Joycelyn Elders: 
*From Sharecropper’s Daughter to Surgeon General of the United States of America*

Lesson Plan by Ashley Ralston  
Hands-On History Coordinator, Historic Arkansas Museum  
Butler Center for Arkansas Studies  
2007-2008 School Year  
Utilizing 2006 Arkansas Social Studies Frameworks  
Plus Other Curriculum Frameworks Including 2007 School Library Media Frameworks

The August Section from 2008 *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture Calendar* features a photograph of “Joycelyn Elders” with members of her 1954 physical therapy class from the U.S. Army Medical Specialist Corps. Calendars can be ordered annually by emailing info@encyclopeidaofarkansas.net

Students will analyze various sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the life and accomplishments of Joycelyn Elders. Students will research both primary and secondary sources, then compare and contrast the quality of information gained from these sources. Students will use information for a predetermined task.

**Grades:** 9th - 12th

**Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to research information to place on a timeline.
2. Students will be able to analyze primary sources to understand the life of Joycelyn Elders and the impact she had on Arkansas.
3. Students will be able to read both primary and secondary sources to understand the differences in the type of information given.

**Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks:**

**Arkansas History Student Learning Expectations:**

WWP.9.AH.9-12.6 – Analyze the political and economic effects of the Clinton presidency

WWP.9.AH.9-12.8 – Research significant contributions made by Arkansans in the following fields: art, business, culture, **medicine**, science

**English Language Arts Student Learning Expectations:**

OV.1.10.2 - Prepare and participate in informal discussions and activities, such as presentations, group discussions/work teams, and debates…
School Library Media Student Learning Expectations:
I.1.9.9, I.1.10.9, I.1.11.10, I.1.12.10 – Distinguish between primary and secondary sources
I.2.9.2, I.2.10.2, I.2.11.2, I.2.12.2 – Evaluate primary and secondary sources
A.4.9.1, A.4.10.1, A.4.11.1, A.4.12.1 – Use resources and/or technology tools for a predetermined task

NCSS Thematic Standards:
Culture
Individual Development and Identity
People, Places and Environment
Power, Authority and Governance
Civic Ideals and Practices

Related Encyclopedia of Arkansas Entries:
Bill Clinton; Joycelyn Elders; Modern Era, 1968 through the Present

Key Terms:
| Primary Source | Secondary Source |

Key Terms Defined:
Primary Source:
A primary source is any information that originates from the time period under study. This information may take the form of a newspaper article, memoir, photography, artifact, etc. Primary sources help historians understand an event, person or time period by providing a direct link to the information.

Secondary Source:
A secondary source is any information written by an indirect source, most often, used as a means to analyze an event, person or time period.

Materials Needed:
Paper
Writing Utensils
Internet Access
Joycelyn Elders Timeline (attached)
Joycelyn Elders Primary Source (attached)
Primary vs. Secondary Sources (attached)

Suggest Timeline:
One to Two Fifty Minute Class Periods

Background:
Joycelyn Elders, born Minnie Lee Jones, was born in the small town of Shaal, Arkansas. She was the first of seven, raised in a low income, sharecropper family. Elders defeated many obstacles to become both the first African-
American and female Chief Resident. This propelled her to become the Director of the Health Department and later Surgeon General under President Clinton.

Procedure:
*All discussion questions may substitute as journal entries*
Inform students that they will be studying Joycelyn Elders. After providing a brief introduction to Elders (see Background), ask students if they know the definitions between a primary and secondary source. Tell students that they will be researching the varying types of sources, so that they may better understand their differences.

Discussion Questions:
What is a primary source?
Give examples of primary sources.
What type of information is gained from a primary source?
What is a secondary source?
Give examples of secondary sources.
What type of information is gained from a secondary source?

Activity #1
Place class into approximately ten groups. Allow groups to go to the library or computer lab to gain internet access. Students will visit online Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture to learn about the life of Joycelyn Elders. [http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/](http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/)
If internet access is not available, it may be helpful to print the information for distribution to students.

