

## **The Harlem Renaissance**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

I teach art at Houston's Jack Yates High School, a seventy-nine year old institution with a rich history, now striving to regain its niche in the delivery of quality education. Art history and studio comprise my undergraduate training. My interest in both facets continues, and in my instruction I endeavor to bring to each student a rich and heady meld of both the 'why' and the 'how' of art.

My siblings and I are alumnae of Jack Yates High School. I live in the neighborhood. We have enjoyed traveling far and living in other varied places, and we have each returned to the Houston area; I always knew that I would return. I have a vested interest in the community and its quality of life.

Concurrent with the unit's curriculum content, my charge is to build students' self-esteem and strengthen their awareness and sense of ownership of their cultural and creative legacies. Many of the students that I encounter have few expectations of success. My goal is that this unit will awaken students' curiosity and embolden them to deeper involvement in the learning process as a whole, in the relevance of the arts in their lives, and in the importance of creative expression.

### **ACADEMIC SETTING**

The student population at Jack Yates High School is 91% African American, including those born in the United States and migrants from Central America and the Caribbean Islands. Approximately 8% of students are Hispanic, and less than 1% are Asian, Caucasian or other. Each of my classes includes ninth through twelfth grade students who range from typically developing to a variety of behavioral, sensory and physical disabilities, from mild to severe.

As I look across the crowded hall just before the tardy bell rings, I exchange pleasantries with most of the students milling about. Whether or not they have been assigned to my classes, I know most of their names and most are pleased to be recognized.

Teaching at Jack Yates High School has been a dream fulfilled. I am fortunate to have eager, inquisitive, engaged extra-credit seekers who enliven every school day, and produce their best work every assignment. I appreciate their diligence and enthusiasm and I do not hesitate to tell them so. However, they are not the students who command the spotlight, who demand most of my attention. They are shortchanged by their colleagues who engage in nonproductive and wasteful activities that stifle the learning process. An inordinate amount of instructional time is expended diffusing potential disruptions and eradicating negative, attention-seeking behavior perpetrated by individuals who do not envision themselves in a role in the world beyond their community. They allude to the pimp as hero. They glory in the "gangsta" as role model and such images are recurring themes in their assignments.

Accompanying myriad pleasant memories of my growing up in this neighborhood is the disquietude of knowing that many of my students cannot fathom my generation's pleasure to have grown up in this community known as "The Third Ward." Today, Third Ward is regarded by

many as a ghetto with all attendant stigmas and dysfunctions. To some it has become the locus of continuing turf rivalries. Third Ward is some of the above, but it is much more, and it is still shedding old realities and rebuilding. It is a work in progress.

From the windows of the classroom, my students and I can see the towers and spires of Houston's downtown—so near and yet, to many, as far away as the galaxies of another universe. We are sandwiched between two institutions of higher learning, Texas Southern University and the University of Houston, venues far removed from the consciousness and aspirations of many in such close proximity.

In our school, hand signals and “colors” are flashed, and chest-thumpers’ epithets echo down the halls. I believe this shrill and overwrought behavior cloaks feelings of despair that sometimes filter through the cacophony. Not only is there a lack of self-worth, students have a skewed concept of value. The thudding mantra that they chant: I can't hear you. I'm plugged in to my CD player. Yo, check this out! Let me play you a tune and take a picture. Wanna play a game? Shoes? I got the latest shoes. Let me hook you up. Pencil? I ain't got no pencil. You got a pencil?

From last year, an unforgettable classroom scene of unbridled anger: “I ain't got no paper. It's your fault I ain't got no paper. My mama cain't change it! You cain't change it! That's just the way it is! That's the way I am in all my classes—bad attitude—that's just the way I am! You cain't turn it around! The Mayor cain't turn it around! That's just the way I am. I ain't gon' change!” Of course, he changed. He recently stopped by to assure me of his appreciation for time spent in my class. He has made a positive change, and others have learned by his example. It is my hope that all students will choose positive change and actively participate in the re-birth of our institution.

