

8.1 Bite-Sized Black History

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00:00

You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, Season Eight, Episode One, "Bite-Sized Black History."



00:13

Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want, a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.



00:49

Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. All right, y'all. Let's get right into it. Bite-Sized Black History is here, the Grand Finale of Bite-Sized Black History is available, and I'm so excited to share it with you. Okay, so here is what we're gonna do today, I'm going to tell you all about Bite-Sized Black History, if you haven't heard of it before, and I'm going to give you a free sample. One of the episodes that I made for the Grand Finale episode will be embedded at the end of this episode. So if you keep listening, you can hear a FREE sample of Bite-Sized Black History and see if it is something that you love.



01:26

Okay, some of you are thinking, What in the world are you talking about? Let me tell you, Bite-Sized Black History is the program that I created so that you can have a meaningful Black History Month celebration, both in your home and in your classroom. So here's the real real. When I was growing up, I hated Black History Month, I grew up in the suburbs of Arizona. Very, very, very, very, very white suburbs of Arizona, we were one of the only Black-biracial families as far as the eye could see. And it was just really, really difficult. And Black History Month would come around and we would talk about the same people and the same things over and over again, civil rights and slavery. And every time I was heartbroken and sad and didn't really know

what to do with everything that I was feeling. And my teachers were in no way prepared to handle the questions and the conversations that were coming up around these topics. And so I just started to be like, "I hate Black History Month." Like this is, it was great at home, like my parents were amazing. My dad would like get us these books about different Black people from history, and whenever I had like a book report, or I had to write about a person from history, he would always encourage me to choose like a Black inventor or something. And so I really enjoyed that. But when it came to like talking about Black stuff at school, like it was just, oh. I still feel it. Like I still kind of get like that, I don't know, just like pit in my stomach. It was just awful. So when I started First Name Basis, I thought to myself, I really want to make the Black history program that I wish I had in school. Like what would have helped me feel excited about Black History Month? What would have helped me make a connection to my culture and feel really proud of my heritage? And what would have made my classmates really understand the complexity and the vibrance and the joy and ingenuity and creativity and all the amazing things that come along with being Black? So Bite-Sized Black History was born.



03:35

Bite-Sized Black History is a set of 28. With the grand finale episodes, we are now at 28 bite-sized podcast episodes just for kiddos. And what you do is you just press play and each episode is about a different Black American from history. But it's people that you probably, either you've never heard of them, or you've heard of them and you're like not 100% sure who they are like you're like, "Oh, I know that name, but I don't really know what they did," or "I couldn't tell you that much about them."



04:06

So as much as we love Rosa Parks, we love Martin Luther King, we love Harriet Tubman, right? Those are not the people that we're talking about in Bite-Sized Black History. For example, the episode that I'm going to play for you today is about a man named Jerry Lawson, who is the father of modern video gaming. And he was amazing. He invented the video game cartridge, which was the foundation for the billion-dollar gaming industry that we see today. You've probably never heard his name before, or if you have you're like, "I've heard of that guy, but I'm not really sure." Right? Like these are the people we're talking about. We're talking about Ronald McNair, the astronaut. We're talking about Marie van Brittan Brown. We're talking about CJ Jones we're talking about Gwen Ifill. I mean, journalists, architects, inventors, nurses... like amazing people. We are celebrating Black joy. We are celebrating Black brilliance, and we are doing it all in 12 minutes or less!



05:03

Okay, let me tell you. So I used to be a second grade teacher, as you know. And the thing that I found with my students is that their attention span, 15 minutes is like the sweet spot. So all of the episodes I have made 12 minutes or less so that your kiddo can make sure that they're engaged and really immersing themselves in the story.