Give students the Joycelyn Elders Introduction Worksheet to complete as they read. Then, re-create the timeline on the board or overhead projector and have representatives from each group place events with dates. This timeline may take the form of an illustrated timeline; this may take the form of simple illustrations, graphics and captions that represent key events in the life of Joycelyn Elders. Ask students to identify the information as primary or secondary.

Activity #2
Label each group a number between one and ten. Give students a copy of the Primary Source Handout. Allow groups a few minutes to look over their section and elect a group member to present their information. Ask each representative to find their place along the timeline created during the introduction and read their information.

Ask students to identify the information as primary or secondary.

Discussion Questions:
- What obstacles did Elders face as a child?
- Who were her influences?
- How did joining the Army benefit her life?
- How did her career affect her life?
- What were her thoughts on race relations?
- What barriers did she break?
- Describe the relationship between Elders and Bill Clinton.
Conclusion:
Individually, ask students to complete the Primary vs. Secondary Source Guide Worksheet. As students complete the handout, have them discuss their answers with the class.

For Further Reading: See Race Relations in the Natural State by Grif Stockley. The book has been adopted by the ADE as social studies textbook. Order information is available at [http://www.butlercenter.org/publication/books.html](http://www.butlercenter.org/publication/books.html)

The Taylor Foundation (Little Rock, Arkansas) makes Butler Center lesson plans possible. Contact the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System, 100 Rock St., Little Rock, AR, 72201. 501-918-3056 [www.butlercenter.org](http://www.butlercenter.org) and [www.cals.lib.ar.us](http://www.cals.lib.ar.us)
Joycelyn Elders Timeline

Directions: Visit http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/, type Joycelyn Elders into the search engine. As you read about the life of Dr. Elders, create a timeline with the dates listed below. This timeline may take the form of an illustrated timeline. One may use simple illustrations, graphics and captions that represent key events in the life of Joycelyn Elders.

- 1933
- 1949
- 1952
- 1956
- 1960
- 1961
- 1987
- 1993
- 1994
- 1996
Primary vs. Secondary Source Guide

Topic:

**Primary Source**
1. Where did the information come from?
2. Who is the author of the source?
3. Why was the source created?
4. What type of information did you learn from the source?
5. What is the quality of this information?
6. How has this source broadened your understanding of the topic?

**Secondary Source**
7. Where did the information come from?
8. Who is the author of the source?
9. Why was the source created?
10. What type of information did you learn from the source?
11. What is the quality of this information?
12. How has this source broadened your understanding of the topic?

**Primary vs. Secondary**
13. Compare and contrast the information you received from both the primary and secondary sources.
14. Which source gave you a better understanding of the topic?
15. What are the benefits of researching both types of sources?
16. List other topics/situations when you think this type of research may be valuable.
#1 Home Town
“The town of Schaal, Arkansas, where I was born on August 13, 1933, has a population of ninety-eight, ninety-nine when I’m home. Schaal is too small for most maps, especially since the Williams brothers’ general store burned down and the post office moved to Mineral Springs…To see the actual places where I grew up, a car won’t do. You need to go by pickup truck. Both the houses of my childhood are gone now…All that’s left of them are little flattened rises in the middle of overgrown meadows that used to be full of cotton and corn…”

#2 Family and Education
“In those days school went only part-time since all the students worked regularly on the farm. As a result, extremely few of them graduated, and all of them were older for their grade level than is common nowadays. Mama finished the eighth grade herself, which was pretty good for a black woman growing up in the southwestern corner of Arkansas in the first part of the century. And she had a tremendous determination that all her children were going to be educated. She didn’t ease off any on the seven that came after me. But as her first I experienced that determination at its fiercest…Mama held tight to the conviction that if we ever wanted to “be something” we had better get educated…As little as he said, even my father had a high regard for education. In his own way he was remarkable…He was a prime example of the dilemma our grandparents faced, and our parents. They were always saying, “Well, I couldn’t go to school. But you better go there and do the best you can.” Yet in order to survive, they had to keep you out of school working in the fields…In their hearts they were driven to see you educated. But reality often had its own ideas.”

