

Catto's Courage

COURAGEOUS LEADERS



Developed by a Team of Educators:

Steph Davis
Allison Dobbs
Andrea Rivera-Luna

Thank you!

Thanks for your interest in what the Music Inclusion Hub has to offer!

As a special thank you, we're giving you this complimentary lesson plan from our *Catto's Courage* curriculum guide. The full guide, which serves as a pedagogical companion to our original side-by-side, intermediate string ensemble piece of the same name, contains a series of activities ranging from readings and discussions to imaginative performances and creations designed to intertwine the music with historical, literary, and artistic analysis. The fundamental goal of the guide is to get students thinking and creating across different subjects and disciplines, using the stories of these historic leaders as inspiration.

CURIOUS TO KNOW MORE?

Purchase the full *Catto's Courage* guide and music score at www.CastleSkins.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT THE MUSIC INCLUSION HUB

The Music Inclusion Hub is a digital hub of culturally responsive, intersectional, mixed media resources for elementary, middle, and high school educators nation-wide. To learn more and explore all of its Kindergarten to College materials, please visit www.MusicInclusionHub.com

OCTAVIUS VALENTINE CATTO (FEBRUARY 22, 1839 – OCTOBER 10, 1871)



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Activist Parents

Octavius Valentine Catto was born February 22, 1839 to William and Sarah Catto in South Carolina. In 1845, Sarah Catto died during childbirth and William Catto remarried Mary Anderson. William Catto moved the family to Baltimore with the plan to continue traveling to Liberia for missionary work. When his activist writings were discovered, his license was revoked and the family fled to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, William Catto continued his influence through the church, speeches, and private organizations.¹

Early Activism, Leadership, and Education

William enrolled Octavius first at the Vaux Primary School, then the Lombard Street Grammar School, and in 1854, the influential Institute for Colored Youth (ICY).² While

his son attended the ICY, William helped to found the prestigious Banneker Institute of Philadelphia: a special group that tried to create change through intellectualism and advocacy.³ Octavius, who always wanted to be involved, applied for membership while still in high school. Despite his family ties, he was turned down for being too young. Yet, in some ways, the application process was important for Catto. His attempt to join impressed the members of the Banneker Institute. Many likely became future followers of Octavius. In turn, they encouraged him to reapply when he finished high school.

¹ Biddle 180

² Biddle 158

³ Biddle 181

OCTAVIUS VALENTINE CATTO (FEBRUARY 22, 1839 – OCTOBER 10, 1871)



The story of Octavius's application to the Banneker Institute was indicative of his many strengths, which continued to show up in important ways throughout his life. Like his father, Octavius was persistent and persuasive. He was so persuasive and demonstrative that asking and applying for what he believed in meant he often succeeded and earned many admirers along the way.⁴

Baseball, Segregation, and Activism

With his boyhood friend Jacob C. White Jr., Catto established the Black baseball team the Philadelphia Pythians. An excellent hitter, Catto played shortstop and served as the team captain.⁵ The Pythians were one of the best teams in the Black league. Always operating with activism in mind, Catto saw the baseball league as more than just a fun and physical activity. He saw it as an opportunity for Black men from opposite teams and distant towns to meet to discuss political, economic and social issues, and as a way to ultimately pursue full citizen rights.

The Pythians shared the field with the Athletic Baseball Club of Philadelphia (a white baseball organization) for important matches. While the Athletic Baseball Club shared its field, it refused to engage in matches involving Black baseball teams. The Pythians were also excluded from matches and tournaments that might enable a Black team to win a national championship. In 1867, Jacob White attended a meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Amateur Baseball players to apply for membership for the Pythians. At the meeting, the members agreed the Pythians should join, but White was persuaded to withdraw the application to avoid the embarrassment – since they believed his team had no chance of being accepted. Neither giving up after the local organization turned him down, nor assuming what might or might not be possible because of it, Catto applied for membership⁶ in the National Association for Baseball Players. Unfortunately, he was denied.