05:26

The other thing is that I teamed up with an amazing illustrator named Nadia Fisher, and she made a custom illustration for each person. So you're listening to the episode, your kiddo is coloring the illustration while you're listening so they have something to do with their hands, and then I've also created reflection questions to go along with each episode. So for example, with the episode you're going to hear a little bit later about Jerry Lawson and how he's the father of modern video gaming, one of the reflection questions is, "If you could design a video game with Jerry Lawson, what would it be? What would it be about?" Or like another episode from the Bite-Sized Black History Grand Finale is about a woman named Lois Curtis, and she was actually an artist and a disability rights activist. And she had an intellectual disability herself. And what she did was she teamed up with a lawyer to make it so that people who are disabled can actually live in the community independently instead of having to live in an institution to get the care that they need. And so the reflection question that goes along with her episode is, "Why is it important that everyone gets to live in and participate in a community?" So you can see how these questions can be really fun and exciting, but also help you talk about deeper, really important, values-based issues.

 06:50

So if you're listening, and you're like, "I need this in my life," just go to firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory, and you'll find everything you need there. The link is also in the show notes, as usual. But let me give you the lowdown.

 07:03

So if you're new, and this is your first time hearing about it, there are finally 28 episodes, so that you can have one episode per day of Black History Month, which is really exciting. And if you've been here for a while, and you're like "Yes, I know all of this, and I love Bite-Sized Black History," we have the Grand Finale for you that is new this year.

 07:22

So this is actually our third year doing Bite-Sized Black History, if you can believe it. The first year it was Season One and I did 12 episodes for that. The second year, last year, was Season Two, and we have 12 episodes for that. And then this year is our Grand Finale, which is four episodes so that you can round out your 28-episode set. So you can either invest in all 28 episodes, or you can invest in one of the seasons. Or you can just finish off your set by grabbing the Grand Finale.

 07:54

And one of the most common questions that I get is what age level is this good for? And let me tell you, like, most kids love listening to a story. I mean, even I, as an adult, would love to snuggle up and have someone read to me. Hello audiobooks, right? So we actually recommend it for lots of different age levels. We had a family share that they are using it with their kiddos as young as three years old. And we have had people tell us that their 13-year-old loves it. So it's great for a huge range. But if it were me, like I just started it with Violet this year, and she is

five, and she's loving it. And we're having some really, really good conversations. I mean, she knows the story of Richard and Mildred Loving, but we got more into race and the racial categories. And sorry, I should say if you're not familiar with the Lovings, they are the couple that took interracial marriage to the Supreme Court. And were able to win that right for heterosexual couples. Unfortunately, interracial LGBT couples did not have that right until 2015.

 09:03

But so we celebrate Loving Day, and Violet knows all about the Lovings. But there are quotes in there from the judge who was saying, you know, "God has separated the races, white, black, yellow Malay," and she's asking me, "What is yellow? What is red?" and we're having these really good conversations about what is race and where did it come from. And it was so funny, I was telling her, so I'm black biracial, which means my mom is white and my dad is Black. My husband is white. And so I was telling her, "You know, there's only one person in our family who's not mixed race, because I'm mixed, you're mixed, Holly's mixed," and she she's like thinking about like, "Who who is it?" And I said, "It's dad." And she was like, "Too bad for dad." We laughed so hard. It was just so sweet that we got to have that conversation and I got to affirm her identity and help her see how lovely it is to be someone who is Black-biracial, because that's something that I feel like took me a little while to figure out.

 10:07

So I'm just really excited to share this program with her. And I created it for us, right, like to heal pieces of myself that I feel like really had a hard time growing up in a predominantly white area and not seeing Black history that reflected brilliance and excellence and joy and really uplifting good stories. And also for my white peers who didn't get those stories either. Like, I don't think that people realize that our white students really miss out when they don't have examples, positive, good examples, of Black Americans throughout history, examples of Black Americans who are just living their life, like trying to be dancers, or trying to be inventors and aren't necessarily knee deep in the civil rights movement. And there are those people in there too, right? Like we talk about Ella Baker, and we talk about Bayard Rustin. These people definitely were key players in the civil rights movement. And what I'm saying is that I think we need both.

