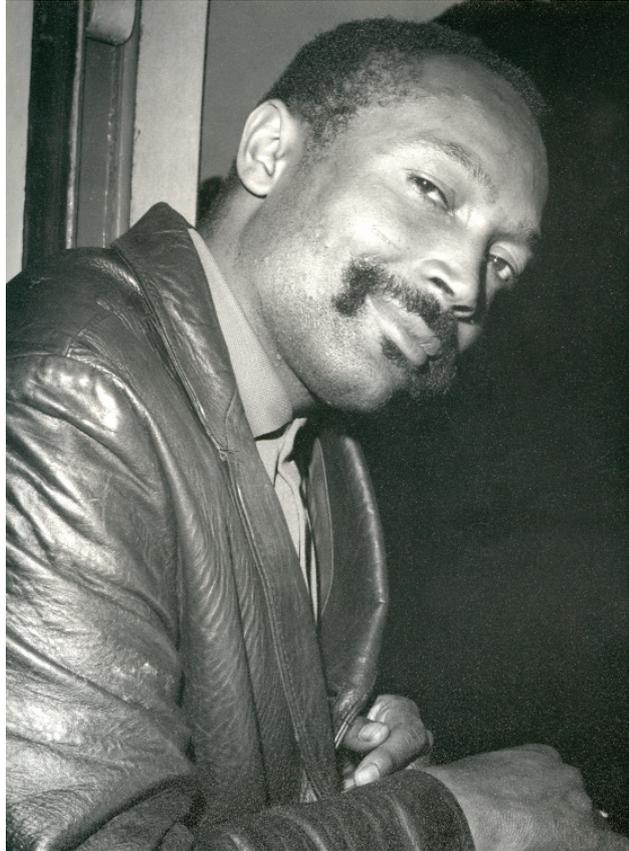


Alfred Fagon

■ Biography

Date of birth: 20th June 1937
Place of birth: Jamaica
Date of arrival in UK: 1955

Alfred Fagon, was born in Jamaica and was one of 10 children. His father worked on a sugar plantation in Cuba. He came to England in 1955, and he started to work on the railways in Nottingham. In 1958, he joined the army where he served for four years and also became a middleweight boxing champion. On leaving the army, Alfred travelled around England singing calypso and then settled in St. Paul's. Here he trained and worked as a welder then started acting and writing.



Alfred as a young man
Photo courtesy of Angela Rodaway.

Alfred made his first stage appearance as an actor at the Bristol Arts Centre (off Jamaica Street, St. Paul's) playing the Nigerian Officer Orara in Henry Living's play, *The Little Mrs Foster Show*. After that, he took worked as an extra in television before he researched, wrote and performed *John Bull*, a play for HTV in 1969. As he had lived in Bristol in the 1960s and 1970s, and did youth work in Kingswood, much of his early writing was based on his experiences and what he knew about people in St. Paul's.



Alfred visiting Jamaica

In 1970, Alfred made his first professional stage appearance in a play in London called *Black Pieces*. After that he appeared in many television, film, radio and theatre roles, including BBC television's five part drama series, *Fighting Back*. Alfred wrote many well known plays

and Milton was his favourite poet. At the time of his death he had just finished writing a series of poems called *Waterwell*.

Alfred collapsed of a heart attack while he was jogging on the streets of Lambeth on the 29th August 1986. The police did not find out the contacts for any of his family or friends, in spite of his diary, passport and a BBC script being in his room, so he was given a pauper's funeral. It was two weeks before they knew what had happened to him.

A Friends of Fagon Committee was then set up in Bristol, as people wanted to remember him. Alfred used to say "The heart of St. Paul's is at the corner of Ashley Road and Grosvenor Road". Therefore they put up a bronze statue on the first anniversary of his death on this spot. This is now well known by many people, and is the only Bristol statue of an African Caribbean man. They also started a competition for African-Caribbean playwrights in his memory.



Alfred's statue on Grosvenor Road, St. Paul's
Photo courtesy of Bristol Record Office

Paul Stephenson, who chaired the Committee, says that Alfred was very popular with the African-Caribbean community because of his warmth and sensitivity and he is remembered as a "larger than life" character. Paul also says that Alfred was someone who mixed with ordinary people even though he was quite famous. His writing showed he believed in the power of love. Although he was an army boxing champion, he hated violence.

Paul Stephenson's message is:

“ It is hoped that the statue will inspire young people of all backgrounds to read and learn about Alfred's work and add to the artistic and cultural richness of the St. Paul's community, and Bristol at large. ”

Alfred Fagon

■ Teachers' Background Notes

(Based on an interview with his sister in law, Judy Malone)

Alfred Fagon was born in Clarendon, Jamaica on 20th June 1937. His parents kept a shop or post office and they had a close family of eight sons and two daughters. They were religious and went to church three times on Sundays. His mother Clementina went to market and his father worked in Cuba on a sugar plantation. Alfred left school at 13 and some of his siblings eventually went to America and Canada but Alfred came to England and became a successful, published playwright. His brother Donald became a professor in America and the children brought wealth to the family who were able to buy an orange plantation in 1976.