⁴ Biddle 181

⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw-NJ3sBrCs

⁶ Biddle 367

OCTAVIUS VALENTINE CATTO (FEBRUARY 22, 1839 – OCTOBER 10, 1871)



Streetcar Demonstrations

The mass transit system began in Philadelphia in 1858, using privately owned, horse-drawn streetcars. While Philadelphia was located in the North, it was still one of the most segregated cities. Even though Chicago, New York and Boston trolleys had been desegregated, most trolleys in Philadelphia did not allow Black passengers to ride at all. There were a few trolleys that allowed Black passengers to pay, but Black people were never allowed to ride inside; instead they had to ride on the outside of the train on a platform attached to the front of the car. Racial discrimination was obvious: enlisted Black soldiers of the Union Army were denied rides to the training grounds at Camp William Penn; Black women could not ride the trolleys to see their wounded husbands during the war; Reverend William Alston hailed a streetcar when his two year old son was gravely sick, and was denied a ride even though the car was empty.⁷

Octavius Catto formed an activist group who called themselves a “band of brothers” and created a “dual strategy” of demonstration and politics to desegregate the trolleys. He would work to change legislation and collaborate with Republican senator Morrow B. Lowry who tried to pass a bill integrating public transit. One of Octavius’s arguments was that Black people who had “enough” citizenship to serve in the military should therefore have the citizenship right to ride inside a streetcar.⁸ Catto’s group, which included his fiancée Caroline Le Count and his friend Jacob C. White Jr., worked with local churches to protest banning Black people from riding streetcars. The vision for the protest was resistance without violence: as policemen and officials forced them to be removed from the trolleys, the protesters would let their bodies be uncooperatively “limp,” making it more difficult for them to be removed from the cars. Catto himself joined these demonstrations. He boarded a street car, and the conductor refused to take him, detaching the horses that were pulling it and leaving Catto in the car. Octavius remained in the car, left in the street

⁷ Kashutas 184-185

⁸ Biddle 326

OCTAVIUS VALENTINE CATTO (FEBRUARY 22, 1839 – OCTOBER 10, 1871)



overnight, attracting more and more followers by his civil disobedience and demonstration. The demonstrations created unprecedented attention from local officials, state legislators, and the general public. Unfortunately, a poll to make any change (offered only to white voters) resulted in 4,000 to 200 votes in favor of “keeping a whites only policy.”

In February 1867, Congress finally passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted voting rights to Black men. The following month, Governor John Geary passed a bill allowing Black people to ride the city’s streetcars. Caroline Le Count, just three days later, boarded a streetcar but was denied entry. Having shrewdly anticipated this very thing to happen, she brought the newspaper announcing Geary’s new law and showed it to a policeman. The trolley driver was fined \$100.

Assassination

The Fifteenth Amendment finally became ratified into law on March 30, 1870 for the state of Pennsylvania. Black people celebrated throughout the city with parades and church services. Leaders such as Frederick Douglass spoke about voting, advising Black people to vote “as they pleased,” while Catto urged them to support the Republican Party - who, in the late 1800s, were pro-abolition and equality while the Democrats were not. Catto believed, as an overall strategy, that having Republican support could eventually lead to Black leaders running for office and winning elections – tangible political leverage that could reach as high as the state level.

The following year, during the mayor election for Philadelphia, support for the candidates was divided starkly along racial lines. Republicans hired outsiders to create repeat votes and Democrats mobilized their Irish immigrant voters with a false racist campaign. On election day, October 10, 1871, the worst riots in Philadelphia’s history took place. In the 5th Ward, Black voters accused Irish police of intimidation. In the 7th Ward, fighting began when a Black man was turned away from the polls, causing violence to spread to the 4th, 16th, and

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17th wards. White mobs, helped by the police themselves, attacked Black voters.