## **UNIT OBJECTIVES**

In choosing the Harlem Renaissance as a unit theme, I want to link learning to a historical setting with which students can readily identify. We will consider the cultural tone of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, World War I, and its aftermath that precipitated the Harlem Renaissance. We will study creative currents following the Harlem Renaissance. In addition, my objective is to underscore the continuum of history, to facilitate students' respect for the contributions, connections, and crosscurrents of cultures, and to help them understand and appreciate their own cultural heritage, whatever it may be.

It is my hope that this unit will awaken students' curiosity and embolden them to deeper involvement in the learning process as a whole, in the relevance of the arts in their lives, and in the importance of creative expression, to facilitate confidence building and to have them awaken to their own 'renaissance.'

## **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills Objectives**

Lessons will be organized to include the four basic strands of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Fine Arts, High School: perception, expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation. This unit will emphasize TEKS precepts of cultural and historical analysis with the goal of stimulating learners' creative thinking skills and expression, to instill in them the value of reflection and to enhance their problem-solving abilities.

The portfolio, a student's body of work, is the ongoing focus of this unit. It is a record of progress, a repository of one's personal best and evidence of the student's developing proficiency in analysis, evaluation, problem solving and application in work that expresses a unique and personal viewpoint and creative expression in a variety of media.

Central to each activity is the language of art through which we articulate meaning, analyze and evaluate our work and the work of others: elements of design which define the sensory characteristics of art, and principles of design which determine the “look” of a work. We will identify visual artists, their media and techniques. We will compare and contrast artists’ use of (1) Elements of design – defining the main sensory qualities of art: color, value, line, shape, form, texture and space, and (2) Principles of design – qualities that govern the viewer’s response to a work: balance, proportion, emphasis, rhythm, pattern, unity and variety.

## Vocabulary

As the unit begins and students assess their prior knowledge of the Harlem Renaissance, we will compare and contrast the spirit and creativity of art and society during the **Renaissance** of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

I use a **diaspora** to describe the huge outpouring of the masses to New York. We will discuss **World War I** and the **Great Depression** in the context of the **Harlem Renaissance**. In the lessons, we will identify visual artists, their media and techniques.

**Renaissance** – a rebirth or reawakening: The period of European history during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when new ideas and technological advances, well as renewed interest in the classical style of the Romans and Greeks laid the foundation for modern art and society (Turner 360) describing Europe’s emergence from the Middle Ages to new heights in the arts and letters. Urban centers came into prominence as reduced numbers of rural workers weakened the power of landowners and laborers found jobs in industry (Holmes 7-11).

**Harlem Renaissance** – a literary and art movement in the uptown Manhattan neighborhood of Harlem in the mid to late 1920’s. The Harlem Renaissance has also been called the “New Negro Movement” after the title of philosopher/art historian Alain Locke’s book, *The New Negro*, which urged black artists to reclaim their ancestral heritage as a means of strengthening their own expression (*Britannica Online*).

## UNIT BACKGROUND

### World War I

Negroes were subject to army quotas. No black men could serve in the Marines, Coast Guard, or Air Force. Those wishing to serve in the Navy had one choice: messman (Hughes and Meltzer, et al. 263). Still, there were thousands who answered the draft to “Make the World Safe for Democracy” (262), even as reports of race riots and lynchings competed with news stories of the war abroad.

In France, Black soldiers did not encounter the racist attitudes of home, but were subject to the old attitudes of white combatants. During peace negotiations at Versailles, W. E. B. DuBois organized the first Pan African Congress in Paris in order to provide a wider forum on the case for racial equality. “Although the results of the meeting were small, it called attention of the world to the fact that darker people in various parts of the world had a material interest in the deliberations in Paris and that they were seeking for themselves the democratic treatment for which they had fought” (Franklin 338). Prevailing attitudes gave black soldiers few expectations of improved treatment upon their return to the United States.