Alfred arrived in England in 1955, where he worked on the railways in Nottingham. He joined the army in 1958, serving for four years, and becoming middleweight boxing champion in the Royal Corps of Signals. On leaving the army he travelled around England singing calypso, and then settled in St. Paul's. There he trained and worked as a welder but he also started acting before he eventually began to write.

Alfred made his first stage appearance at the Bristol Arts Centre (off Jamaica Street, St. Paul's) as the Nigerian Officer Orara in Henry Living's *The Little Mrs Foster Show*. He then made his first professional stage appearance in Mustapha Matura's *Black Pieces* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. Subsequently he took extra work in television prior to researching, writing and performing in *John Bull* for HTV in 1969. He later appeared in many television, film, radio and theatre roles, including BBC television's five part drama series, *Fighting Back*.

Alfred lived in Bristol in the 1960s and 1970s and did youth work in Kingswood in the early 1970s which he really enjoyed. He lived thriftily because he was not materialistic. He is described as passionate and although some people found him a little intimidating, he was also entertaining and engaging. He is said to have particularly influenced people who were working in certain areas such as race and literature.

Much of his early writing was based on his own experiences and people in St. Paul's. His first produced play was *11 Josephine House*, in which he appeared as himself. This was staged at the Almost Free Theatre in 1972. It is set in the front room of a Bristol household, which "acts like a cocoon for the characters to dream about and squabble over their real spiritual and geographical 'home' in Jamaica". This play addresses the problems of Caribbean people bringing their culture to England.

In Shakespeare Country, directed by Philip Saville for BBC 2 in 1973, Alfred writes about the struggle to define Black identity in a country dominated by Shakespeare. *No Soldiers in St. Paul's* which Alfred directed himself is about a younger generation in their twenties living in St Paul's. *Death of a Black Man* produced at Hampstead Theatre in 1975 is set in Chelsea and is loosely based on the life of a wonderful Jamaican saxophonist Joe Harriot. It strangely echoes Alfred's own death.

His fifty minute play *Four Hundred Pounds* is set in Finsbury Park London in the late seventies. It toured the UK and played at the Royal Court in 1983 and is about the way the pressure of earning a living in London affects two Jamaican friends and partners.

Alfred's last play was *Lonely Cowboy*, which is set in Brixton, London. In this play all his characters were young, second generation Black people who see Brixton as home. At the time of his death he had also completed a series of poems called *Waterwell*.

Alfred was a larger than life character. He is affectionately remembered by the African-Caribbean community in St. Paul's for his immense warmth, sensitivity and perception. He had the gift of observation and making sense of people. He was passionate, vulnerable and sometimes lonely. When he wanted to work he just sat down and wrote a play and then might do nothing for a while after that.

Alfred collapsed and died at the entrance to his flat. Despite the police searching his flat and interviewing neighbours, they said they were unable to find evidence of next of kin. They failed to notice on his desk, his union card, passport, letters, a diary with phone numbers and even his BBC script next to his bed! He was given a pauper's funeral, his ashes spread over a hedge marked T91 and it was two weeks before his family and friends found out what had happened to him.

Alfred used to say '*The heart of St. Paul's is at the corner of Ashley Road and Grosvenor Road*', so his friends erected a statue, the only one of an African-Caribbean in Bristol to commemorate his life. An annual competition for the best new stage play by writers of Caribbean descent has also been set up in his memory.

Paul Stephenson says that Alfred was very popular with the African-Caribbean community and he is remembered as a "larger than life" character. His writing showed he believed in the power of love, and although he was an army boxing champion, he hated violence.

Paul's Stephenson's message is:

"It is hoped that the statue will inspire young people of all backgrounds to read and learn about Alfred's work and add to the artistic and cultural richness of the St. Paul's community, and Bristol at large."

Alfred Fagon

■ Suggested Activities

These are suggested activities based on Alfred Fagon's biography. The activities in bold print have a detailed lesson plan on following pages.

Foundation Stage/ KS1 Activities	KS2 Activities	KS3 Activities
<p>Calypso music* Listen to some calypso music and learn a song. Perform to another class or parents/carers.</p>	<p>Play writing – Literacy link Use this biography when covering play scripts in literacy lessons. What other playwrights do we know?</p>	<p>Bronze statue Explore the process of making a bronze statue. Visit the statue. Debate whether this is the best place for it. Investigate other bronze statues in Bristol. (Art, English)</p>
<p>Statue of Alfred Fagon Visit the statue. Look, feel and talk. Take photos to create a display about Alfred Fagon in school. Pupils to use clay to make own model of each other.</p>	<p>'Larger than life' What does this mean? Make a collection of idioms. Include idioms from other countries and in other languages which can also be translated into English. Select an idiom, illustrate it and write an example of how to use it.</p>	<p>Community of enquiry activity – debate Read biography with pupils. Encourage pupils to ask questions. Sort into factual and philosophical. Select one to debate. (Speaking and Listening, English).</p>
<p>Schools Schools in Jamaica now. Hear from a child or parent/carer about Jamaican schools or visit http://www.hitchams.suffolk.sch.uk/jamaica/index.htm to find out more about Jamaican schools</p>	<p>Mystery Who is this man? Provide pupils with picture and clues to build up profile of Alfred Fagon.</p>	<p>Music Explore the origins of calypso music. Listen and learn one song to perform e.g. Lord Kitchener in the EMAS Patois pack.* (Music)</p>