At this time, Catto was teaching at the ICY, having voted in the morning before school. Notified of the riots, he dismissed his students at 1pm to go home, fearing for their safety. At 2pm, James Milliken came to Catto at the Institute, informing him the Fifth Brigade (where he had been a major and inspector), was assembling to provide protection to Black voters. Catto was ordered to arm himself and report to headquarters. While leaving the school, a colleague of Catto's urged him to take a longer, safer route home, which Catto did. With the safer route, he narrowly escaped one white rioter. Turning home, he passed another white rioter, bandaged, on the same side of the street. The rioter recognized Catto and shot him in the torso as a streetcar approached. Catto cried out, "*What are you doing?*" and took cover behind the streetcar. The white rioter followed Catto, firing another round of shots at close range. A policeman arrived at the scene, catching Catto as he collapsed, and the pedestrians, streetcar passengers - both Black and white - watched in shock. Catto was one of three Black men who were murdered that day.⁹

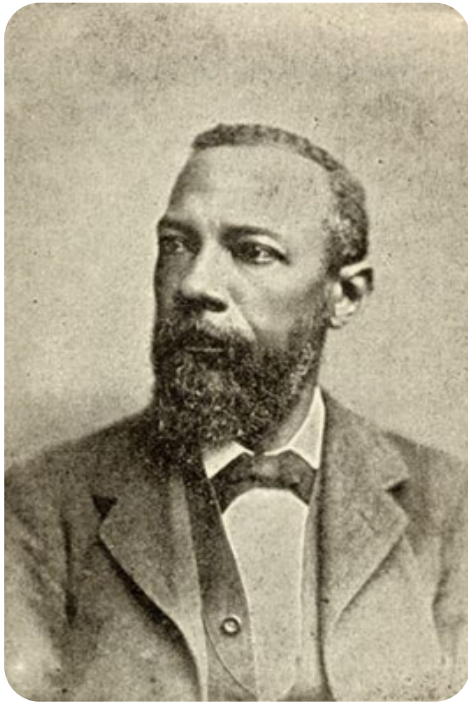
Octavius' funeral was an interruption to the violence and rioting over his death. Nationally attended, his funeral was the largest in Philadelphia at that time with over 5,000 mourners. People from New York, Washington D.C., Delaware and Mississippi came, as well as students, faculty, and graduates from the ICY, politicians, and regimental guards.¹⁰

⁹ Kashutas 199-201

¹⁰ <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/murder-of-octavius-catto/>

JACOB C. WHITE JR.

(1837 – NOVEMBER 11, 1902)



JACOB C. WHITE JR.
(1837 – NOVEMBER 11, 1902)

Activist Family

While Jacob was born in 1837 to an elite Black family, from childhood he was aware of the racism around him and would have known from a very early age of the violence against Black people in Philadelphia.¹ Outwardly, Jacob's father was a barber and dentist. His mother Elizabeth was a seamstress.² Both already had a long history of activism³ having worked in the Underground Railroad and other vigilante societies helping fugitive enslaved people for the last 25 years.

Teenage Years:

Early Activism, Recording, Speaking, Joining

As a teenager, Jake Jr. (as he was often called) had a great gift for both writing and note-taking. Both civically and socially minded, Jacob joined fourteen different societies and fraternities in his teens, where he was almost

inevitably elected secretary, recording secretary, or corresponding secretary. He loved sports but was not very athletically gifted, playing on teams but usually taking on additional duties such as recording the scores or publishing in the sports sections of newspapers. Already a natural historian and budding archivist, Jacob instinctively saved every invitation, sports ticket stub and record.⁴

By age 15, Jacob had already published an essay, urging Black people to boycott "slave-grown goods." He and fellow youth activist Charlotte Forten were already attending (or trying to attend since they were not always allowed due to their ages) protests and political meetings.⁴

¹ Biddle 177

² Biddle 173

³ <https://catto.ushistory.org/catto-and-american-civil-rights/civil-rights-timeline-with-catto/>

⁴ Biddle 174

JACOB C. WHITE JR.

