVhI>

Have students compare and contrast the milling process during the First World War, with the Black Battalion, to modern milling practices. You can use a Venn diagram to illustrate the similarities and differences as you discuss them with the class after watching

the video. Some similarities include cutting the trees, transporting logs by flatbed trucks, and transforming the logs into lumber at the mill through the process of debarking, cutting, and drying. Some differences are that the Black Battalion's labour was more physically intensive (cutting, moving the logs, milling), the modern milling process is more technology-driven, and waste is minimized (sawdust and small wood pieces repurposed).

The No. 2 Construction Battalion has a strong connection to Nova Scotia. It was formed in Pictou on July 5, 1916. A monument commemorating No. 2 Construction Battalion was erected there in 1993; and a commemorative stamp was issued by Canada Post in February 2016. The Black Battalion sailed from Halifax to Liverpool, England on March 28, 1917. The No. 2 Construction Battalion National Apology took place on July 9, 2022, in Truro, Nova Scotia.

Serena Virk is an Ontario-based certified teacher with over 20 years of experience. While researching materials for Remembrance Day, she discovered a significant lack of information designed to help young children learn about the contributions of Black soldiers during the First World War. Although resources about the Black Battalion existed for teenagers and adults, there was nothing available for younger readers. Recognizing the importance of filling this gap, Serena recently published a French edition of her picture book and launched a website where educators can access year-round, cross-curricular lesson activities. Her books are currently used in several school boards across Ontario and New Brunswick, and she is dedicated to getting her picture book about the Black Battalion into schools across Canada. Follow and connect with her @virkbooks.