### Post World War I

Following the war, migration continued from the rural South to northern U. S. cities, with New York’s Harlem a principal destination for persons of color. The population of Harlem morphed from predominantly white into predominantly black.

Because the war cut off the supply of cheap immigrant labor, minorities at home could gain employment in the cities. At war's end, returning soldiers sought opportunities in the cities, joining rural workers and others. "Injustice in the Southern courts, the lack of privileges, disfranchisement, segregation, and lynching served as important stimuli for blacks to move out of the South" (Franklin 339).

### **Harlem's Zenith**

The Negro population of post-war Harlem exceeded that of any Southern city (Hughes and Meltzer, et al. 272). It was a time of great expectations, a decade of unprecedented creativity in the arts, proclaimed by Alain Locke and supported by the intelligentsia of Harlem. Attracted to what they perceived as the exotic, exciting and primitive atmosphere of Harlem and the allure of jazz, white trendsetters made Harlem their destination for good times.

Editor William McConnell cites two contributing factors to the Harlem Renaissance 1) "The first of these factors was the interest the white nouveau riche had in the Harlem community" (10). Racial barriers heightened the curiosity of many who came for jazz, cabaret and theatre. 2) "The second factor that converged during the Harlem Renaissance and worked to draw serious attention from both black and white audiences was the fostering of a new black consciousness" (13). Increasing numbers of Harlem-based writers chose the black experience as their theme and received the commercial support of mainstream publishers. These works attracted both black and white audiences.

According to John Hope Franklin, "New York was already the center of American literary and artistic activity. Talented authors, playwrights, painters and sculptors came to the big city to sell their wares and to increase their output" (364). Poet, historian, activist James Weldon Johnson moved from Florida to New York to chronicle the Harlem Renaissance.

W. E. B. DuBois, author and founding officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, moved to New York from Atlanta. Jamaican poet Claude McKay arrived in New York in 1912 and gained stature as the first significant writer of the Harlem Renaissance (Franklin 365). After travels from his Missouri home to Mexico, Africa and Europe, writer Langston Hughes moved to New York and became the most prolific of the Harlem Renaissance writers (Franklin 366). In 1925, Alain Locke, an influential writer, lecturer and professor of philosophy at Howard University in Washington, D. C., interpreted Harlem's literary awakening and published an anthology entitled *The New Negro*, precipitating the interest of New York's literati and garnering nationwide attention (Franklin 374).

In his role as liaison and cheerleader, Alain Locke called for "A New Negro for a New Century" (Gates 163), and "urged young black visual artists to imitate the European modernists who were so heavily influenced by sub-Saharan African art" (165). Cultural crosscurrents were evident in the revolutionary works of artists in Paris. Pablo Picasso, the most prominent and influential of the modernists, had begun to incorporate the simplified forms of African tribal masks into a style that was to become known as "Cubism."

While many artists of the diaspora echoed rural themes in their works, or adapted their styles to tap the primitive style evocative of African roots, others traveled to European capitals, studied, becoming residents and following classical forms in creating their works. Preeminent among visual artists of the era was Henry Ossawa Tanner, medallist at the Paris and St. Louis expositions (Franklin 370). Tanner painted in the classical European style.

Aaron Douglas trained and painted in the classical style until he was persuaded to paint African and black themes. His work illustrated many books and periodicals, including Alain Locke's *New Negro*. His painting series entitled *Aspects of Negro Life* chronicles African and

African-American from slavery through reconstruction (Powell, *Rhapsodies in Black* 24). He, too, returned to his more classical style after the Harlem decade.

Unlike the classical reality preferred by Tanner and Douglas, William H. Johnson reconfigured his work to express “the vitality of African-American life in Harlem” (*Scholastic Art* 4). He, too was classically trained, but changed his technique to flattened, stylized, linear works in bold colors. In his own words, “Even if I have studied for many years all over the world, I still have been able to preserve the primitive in me” (4).