*See the resource list for details

Alfred Fagon

■ Lesson Plan: Statues and sculpture

(PSED, K&U, CLL, PD, CD)

FS

2:5

Alfred Fagon Lesson Plan

Learning objectives

- To see, feel a statue and use descriptive language to describe the experience.
- Have opportunities to create their own statues or sculptures.
- Have an opportunity to be a writer.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people have made a contribution to the literary world.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Statue	Biography and picture of Alfred Fagon	Whole class
Sculpture	Pictures of other statues and sculptures	Small groups
Writer	Clay/dough	
Materials e.g. metal, wood, plastic	Junk modelling materials Paper, blank books, pens etc.	

Suggested activities

- Share Alfred Fagon's biography and pictures.
- Visit the statue of Alfred Fagon in St. Paul's.
- Encourage pupils to describe what they see and feel.
- Take photos and use to create a display in setting.
- Talk about him and his contribution as a writer – plays, poetry etc.
- Visit or look at other pictures of statues and sculptures.
- Physical activity in hall or open space – be a statue, strike a pose.

Opportunities for child initiated experiences

- Modelling with clay or dough - statues/busts of each other.
- Junk modelling.
- Set up a writing area with a variety of blank books and papers, pencils, pens.

Recall – the visit to Alfred Fagon's statue and share pupils' creations – books, model and statues. Discuss their learning.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils have used experience of visit to stimulate description.
- Pupils have an understanding of the value of writers in society.
- Pupils know about Alfred Fagon's life.

Parent/Carer involvement

Encourage pupils to show display to parents/carers and ask them to look out for other statues and sculptures.

*See the resource list for details

Black Bristolians

2 : 5 : 7 5

Alfred Fagon

■ Lesson Plan: Who is this man?

(History, Thinking skills, Literacy)

Learning objectives

- To develop investigative and collaborative skills to solve a mystery.
- To use evidence and make links between clues.
- To learn that Black and minority ethnic people have contributed to the field of literature and been recognised.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Question words – who, why etc Collaborative	Biography/picture of Alfred Fagon Clues (see activity)	Whole class Groups

Suggested activities (do not read biography at start of lesson)

- Provide pupils with clues about Alfred Fagon. Clues could include a picture of him and his statue, map of Jamaica, pen and paper, boxing gloves, copy of a calypso song, the title of one of his plays, picture of St. Paul's in the 1960s.
- Groups of pupils to investigate the mystery 'Who is this man?' Teacher to support groups by reminding them of question words - why, where, when, etc, and prompting them to make links between items.
- Share pupils' findings, focusing on how they used the evidence and their justification. Provide talking frames such as:
'We think he is... because...'
'We don't agree with that group because...'
- As a class come to some agreement about some answers to the question.
- Share Alfred Fagon's biography with pupils.

Plenary

- Discuss investigative skills, thinking skills and listening skills.
- Discuss issues arising from the biography.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils know about Alfred Fagon's life and his contribution to Bristol.
- Pupils know that Black and minority ethnic people have contributed to the field of literature.
- Pupils can use collaborative and investigative skills effectively.

Assessment opportunities

Listening and language of reasoning.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Research other Black writers or statues in Bristol.

*See the resource list for details

Alfred Fagon

■ Lesson Plan: Create a debate

(History, Speaking and Listening, Philosophy, Thinking skills)

KSS3

2:5

Alfred Fagon Lesson Plan

Learning objectives

- To develop historical understanding of the 1960s in Bristol.
- To develop speaking and listening skills including discursive language.
- To encourage independent thinking and open-mindedness.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people contribute to life in Bristol.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Philosophy Ground rules Debate	Biography/pictures of Alfred Fagon	Whole class

Suggested activities

- Read Alfred Fagon's biography with the pupils.
- Each pupil or pair of pupils should note down one question arising from the biography.
- Share questions and sort out which are factual and which were philosophical questions.
- Pupils to vote on which philosophical question to debate as a whole class. Agree ground rules for the debate. The success criteria for the debate could be listening to others and allowing all to be involved.
- Discuss the question chosen by the pupils asking for comments from as many different pupils as possible. Provide talking frames such as:
'I think... because...' and
'I don't agree with that group because...'

Plenary/Success criteria

- Revisit the success criteria and discuss this. How successful were we? How could we improve it next time?
- Display Alfred Fagon's biography and picture with some of the questions asked.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils have used skills necessary for debate.
- Pupils know about Alfred Fagon's life and his contribution to Bristol.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Pupils to research some of the factual questions asked in the session.

Alfred Fagon

■ Resources

- Calypso – Lord Kitchener – EMAS Patois Pack (Contact EMAS 0117 903 1365).
- <http://www.hitchams.suffolk.sch.uk/jamaica/index.htm>
- www.talawatheatrecompany.co.uk/afa/who.htm