(1837 – NOVEMBER 11, 1902)



When he was 16, Jake's father enrolled him at the Institute of Colored Youth (ICY). The school emphasized moral standards, classical offerings such as Latin, Greek, trigonometry, and most especially activism. In the spring of 1855, Governor James Pollock made an exceptionally rare visit to the ICY – the first governor to visit any school. Jacob White, still a student at the ICY and only 18, addressed the governor directly in front of the school with questions about citizenship and equality. With remarkable poise and carefully planned remarks, accounts suggest the governor received an unexpected verbal “pelting” from Jacob. The principal of the ICY never once stopped or interrupted Jacob. Jacob addressed the governor: *“You see us, sir, a little family by ourselves, set off from the other youth of this great Commonwealth...We are glad therefore, that in the midst of your numerous engagements, your Excellency has given us an opportunity to present ourselves before you, that you may see that though not recognized by the Commonwealth, we are nevertheless preparing ourselves usefully for a future day, when citizenship in our country will be based on manhood and not on color.”*⁵

Teaching, Baseball, Publishing, and Activism

In 1857, the influential Banneker Institute (originally called Alexandrian Literary Institute) was formed, whose mission was to combine academia with activism for Black people. Octavius's father was a founder, and Jacob C. White, only 19 at the time, was appointed secretary as he was already trusted by the senior members with recording the minutes from the meetings, annual reports, and records of code-of-conduct infractions.⁶ In 1857, Jacob graduated from ICY (the only graduate in his class) and in 1858, started teaching at the ICY himself. He also began lecturing on math at the Banneker institute.

Jacob White was also active in the movement to desegregate streetcars. White first worked with William Still, who was the primary early leader in the desegregation movement. However, Still's approach continued to produce small results, and Jacob shifted his allegiance and support to his childhood friend, Octavius Catto, who had his own ideas and strategies to bring change more quickly.⁷

⁵ Biddle 168

⁶ Biddle 181

⁷ Kashutas 195

JACOB C. WHITE JR.

(1837 – NOVEMBER 11, 1902)



Very much a joiner and collaborator, Jacob was elected secretary of the Pennsylvanian Equal Rights League when he was 28 years old. At age 29, Jacob and Octavius established the Philadelphia Pythians Black baseball team. While Octavius played in the games and served as team captain, Jacob naturally became the team's secretary scheduling the games, team parties, and keeping team statistics. The two friends used the baseball team as yet another way to pursue full citizen rights for Black people. The simple creation of this baseball team became a social center for Black communities in Philadelphia. While White and Catto were not successful in joining the National Association for Baseball Players, they played their first interracial baseball game against the Philadelphia's white team: The Olympics.

Later on, Jacob became principal of the Roberts Voe Consolidated School, serving in this tenured position from 1864-1896, and turning the school into a model for the education of Black youth.⁸ In June 1895 at the age of 58, Jacob was appointed president of the board for the Douglas Memorial Hospital. Once he procured funds needed to support the hospital, he resigned from the presidential position but retained influence as a member of the board.

Jacob White believed it was critical that the details about activists' lives be preserved for future generations. His records are perhaps his last activist contribution. Along with other historians, White's papers, books, letters and mementos were donated to the American Negro Historical Society, now housed within the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The materials, sheer volume, and thoroughness of Jacob's archives and personal writings were so extensive that Jacob's widow, Amelia, continued sending over more items after his death in 1902.⁹ Jacob's activism as a recorder and archivist cannot be underestimated. Robert Adger, a fellow leader, activist, and bibliophile alive and active during Jacob's lifetime explained: *"We want the Newspapers, the Churches, and the Parents to tell their Children what our past Condition was, and about those dear people who are dead and gone, of the sacrifices they made in our behalf, and grand opportunities we are now offered."*¹⁰

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw-NJ3sBrCs&ab_channel=PhiladelphiaBaseballHistory

⁹ Biddle 475

¹⁰ Biddle 476

CHARLOTTE FORTEN

(AUGUST 17, 1837 – JULY 23, 1914)



CHARLOTTE FORTEN
(AUGUST 17, 1837 – JULY 23, 1914)