In music, although the jazz idiom was most reflective of the spirit of the times, composers and musicians also produced successful works based on classical and religious themes. “The father of the blues, W. C. Handy, moved from Memphis to New York, where his influence and popularity increased enormously” (Franklin 370). Fletcher Henderson and Louis Armstrong brought jazz to New York’s Broadway and Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington’s big band radio broadcasts from Harlem’s famous Cotton Club propelled him to fame. George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” interpreted Negro blues and “Porgy and Bess”, Gershwin’s folk opera co-written with DuBois and Dorothy Heyward and Ira Gershwin, proclaimed New York as “Mecca” for rural, impoverished Negroes. In other music, from symphonies to spirituals, contemporary composers chose the black experience as theme.

### **Changes in Harlem**

While the decade of the twenties was the zenith of the Harlem Renaissance, the center could not hold. According to John Hope Franklin, “It was no more possible for the Harlem Renaissance to remain confined to upper Manhattan that it was for other elements in American social and cultural life to remain isolated in one area of the United States” (374). W. E. B. DuBois and others lectured on literary and cultural themes and the Black experience on travels throughout the country.

By the decade of the thirties, the close-knit group was no longer centered in New York. Claude McKay was spending much of his time in France. Langston Hughes was once again the world traveler, and James Weldon Johnson became a professor in creative literature at Nashville’s Fisk University (Franklin 374). “Gradually the scope of the Harlem Renaissance came to be the whole of the United States” (373).

Another opinion: “The real reason why the Harlem Renaissance ended was that the United States was a segregated society and the majority white population never accepted blacks as equals” (Haskins 173). A movement already in decline was further dissipated by the plunging economy. Former Harlem hot spots closed or became short-lived reincarnations in downtown Manhattan. Harlem was no longer the place to be.

There are many who link the end of the Harlem Renaissance to the onset of the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression. There are others who contend that the Harlem Renaissance did not end: that the Depression and World War II were but interruptions and may have “served as stimuli for the greater articulation of the Negro the Negro American” (382). “The first fifty years of the Harlem Renaissance may be regarded by future historians as merely the beginning of a long period of self-expression and self-revelation of the Negro in American life” (382).

### **Implementation Strategies**

This unit will be taught in several increments over six weeks. Each lesson will include a segment for research on one or more artists including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Romare Bearden, William H. Johnson, Palmer Hayden, Jacob Lawrence and John Biggers; poet, essayist

and playwright Langston Hughes; writer James Baldwin, and, and musicians-composers Edward Kennedy Ellington and George and Ira Gershwin.

Lessons include creative writing segments in which students will compose and visually interpret poetic works. These activities will be accompanied by music contemporary to the Harlem Renaissance, with emphasis on the classical jazz idiom. This unit focuses on HISD's CLEAR goals for creation and performance, perception and analysis, use of vocabulary, and use of elements to produce original artworks.

In following TEKS objectives of perception, expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation, there will be opportunities to include collaborative efforts with our school's drama, music, and dance classes, segments from each of the represented arts. Each lesson includes written and visual components. There are individual assignments, and some lessons will include cooperative group assignments, and use of graphic organizers and exercises to determine students' prior knowledge, activities to develop problem-solving skills, and analysis.

This unit provides for modifications and accommodations for students with special needs. Specific modifications will be provided as warranted by the teacher's observation and ongoing assessment.

There are reading and writing components in each lesson and we will approach each lesson from historic and cultural perspectives to bolster learners' creative and critical thinking skills. We will correlate lesson sequences with Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-content classes. In addition, I will re-teach to focus on enhancing learners' skills in sequencing, categorizing, and determining cause and effect, finding main ideas, summarization, and problem solving.

While this unit emphasizes visual art, these are lessons that provide multi-sensory experiences and opportunities for higher-level thinking.

### **Setting the Scene**

Harlem is located on northern Manhattan Island, New York City. Harlem is north of Central Park. Its northern boundary is 155<sup>th</sup> Street. Ninety-sixth Street east of Central Park and 110<sup>th</sup> Street and Cathedral Parkway comprise Harlem's southern boundary. The East and Harlem Rivers comprise Harlem's east boundary, and Amsterdam Avenue is its western boundary.