 11:14

Okay, one of the other things I wanted to tell you is that Bite-Sized Black History is actually on sale right now. So if you use the code, BLACKHISTORY15, make sure you use all caps, BLACKHISTORY15, it is on sale until February 22, 2023. So go use your coupon code, invest in this amazing program for your family at firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory, the coupon code and the link are both in the show notes.

 11:40

And sometimes I have parents or teachers say like, "I don't know if my students are going to like it " or "I'm not sure if my kiddo would be into this " That's why I put this sample free

like it, or I'm not sure if my kiddos would be into this. That's why I put this sample, free sample, at the end of this episode. So you can just play it for them, like, play them this free sample, ask them if they're into it. And if they are, then great, you know, it's something that will work well for you.

 12:03

I have two more things I want to tell you before I share the free sample episode with you. Number one is that if you are a teacher listening, we now take purchase orders, which is so awesome. I'm so excited. We had our first purchase order a couple of weeks ago and I was so grateful to the librarian who was so patient with me as I figured it out. But we can take purchase orders now. So if that's something that has been a barrier in the past for you, just email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org. I will put that in the show notes too. And just let us know that you would like to use a purchase order instead of going through our website. And we will honor the 15% off if you purchase through a purchase order as well. So you'll definitely get that discount and everything will be squared away with your school. It is super easy and exciting. So hello@firstnamebasis.org if you would like to purchase using a purchase order.

 12:55

And the other thing I wanted to share with you is about the content. So like I said, we've been doing this for three years and I have grown so much. Just like I'm sure you have on your anti-racist journey in the last three years, I have grown too, and that's the amazing thing about anti-racism is I have, it really is a journey and I can look back and see kind of things that I would do differently now. And one of the things that I am in the process of updating and changing is the language in some of the episodes. So in Season One, there are a couple of episodes where I'll say, like, "They weren't allowed to go to this restaurant because they were Black." But in reality, and I really wish I could remember who I learned this from, because I would love to give them credit, but that's just not accurate. Like they weren't allowed to go to the restaurant because of racism, not because they were Black. Or we have an episode in the grand finale that is about the first openly gay Major League Baseball player, his name is Glenn Burke. And I was really, really intentional about saying that he faced all of this discrimination because of homophobia, not because he was gay, you know? So what I'm doing right now is I'm going through all Season One and Season Two and making sure that I update that language, just so that you have the best, most accurate thing to share with your kiddos. And that language will all be updated by February 1. And the great thing about the program that we use is that if you have your account, like it will automatically be updated. You won't have to redownload anything, don't worry about that. It's just something on the back end that I will do. But I just wanted you to know that if you press play on one of the episodes and you heard me say because they were Black, and you're like, "Oh, what? I don't feel good about that," I hear that and I totally understand that. I'm grateful for the opportunity to make it better.

 14:44

All right, it's time it is time for me to share with you Bite-Sized Black History, Jerry Lawson. I cannot wait. Just so you know firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory will take you right to the page where you can see everything you need to see about the program. Make sure you use the coupon code BLACKHISTORY for 15% off until February 22. And let's do this.



15:13

Welcome to Bite-Sized Black History. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw. Let's learn together!



15:13

Well, hello there everyone. This is Bite-Sized Black History Grand Finale, Episode One, "Jerry Lawson: The father of Modern Gaming." Jerry Lawson was born on December 1, 1940, in Brooklyn, New York. Now even though he was born in Brooklyn, he actually grew up in Queens. His family was amazing. His grandpa worked as a mail carrier, but he had an educational background in physics. His dad was a longshoreman, and that just means that he worked down at the docks, unloading ships. But when he wasn't doing that, his passion was for learning, especially science. Jerry remembers when he would see his dad reading science books all night long. His mom work for the city. But when she wasn't at work, she was helping out at Jerry's school. She was actually the president of the PTA at his school.



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Now, it's important to know that high school was predominantly white. That means there were lots and lots and lots of white kids, and Jerry was one of the very few Black kids in his school. Now, I have to tell you that this is how I grew up. I grew up in the suburbs of Arizona, and there weren't very many other Black children in my school besides my sister. So I just want to say if you have this experience, like me and like Jerry, just know that you're not alone. I know, it's really hard to be the only one sometimes.



