

Lesson Plans: 11 Eng LPQ3 037 Literature of the Harlem Renaissance

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Grade Level : Grade 11

Subject : Language Arts - High, Reading - High, Social Studies - High

Essential Question- Scope & Sequence: **What impact did the writers of the Harlem Renaissance have on modern American literature?**

Technology Connections and Teacher Materials: [Great Days in Harlem](#) The birth of the Harlem Renaissance
["America"](#) by Claude McKay

Technology Connections and Student Materials: **Websites related to the Harlem Renaissance** A Guide to Harlem Renaissance Materials
<https://guides.loc.gov/harlem-renaissance>
PBS Biographies: Duke Ellington www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_ellington_duke.htm

Vocabulary: Literature Back to Africa movement Scholarship Racial consciousness oppression renaissance culture African diaspora stereotype equality patronage identity

Steps to Deliver Initial Instruction: The following **HISTORICAL SURVEY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE** can be used as background information for the teacher and/or as resource material for students

- The Harlem Renaissance reflected changes which took place in the African American community after the Civil War. It centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. There was a great migration of African Americans from the South to the North to escape Jim Crow laws, lynching, and lack of civil and political rights. The new African American societies in the urban north began to strive for civil rights, political equality, and economic and cultural self determination. A contributing factor to the Harlem Renaissance was a new consciousness by African-American artists and intellectuals to cease imitating European and white American literary styles and project black dignity and creativity. Great social and cultural changes were taking place in America at the end of the First World War. This was also the period of the Great Depression and economic decline in America.
- The 1920's saw an explosion of African American writers who asserted the values of black dignity. Harlem became the focal point of this new movement approximately fifty years after slavery was abolished in America .A small group of thinkers and writers who surmounted difficulties and acquired an education was the driving force behind this new movement. The African American writers felt confident enough to reject assimilation into main steam American culture and assert the values of American culture. The Harlem Renaissance influenced literature, drama, music, visual art, and dance. Harlem became a center for African American culture where writers met and interacted with one another. The movement influenced not only African American culture, but the African Diaspora as a whole. Afro-Caribbean artists and intellectuals were also part of the movement. Among the writers were Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer and Nella Larson. The writers of the Harlem Renaissance influenced the writers that followed in the 1930's and 1940's such as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright.
- **CLAUDE MCKAY (1891-1949)** Claude McKay, of Jamaican parentage, was one of the most outspoken and radical writers of the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry is mature and subtle. Many of his ideas were espoused by the black power movement of the 1960's. McKay's novels affirm the primacy of African culture over Western civilization. Among his poems are "The Flame Heart" a poem about his childhood in Jamaica. "Summer Morn" reflects on night and dawn far away from love. "To the

White Friends” affirms that the Negro is better than the whites because he shows the light of humanity rather than cruelty. McKay’s novels are similar to those of Langston Hughes. His novels, however, are more radical than Hughes.

- **COUNTEE CULLEN (1903 –1946)** Countee Cullen was one of the most significant writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Mr. Cullen wrote with style, humor, and excellent description. In his poem, “Yet Do I Marvel” he asks how god could make a poet black and expect him to sing. “The Shroud of Color” explores the meaning of color, while “Heritage” explores the relationship of the Negro to his African heritage. Apart from his poems, Mr. Cullen wrote one novel *One Way to Heaven*. He wrote with pathos and understatement instead of violence and passion.
 - **ZORA NEALE HURSTON (1891-1960)** Zora Neale Hurston is considered to be a significant contributor to the Harlem Renaissance. She was born in Alabama in 1891, but grew up in Eatonville, Florida. A woman of varied talent, she was an anthropologist, playwright, folklorist, journalist, activist and early feminist. The quality of her work as a scholar and writer earned her great respect among her contemporaries. Zora wrote five novels, two collections of folklore, an autobiography, plays, and many essays, stories and articles. Eminent Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison places Zora among the greatest writers of the twentieth century. Her work is taught in schools and universities. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is one of the more significant novels of the period. It has a “sensitivity in language” and excellent character development. It deals with the determination of a person willing to escape the “imprisonment of conventions”. Other novels by Zora include *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Seraph On The Suwanee* (1948)
 - **LANGSTON HUGHES (1902 –1967)** Langston Hughes is one of the most important literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance. He was a poet, novelist, playwright, short story writer and columnist. In his first book of poetry, Hughes published “The Weary Blues” (1926) and “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”. Hughes life and work were very influential during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920’s together with those of his contemporaries, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay and Countee Cullen among others. Hughes’ aim was to explore the black human condition in American society and uplift African Americans through his writings. His poetry depicts the working class lives of blacks in America generating pride in African American identity and culture. *The Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1959) provide excellent material for English teachers.
 - **JAMES WELDON JOHNSON (1871-1938)** James Weldon Johnson, a multi talented individual, was born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1871. Johnson achieved distinction as a poet, author, editor, professor, lawyer and secretary of the NAACP. Johnson published in 1922, *The Book of Negro American Poetry*. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, he produced *God’s Trombones*, seven poetic sermons in free verse. Other of Johnson’s poems can be found in *Caroling Dusk*, a collection edited by Countee Cullen. Johnson’s novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, is of high literary quality and is considered to be one of the best early novels by an African American writer. Johnson’s anthologies provided inspiration and encouragement to the new generation of artists of the Harlem Renaissance. He composed the lyrics of “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing.” This song would later be adopted by the NAACP as the Negro National Anthem.
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- **Day One:** Begin by reading Langston Hughes’ poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”. Ask students to share their responses. You might also visit PBS Biographies; Duke Ellington and listen to “Mood Indigo” and the “Mooche”.
 - Review the history of African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th Century. Select information to share using the timeline. The teacher may consider reserving time in the computer lab for research purposes. Make copies of the Harlem Renaissance websites available for each student.
 - **Day Two:** Use KWL chart and complete columns K and W and distribute biographical analysis organizer (attached below). Students will work individually or in groups to read information and complete biographical analyses focusing on family history, education, accomplishments and influence and to what extent their personal

histories influenced their work. Finally complete KWL chart.

Guided Practice with Feedback:

- **Day Three** Distribute copies of the following poems to students. One per person. Low level readers could be connected to one of the Langston Hughes poems that provides audio reading of poem.
 - ["America"](#) by Claude McKay
 - "Tableau" by Countee Cullen.
- Each student should provide a written one paragraph summary of the authors meaning and the student's response to the poem.
- Students could also write an additional paragraph noting the background information needed to understand the meaning. This should also include the lines or references that the student did not understand.

Independent Practice:

- **Day Four:** Read and analyze extract from *Dust Tracks On a Road* by Zora Neale Hurston. Found in *Elements of Literature*, fifth Course, Collection 15.
 - Complete a graphic organizer on literary analysis after reading.

Differentiated Instruction / Small Groups:

- **Day Five:** Divide class into groups and ask students to conduct research on selected literary figures.
- **Day Six:** presentation of projects

ESE/ESOL Accommodations & ESE/ESOL Strategies:

1. Additional assistance and extension of time to complete projects. 2. Pairing ESOL or ESE students with other students 3. groups based on content interest, not ability.

Lesson Closure / Review:

Have students respond critically to the ideas of McKay, Hughes and Cullen by writing essays. Organize a panel discussion or debate on specific issues relating to the Harlem Renaissance. Completed KWL chart, biographical analysis, literary analysis, essays, project presentations.

Assessment with Clear & Compelling:

K-W-L chart should show clear and logical progression of knowledge to be attained. The "learned" column should reflect goals of the lesson. Literary project to be assessed according to attached rubric.

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