Activist Parents

Charlotte Forten was born in 1837, in Philadelphia to parents who had been free since the eighteenth century. Her parents were a wealthy family within the Black community. Like Jacob White and Octavius Catto, Charlotte grew up surrounded by activism. Her aunts, uncles, and grandparents had led or joined what seemed to be every equal rights movement of the previous 25 years.¹

Early Activism and Publishing

When Jacob White had confronted Governor Pollock in 1855, Charlotte had been politically active in demonstrations and publishing for some time. And the same year Jacob addressed Governor Pollock, Charlotte joined the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society.² As a teenager, she published poems about antislavery in the *Liberator*, *Abolitionist*, and *Christian Recorder*.³

She was neither shy nor tentative: as a teenager, she was having dinners with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison; corresponding with poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier; and took part in the storming of a courthouse to free Anthony Burns who was arrested in Boston under the Fugitive Slave Act.

Charlotte's home life and thinking were also nourished through books, novels, newspapers, and piano music. Surrounded by literature, Charlotte kept her own detailed diaries about the racism she experienced. As a schoolgirl, she noted she was "refused" service at an "ice cream saloon," and refused to sit in the segregated Jim Crow car on the train. Her white classmates were cordial to her at school, but she noted they ignored her outside of school.⁴

¹ Biddle 175


² <https://www.nps.gov/people/charlotte-forten-grimke.htm>

³ <https://catto.ushistory.org/catto-and-american-civil-rights/civil-rights-timeline-with-catto/>

⁴ Biddle 170

CHARLOTTE FORTEN

(AUGUST 17, 1837 – JULY 23, 1914)



At age 17, Charlotte enrolled at the Salem Normal School to receive training to become a teacher. At 18, she joined the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society. Her diaries showed her passion for change and for her ideals. Perhaps most importantly, her diaries showed her talent to inspire and lead with words. She wrote: *"It is ignoble to despair; let us labor earnestly and faithfully to acquire knowledge, to break down barriers of prejudice and oppression...hoping and believing that if not for us, for another generation there is a better, brighter day in store, when slavery and prejudice shall vanish before the glorious light of Liberty and Truth."*⁵

Teaching and Publishing

In 1862 at the age of 25, Charlotte moved to Port Royal, joining the faculty of Penn School on St. Helena Island. With her immense talent for writing, Charlotte had dreams of literary accomplishment, travel and community within intellectual circles. Yet her compassion drew her to the needs at Port Royal where the formerly enslaved islanders needed food, clothing and funds. Weighing the decision whether to help at Port Royal or remain in Salem, Charlotte realized her dreams *"can never be mine. If I can go to Port Royal I will try to forget all these desires. I will pray that God in his goodness will make me noble enough to find my highest happiness in doing my duty."*⁶ By teaching both the adults and children on Port Royal, Charlotte became the first Black teacher of Beaufort County. In 1864, Charlotte published in detail her experiences teaching at the Port Royal school. After leaving Port Royal, she continued teaching, first in Boston and then Charleston S.C.⁷

Activism Within the Nadir Period:

Boston, Charleston, and D.C. - Teaching, Poetry, and Clerical Work

The Nadir Period, which started in the 1870s and continued into the 1920s, is considered by many historians a dark period in African American history. Racism, segregation and violence towards Black people was far worse in many ways compared to Charlotte's childhood. Yet Black leaders were not in agreement about action and message. Some preached urgency to actively seek

⁵ Biddle 170

⁶ Biddle 268

⁷ <https://www.nps.gov/people/charlotte-forten-grimke.htm>

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(AUGUST 17, 1837 – JULY 23, 1914)



change while other prominent speakers advised Black citizens to accept segregation for the moment. They argued it would be advantageous that Black people build wealth and skills through farming and directly addressing racism and violence later.⁸