#3 Becoming a Doctor
“Each Sunday the student body at Philander Smith had to attend church service. Then on Wednesdays we had mandatory “chapel” in Bud Long Hall, where Dr. Harris would speak to us. Once a month or so there’d be a chapel where the program was planned by one of the college organizations…after some talk we decided we wanted to invite Edith Irby to come and speak…Edith Irby was one of the first black medical students and also one of the first women medical students. At the university medical school she was scaling two barriers at once. Edith Irby cut a high profile in Arkansas’s black community…Once Edith Irby started to speak I couldn’t take my eyes off her. I was captivated. I thought I had never seen anyone as beautiful or heard anything as moving. I didn’t know about anybody else in that hall, but as for me, I knew what I was going to do… All I could think of was that I wanted to be exactly like her and do exactly what she
was doing…After hearing Edith Irby, I felt a sense of purpose that was completely new to me…Now I knew with 100 percent certainty that I was going to go to medical school and become a doctor.”

#4 Joining the Army
“One day I was walking along a street in downtown Milwaukee when I saw a sign advertising the Women’s Medical Specialist Corps. If you were a college graduate, it said, you could join up to be trained as a physical therapist, speech therapist, or occupational therapist. The Army would send you to school and make you a commissioned officer…For every year I spent in the service the government would give me a year’s worth of financial credits toward my education. I couldn’t believe what I had stumbled on…If I stayed in three years, that would be good for thirty-six months’ worth of medical school….Thirty-six months was about four years’ worth of school. If I did this, it looked like the Army would pay my whole tuition…I signed up then and there…I got on a train for Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. This was in May 1953…When I met my training class; I found it was seventeen young white women and me.”

#5 Meeting Oliver
“One of the services the medical school provided was giving physical examinations to high school sports teams whose athletes needed them before they were allowed to compete. Ordinarily fourth-year students were sent out to do these, and my turn had come up. I was going over to Horace Mann to look at the basketball team. I was supposed to find the coach first, someone named Oliver Elders…Now, it’s a fact that I was interested…I had noticed Oliver the first moment I walked into the gym. As tall and handsome as he was, it would be hard not to…on Valentine’s Day 1960, we were married by Reverend Morley of the Liberty Hills Baptist church…”

#6 Starting a Family
“I was in my second year of residency when I started having my own babies. Oliver and I had planned it carefully…In 1963 I was already twenty-nine, and in those days the word was that if you didn’t have babies before you were thirty-three or thirty-five, you shouldn’t be having them…When I found out I was pregnant, I arranged my schedule so I could work up until my delivery date…The day Eric was born I was rounding all day on the pediatric wards…At around five-thirty, when I was finished work I called Pat Reddin, who was the chief OB-GYN resident…I went in there at five-thirty, and at ten that night Eric was born.”

#7 Chief Resident
“When I finished my second year of residency, Dr. Panos asked me if I would consider being chief resident…Now this was a real honor. It was an unusual thing for a woman to be chief resident anywhere in those days, and for a black woman it was unheard of. But it wasn’t just an honor because I was a black female in Arkansas. It was an honor because it was an honor. If Dr. Panos hadn’t
asked me, I wouldn’t have thought about it one way or another. I wasn’t expecting it in the first place, so I wouldn’t have been hurt not getting it. But I wasn’t really that surprised either. I had worked hard, and in my heart I thought I was the best-qualified resident on the pediatric service…Of course I knew there might be a difficulty or two. As chief I would be head of nine other residents, all of them white southern males…It was only a few years back that Arkansas had become a national symbol of racism, with Orval Faubus facing off against President Eisenhower over the integration of Central High School…Race relations in the state weren’t nearly as bad as they were being made out, and people didn’t like their homeplace being thought of in those terms…That year without a doubt was the hardest year of my life. I worked 365 days. I made rounds every single day and was responsible for every pediatric admission…I’m writing this now in August 1995, thirty-two years after Ted Panos appointed me chief.”