Harlem is named for the City of Haarlem, The Netherlands, and was founded in 1658 by the last Dutch governor of New Netherland, Peter Stuyvesant, who named it Nieuw Haarlem (*Britannica Online*). From battle site in the American Revolutionary War, to farming area, to fashionable residential district for whites, to the site of a large and growing black population. "In 1925, it numbered about 175,000; by 1930, with steady migration from the southern States and immigration from the Caribbean and other parts of the black diaspora, it had expanded to over 200,000, making it the largest African American urban community of its kind (Powell, *Black Art and Culture* 51).

In reality, Harlem in the time of renaissance was also the scene of dissolution and decline, not all high times and celebration. Writers who chronicled Harlem's cultural and creative ascendancy sometimes overlooked the reality of daily life:

The death-rate in Harlem was 42 percent higher than in other parts of the city. The infant mortality rate in 1928 was twice as high in Harlem as it was in the rest of New York. The tuberculosis death-rate was four times as high as that among the white population. (Gates 166)

Henry Louis Gates calls it “the myth of Harlem” (167).

Harlem was also the home of Marcus Garvey and his “Back-to-Africa movement, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. He believed racism was so ingrained; the only hope for Negro Americans was to build a new nation. “The basis for Garvey’s wide popularity was his appeal to race pride at a time when Negroes generally had so little of which to be proud” (Franklin 354). The intellectuals’ ideal of the “New Negro” did not fully engage the masses (Bascom 1-11).

While we do not compromise our awareness of the socio-economic dynamics, causes, and effects attendant to the Harlem Renaissance, in this unit, we will focus on the flowering of the arts. This unit brings an opportunity for exploring creative links between races and cultures and understanding and acting upon our potential for creative expression.

## CONCLUSION

The Harlem Renaissance is significant as the movement through which black culture gained recognition in the creative arts. Alain Locke, whose anthology, *The New Negro* gave impetus to the movement, regarded the Negro as a “collaborator and participant in American civilization” (Hughes and Meltzer, et al. 272). “Like their white contemporaries, black writers were merely becoming more aware of America’s pressing social problems; and like the others, they were willing to use their art, not only to contribute to the great body of American culture but to improve the culture and civilization of which they were a part” (Franklin 363).

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. says that, “‘Renaissances’ are acts of cultural construction, attempting to satisfy larger social and political needs” (165). According to Gates, Alain Locke declared Harlem to be “the cultural capital of the black world.” This unit is my attempt to present lessons that deepen students’ appreciation for their heritage and culture and help them forge strong ties with their own origins and appreciate and value the cultures of others, to help them understand the links to past civilizations and the stronger connections that are possible and enjoyable in the creative process. These lessons are to encourage personal reflection that leads to informed decision making and imaginative outcomes. This approach to creative thinking becomes an important life skill beyond the classroom.

Art is the common thread, strongly linking each of us to our own culture and to our legacy through time. I use each lesson to stretch awareness and enhance learners’ powers to see and to discern the artist’s meaning as well as their own, to build upon what they have learned and to quest for more, to awaken their senses to deeper meaning and higher achievement, to apply good judgment in all that they do, and to have them realize that art enhances our quality of life. Art is our link to other civilizations, transcending race or culture, elevating us all.

## LESSON PLANS

### **Lesson One: Southern Roots – The Art of Palmer Hayden and William H. Johnson**

This lesson examines the philosophies and styles of two artists who came to Harlem from the rural south. Although they embraced the urban lifestyle, their works portray rural and folk themes and their strong personal creative styles.

Both artists spent time in Europe: Hayden serving in the U. S. Army during World War I and Johnson moving to Europe for twelve years where he lived, married, and worked at his craft in France, Norway, and Denmark between the world wars. They both returned to New York, adhering to no specific artistic styles except their own. Both artists took jobs in the workaday world in order to follow their creative dreams and both achieved a modicum of success without compromising their strong personal aesthetic expression.

