



# Paul Robeson

**Actor and Singer**

**Born:** 9 April 1898

**Died:** 23 January 1976

## ARTY FACT!

Paul Robeson paid his way through law school by playing professional American Football.

### Paul Robeson's life

Paul Robeson was born in America, one of seven children. His father had been born a slave. This meant that he belonged to the man he worked for. Slaves are not paid for the work they do, they are given food to eat and a place to live but they are not free to come and go as they please and they are often treated badly.

Slavery was made illegal in America in 1865.

Paul Robeson was very clever and did brilliantly at school. He won a scholarship to one of the best American Colleges and studied to be a lawyer. He was the top of his class but he found it difficult to get a job. Many people did not think a black person could be a good lawyer. He decided to become an actor.

### What makes Paul Robeson special?

Paul Robeson became successful very quickly, often playing lead roles in the theatre. Soon he was offered parts in films.

He had a wonderfully rich, deep singing voice, so he was asked to sing as well. His performances on radio and in musicals were very popular and he sold lots of records.

Paul Robeson was awarded a Lifetime Grammy Award and has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

It is unusual for anyone to be good at so many different things. The fact that Paul Robeson was able to achieve so much at a time when it was very difficult for black people to succeed, makes him even more special.

Throughout his life Paul Robeson spoke out against racism and campaigned for equal rights for black people.

### WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

Find the sculpture of Paul Robeson in York Art Gallery.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Make a drawing of the sculpture.

Listen to Paul Robeson – you can find his recordings on the internet.

See if you can find out more about the history of the Civil Rights Movement.