#8 Race Relations
"At some point…a very peculiar thing happened to me. I lost the consciousness of being black…I can’t put my finger on exactly when that happened. I’m sure it was gradual. When I was growing up, the one thing you were conscious of even when you were asleep was what color you were. That was in the thirties and forties, when segregation was so much a way of life you never thought of anything different. Whites were up here and blacks were down here, and that was the way it was. You didn’t go to church or school or college with white folks; you didn’t compete against them in athletics. In large chunks of your life you didn’t interact with them at all. So it wasn’t that you went around feeling inferior all day long. It wasn’t near you all the time. But there was no doubt about it, you did feel inferior…Somewhere or other I lost that feeling of inferiority…later on there came some moment when I no longer thought of myself as Joycelyn Elders the black doctor, or Joycelyn Elders the woman doctor…I was just plain Dr. Elders…For me the important question isn’t when but how. What is it that enables you to get loose from that racial fixation, to get out from under the constant awareness of it? In my case I think it had to do with being a scientist, though I think maybe you could substitute almost any other profession for science. Somewhere in my development as a scientist and a doctor, my profession began to take hold of the way I thought about myself.”

#9 Director of the Health Department
“The health department was not exactly on the cutting edge of medicine. Being director there was not something someone gave up a professorship at the medical school for…My big problem wasn’t taking the job. I didn’t want the job. But on the other hand, this was the governor asking me to do it. If I were absolutely pushed to the wall on this, I might have to take it, if only as a favor to him; it certainly wouldn’t be any favor to me…What would really make sense here would be to find a way to turn him down without actually having to say no…Clinton himself called to make the offer officially. He truly hoped, he said, that I was giving serious consideration to what he was asking. I had thought u
what I considered a pretty elegant way to get out from under, even though I wasn’t comfortable about it since it wasn’t exactly straightforward. ‘The only way I’ll consider it,’ I said, ‘is if I get to keep my appointment at the university. I also need a ten percent raise in salary. Also, I have to know from you that I would have complete one hundred percent control over the department. If you can get all that, I might do it’… ‘Well,’ he said, ‘let me see what I can do on those’…Three weeks or so later the phone rang at about eleven o’clock at night. ‘Joycelyn?’ he said, ‘You know all those things you said to get? Well, I got them. So, will you take it?’…I said, ‘Oh, well…I guess I don’t want to lie…”

#10 Surgeon General

“…Clinton called me at work and asked if I could stop by the governor’s mansion that evening on my way home…when I got there, the place was in turmoil. People were just kind of rummaging around everywhere…finally Clinton came out and said I could come up to the library. When we got up there by ourselves, we talked a little about the election; he was still glowing from it. Then he said, ‘Joycelyn, I’d like for you to be the surgeon general. Would you consider that?’ I was a little taken aback…I gave serious consideration to not accepting. Other than the visibility, the job didn’t have that much going for it…In the end I made up my mind to do it. I liked Clinton a lot personally; besides, I felt a loyalty to him. If he was asking me to do this, it would have been real hard to turn him down. Plus, I knew he’d be moving in the right direction on health care, and of course a major health overhaul was going to be in the works, so there was a chance to be involved in that…When he and I finally sat down together in the mansion after everything had been settled, I said, ‘Governor, when you asked me to be your health director, you didn’t know anything about me. But if you do this, you will know exactly what you are getting.’ ‘Yeah,’ he said, ‘I know, Joycelyn. I think you’ll be terrific. All I want is for you to do for the country what you’ve done for Arkansas.”


Kaufman, Leslie. 2003. Welfare Wars: Are the Poor Suffering from Hunger Anymore?