According to Johnson, “My travels have taught me that, in order to create, an artist must live and paint in his own environment” (*Scholastic Art* 4).

Johnson attended art school and became highly trained, but stayed true to his personal vision depicting the lives and pursuits of ordinary people in Harlem and his native South Carolina in his colorful, flattened linear approach evocative of traditional African interpretations (*Scholastic Art* 4-5).

In New York, Hayden worked as a handyman and in his off hours painted scenes of home and family. He classified himself as janitor first, painter, second (*Scholastic Art* 2-3).

Having looked at illustrations of Johnson’s and Hayden’s works, learners will form small groups of three or four and analyze the works, comparing and contrasting their styles. Using the vocabulary of design elements and principles, learners will apply prior knowledge in evaluating the artists’ works.

Findings will be edited and data will be entered onto one display chart to be used as a resource for future lessons.

In the creative phase of the lesson, learners will choose subjects evocative of the works of William H. Johnson and Palmer Hayden and create works that detail home, family, and the workaday world. We will analyze works in progress and upon completion; learners will critique their works and narrate stories of the paintings.

## **Lesson Two: Collage/Papier Colle’**

The objective of this lesson is to help learners develop an appreciation for the creative spirit of the Harlem Renaissance and to understand the multicultural links throughout artistic expression. Our focus is on Cubism; the artistic style developed in early twentieth century Paris, attributed to associates Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, and generally believed to have been the most important artistic style of the twentieth century.

In Cubism the artist creates abstract art in which the subject is divided into shapes and forms and then recombined to simultaneously show several views of the subject (Turner 354).

We will begin with research of biographical data and the historical setting of early twentieth century Paris. Students will study illustrations of African tribal masks and Picasso’s use of similar stylization in his first Cubist works and in subsequent abstract portraits.

In addition, we will study the collage works of Picasso and Braque and using our vocabulary of design elements: line, shape, color, texture, form, value and space, students will define “abstract” art and discuss the Cubists’ deconstructing and reconfiguring form.

In small groups of three or four, during a fifteen-minute period, students will select an illustration, discuss and note their observations about the work, materials and techniques used in creating the work. In this context, students can relate the lesson to their environment, noting that the artists have made use of ‘found’ and recycled items as materials in their creative works. Picasso and Braque were recycling before recycling was “cool.” Their Cubist colleague Juan Gris explained the artists’ mission: “to create new objects which cannot be compared with any object in reality.” (Wertebaker 60)

The groups will define and discuss works that are *two-dimensional* (flat pieces having width and height); *three-dimensional* (having width, height and depth); and *relief* (three-dimensional works with projecting surfaces viewed from one side) (Chapman 54-56).

Following the introductory exercise, learners will individually design and create their own two-dimensional or low relief collage works, using, paper, fabric, found materials, and glue. They will apply prior knowledge of design elements and principles. As in the early phase of



Cubism, the focus of this activity is to show variations in texture and depth of surface, balance, and proportion, de-emphasizing color, and emphasizing the tactile quality of the work.

After completing their collages, students will critique their works, again using the vocabulary of design elements and principles. The teacher will guide a review of the Cubist style and its extraordinary history.

### **Lesson Three: Romare Bearden, Harlem Collagist**

This lesson focuses on the unique collage style of an artist who grew up in Harlem and in his youth was acquainted with the literati of the Harlem Renaissance.

Bearden was trained in art technique and history and earned a degree in mathematics. His Cubist-style paintings in the 1940s show the influence of Picasso and Braque. In the 1950s he went to France and Italy to study art, returned to New York to study Chinese calligraphy, collage and the technique of *decollage*, painting layers of paper and tearing top layers to expose lower layers (Sims 2). In his later years, Bearden devoted most of his time to the art of collage. His works celebrate African-American themes, often depicting scenes from his childhood and he often elevated the status of women in his works. Bearden likened the assembly of his collages to the art of quilting (Sims 4).