15:13

When he was a child, Jerry was very curious. He loved to take things apart to see what was inside. He would take apart all these different electronics, and he started taking apart TVs. He put them back together just to see how everything worked. And then when he was in high school, he actually started a business where he would go to people's homes and fix their TVs for them. He was so good at it that people knew that if their TV was broken, they should call Jerry. He earned enough money from his TV repair business that he was able to buy all of the parts he needed to make his own ham radio. I know. What in the world is ham radio? Ham radios are amateur radios that you can use to talk to other people who have them. So there are professional radio stations " that's what you hear when you get in the car and you turn on the radio " and then there are stations where regular people can talk with one another. Those are the stations that you use on a ham radio. So Jerry got all the different parts, put them together to build his own ham radio so that he could talk to people all over the place. He got an amateur ham radio license when he was only 13. And that is when he started building his ham radio in his room.



15:13

When Jerry was growing up, he also loved science fiction books, chemistry, and movies. In the

60s, he went to college at two different places, Queens College and City College of New York. But while he was in school, he was like, I really like computers. And that is not something that I'm learning here. So he left college and decided to teach himself electrical engineering. Isn't that amazing? In the 70s, he moved to Silicon Valley, which is a place in California that is known for their work with computers. He knew that he loved computers, and that is where they were making them, so he moved all the way across the country so that he could join the Homebrew Computer Club. Now this was a club of people who loved computers and video games. He was in the club with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, those are the founders of Apple. Yeah, like the people who made the iPhone! He knew the two Steves before they were famous. Just like his experience in school growing up, Jerry was one of very few Black engineers in Silicon Valley, and one of only two Black members of the Homebrew Computer Club. The members of the club would get together and talk all about the projects that they were working on and ask each other for help.



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While Jerry was in the club, he invented an arcade game called Demolition Derby. You guessed it, it was a game with cars and trucks, and you would use this little steering wheel to crash them into each other. And one of the coolest parts of the game, according to the arcade owners, was something that it had called "coin defeat mode." So in order to play games at arcades, you had to put coins into the machine. And there were lots of kids who knew how to put their coins in, but also how to get their coins back out. The kids would tie a wire to the coin, put it into the machine and start the game, and then pull the wire back so that their coin would come back out of the machine. They would do this over and over again so they only had to use one coin to play the game. Well, Jerry had a solution for that. He created coin defeat mode that made the slot close in a special way so that kids couldn't get their coin back out. After putting it in the machine, kids were no longer able to put that wire in there and keep getting their coin back out. He worked at a few different electronic companies before landing at a company called Fairchild. They knew he was such a great engineer, and so they asked him to design a state-of-the-art video game console. But here's the kicker: it was a big secret. His boss, the person who worked directly above him, didn't even know what he was working on. Jerry would work work work on this new console and show everything to the Vice President of Fairchild. He said that this work made him feel like a secret agent. And this is when he and his team created the Channel F. Now it's important to know that F stands for fun. And it really was a state-of-the-art video game console. So let me explain.



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Back in the day, the video game consoles only had a certain number of games preloaded onto it, so you would buy a console and it already had games loaded on it, and those were the games that you could play. But what Jerry did is that he invented the video game cartridge, so that you could switch it out and choose what game you wanted to play. So you could buy the console and buy all the games that you wanted separately and switch them out when ever you wanted to play them. You know how if you're playing Xbox or Playstation or Nintendo, you can take the games out and put a different game in? Yeah, he is the one who invented that. And that's why they call him the "Father of Modern Gaming." Not only was the Channel F the first console to have video game cartridges, it was also the first one to have a pause button. Yeah, I know! Pretty important, right?