There is not nearly as much recorded about Charlotte's activism after 1872 when she turned 35.⁹ She seemed to have engaged in many more facets of activism when she was younger, although she remained an activist her entire life. It may not be possible to know if her activism and focus were diminished by the cultural shifts during the Nadir period or if her work was simply not documented. It is known that she moved to Washington D.C., taught at a preparatory school now called Dunbar High School, and served as a clerk in the Treasury Department in 1873. She married Reverend Francis J. Grimké, a formerly enslaved minister of D.C.'s Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church. She helped found the National Association of Colored Women and published her poetry in 1896. She wrote about Washington D.C., art, and immortalized political leaders through her poetry. She persisted in the civil rights movement all the way until her death on July, 23 1914, at age 76.⁹

⁸ Dagbovie, 1-9

⁹ <https://www.nps.gov/people/charlotte-forten-grimke.htm>

BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

FOR EDUCATORS



Kashatus, William. *William Still: The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021.

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Octavius V. Catto, A Legacy for the 21st Century

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Civil Rights Timeline with Catto

Daniel Biddle and Murray Dubbin. *Tasting Freedom*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017.

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Octavius V. Catto, the Philadelphia Pythians and the Progression of Civil Rights in Baseball

Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. "Reflections on Conventional Portrayals of the African American Experience during the Progressive Era or 'the Nadir.'" *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13, no. 1 (2014): 4-27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43903496>.

QUALITIES THAT LEAD TO COURAGEOUS ACTS

TEACHER INSTRUCTION
FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS



OBJECTIVES

1. Students will learn Octavius Catto's life story and biography.
2. Students will learn about Catto through his activism and community of peers.
3. Students will be able to identify different kinds of activism through the study of Catto and his community.
4. Students will be able to identify the many qualities/strengths that can be used to harness change.
5. Students will be able to relate Catto's community to their own, and realize their own capability to make change.



PART ONE: IDENTIFYING ACTIVISM

1. Encourage the students to read the biographies of Octavius Catto and his contemporaries Jacob White Jr. and Charlotte Forten. Alternately, biographies can be read aloud.
2. Direct students to circle/underline examples of activism in each of the biographies.
 - a. *NOTE: Activism can take many forms with some types generating immediate change and others having a more gradual/longer influence. For instance, Catto's demonstration on the trolley had immediate impact on the culture of his time, while White Jr.'s note-taking as a young secretary documented important details of his time for the study and understanding by future generations.*
3. Discussing one leader at a time, ask students to list each leader's examples of activism and their contribution(s) to the movement.

QUALITIES THAT LEAD TO COURAGEOUS ACTS

TEACHER INSTRUCTION
FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS



PART TWO: COURAGEOUS QUALITIES WORKSHEET

Individual Lesson Version:

1. Give each student their own *Qualities That Lead to Courageous Acts worksheet* found on the next page. Ask them to reflect on the lives and activism of Catto, White Jr., and Forten.
2. Using a different color for each activist, encourage students to draw a line that connects each person to their strength(s) and role(s).
3. After students finish, discuss their results as a class. Teachers can work through each activist at a time, asking students which qualities they identified for each person, or start with the quality then discuss which activist most strongly possessed it.

Group Activity Version:

1. Display the *Qualities That Lead to Courageous Acts worksheet* on a screen or smart board.
2. Ask students to identify the qualities and roles that best describe each activist. Encourage them to explain their reasoning.
3. Using a different color for each activist, draw lines that connect each activist to the strength(s) and role(s) attributed by the students.

QUALITIES THAT LEAD TO COURAGEOUS ACTS

STUDENT ACTIVITY
FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS



INSTRUCTIONS

Using a different color for each activist, draw a line that connects each person to their strength(s) and role(s).

ACTIVIST	STRENGTH	ROLE
Octavius Catto	Resourceful Empathetic Strategist Persistent Inclusive	Secretary Reporter Applicant Teacher
Jacob White Jr.	Kind Collaborator Intellectual Social Joiner	Demonstrator Poet Public Speaker Journalist/essayist
Charlotte Forten	Private/Quiet Encouraging Charismatic Detailed Bold Unwavering	Team leader Principal Organizer Historian Persuader



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