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Jerry and his team created the Channel F so quickly that everyone in the gaming community was calling them "mavericks." He said that the reason they were able to do it is because they didn't do things the way they were always done. He said, quote, "When you break New Horizons, you've got to break some rules." End quote. In 1976, the year that the Channel F came out, it was one of the most popular Christmas presents. Jerry told a story about that year. He said that after Christmas that year, he had a lot of work to do. So on December 26, he went back to the office. He was just working on some paperwork and it was just him and the security guard; everyone else was at home doing other things. He said all of the sudden, the phone started ringing off the hook. He and the security guard looked at each other and then they started answering the phones. People were calling to talk to them about the Channel F. They had questions about how the games worked, and they wanted to tell him how much they loved it. I know! He said he got phone calls from celebrities talking about how much fun they were having with this brand new video game console. And of course, there were some people complaining. He said he really heard it all that day. He said one guy had taken the whole thing apart looking for where to put the batteries, even though it plugged into the wall. He said another woman called and told him that her dog peed on her Channel F and that she wanted to know if it was still going to work. He was like, "I don't know, you'll have to try it and figure it out." Jerry was pretty much over answering calls and wanted to be done. On the very last call of the night, a woman called and said, "Mine's humming! What's wrong with it?" And Jerry responded, "because it doesn't know the words, lady!" and then he hung up.



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Even when he was frustrated, Jerry would find a way to make a joke out of it. And his kids, Anderson and Karen, said this about him too. They said that when he would get home from work, he would pick them up, spin them around and pretend like he was King Kong. He was 6'6" and almost 300 pounds, so yeah, he was a big guy. His kids talked about his garage, because he didn't put cars in his garage. Oh no. He put computers in his garage. They said he had a big network of computers, eight to 10 different computers, that were all hooked together, and they were the size of a fridge! He would work on those computers and create games, and his kids were in charge of playing the video games and checking them for problems.



15:14

Now, one day he gave his son and his nephew a book called "101 Basic Computer Games." He told them to read the book and create their own game together. Now his son Anderson traces his decision to become a computer scientist back to that moment. He was talking about how if his dad hadn't given him that computer games book, he might not have found his passion as a computer scientist. His daughter Karen said that he didn't have limitations on what he believed he could do or accomplish. After the Channel F, he went on to found his own gaming company, but he was really frustrated because the market began to favor violent video games. Everybody was creating these violent games, and Jerry was like, "No. We shouldn't have to have violence in order to have fun." He wasn't willing to compromise his values and create violent video games, so his company didn't last very long.



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In March of 2011, Jerry Lawson was honored as an industry pioneer by the International Game Developers Association. Everyone agrees that his invention, the Channel F, served as a foundation for the gaming systems we have today: PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo. These all make up a multibillion-dollar gaming industry, and they are thanking Jerry Lawson for helping them. You can see the Channel F on display at the World Video Game Hall of Fame in New York. Jerry Lawson passed away on April 9, 2011 in Santa Clara, California at the age of 71. Remembering his dad, Anderson said quote, "If everyone was going right, he'd figure out a reason to go left. That was just him. He created his own destiny." End quote. That was the story of Jerry Lawson, the father of modern gaming.



27:16

Okay, are you in, or are you in? Because, I mean, pretty cool, right? Oh, my gosh. Uh, yeah. I just I love working on this. I'm so grateful I get to do this. It is one of my favorite parts of the job. And I'm so happy that I get to share it with you. I was just driving in my car the other day thinking about Glenn Burke, one of the people featured in the Grand Finale episodes, and just getting really emotional about what he went through and about how grateful I am for his willingness to be unapologetically himself. Like he was himself. He was a Black gay man in Major League Baseball in the 70s, and that was a hard thing to be, an important thing to be. And I'm so grateful for his example. And it's like these stories, even though I made them so we could share them with our children, they really affect us too, you know. So just come celebrate with us: firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory, BLACKHISTORY15 for 15% off, all caps. Don't forget the all caps. All of this information is in the show notes. And I just love 'ya. I'm so excited!



28:37

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes, and everything is linked there so you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at [firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org. All right, have a great week, my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.