In this lesson we will study the distinctive style of Romare Bearden, comparing and contrasting it with the collages of Picasso and Braque. In small groups learners will discuss and outline Bearden's artistic style involving *collage* and *decollage*. Using the vocabulary of design elements and principles, learners will analyze Bearden's artistic style.

There will be a beginning colloquy during which, students will discuss the role of social commentary and reflect on the authenticity of Bearden's message on the African-American experience as viewed in his work. Students will brainstorm in small groups, and each person will choose a subject for a collage or decoupage work influenced by the style of Romare Bearden.

In the final phase of this lesson, we will discuss the life and contributions of an artist who was a devotee of literature, music, theatre, and he was a songwriter. While developing his unique, dramatic and personal creative style through the 1980s, he was also an advocate for all of the arts. Romare Bearden is truly a "Renaissance man" in the fullest meaning of the term.

### **Lesson Four: Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, Visual Interpretation**

This lesson examines the rich and powerful literature of the Harlem Renaissance and focuses on the works of Langston Hughes. We will have readings from *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*.

"The growing public fascination with blackness that was reflected in the Harlem vogue and the higher quality of literature produced by young black writers in the mid-1920s helped open the doors of the major publishing houses to black literature" (Wintz 157). Unprecedented numbers of works by Negro authors about the Negro experience during the decade of the twenties were published. Many regarded "Harlem as a literary Mecca" (Hughes and Meltzer, et al. 274).

The lesson begins with individual students orally reading from selected works of the Harlem Renaissance. We will discuss imagery, themes, and vernacular of the poems and how they reflect the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance and the everyday lives of Harlem residents. Students will compare and contrast the past and present lives of new arrivals in Harlem, those who have come in search of a dream.

Following discussion and analysis, each student will select one of the poems from the collection and create a drawing visualizing the poet's message. There will be background music contemporary to the Harlem Renaissance, including the works of composers Edward "Duke"

Ellington and George and Ira Gershwin. Upon completion of the drawings, students will critique their works, calling upon their prior knowledge of the principles of design vocabulary: balance, proportion, rhythm, pattern, emphasis, unity, and variety.

In small groups, learners will begin the process of composing their own poetic works. They will reflect on the message, rhythm and descriptive language and exchange ideas prior to individual work. They will relate their compositions to their own lives and convey Langston Hughes' celebration of ordinary people engaged in everyday activities.

Upon completion of their poems, students will critique their works and the works of others, and we will edit our own illustrated volume of selected works. We will invite colleagues to a campus poetry reading.

### **Lesson Five: Influences of the Harlem Renaissance – James Baldwin**

This lesson examines the literary works of Harlem resident, James Baldwin, focusing on his essay, "Harlem—Then and Now." From selected works of James Baldwin, we will compare and contrast his early and later literary works. Individual students will read portions of the work and discussion will include students' comparing Baldwin's descriptions to their own neighborhoods.

Students will write one-page narratives about their neighborhoods, read and critique their works and the works of others.

In the final phase of this lesson, learners will reflect upon the young Baldwin's emotional response to his environment, their own emotional responses to Baldwin's world and their own, and how they relate to the spirit of Harlem "then and now."

Learners will compare and contrast the young Baldwin's narrative description with the writings of Langston Hughes in the previous lesson.

### **Lesson Six: Latter-day Influences of the Harlem Renaissance –Jacob Lawrence and John Biggers**

This lesson focuses on two artists who excelled in the visual narrative, Jacob Lawrence and John Biggers. The lesson begins with a visit to the school library for research on the lives of Lawrence and Biggers. We will view Lawrence's "The Migration Series" and Biggers' "Ananse: The Web of Life in Africa." We will compare and contrast their lives, artistic styles and the artists' coverage of three categories in their works—historical, social, and educational. We will compare and contrast the artists' themes and creative styles with the works of Palmer Hayden and William H. Johnson whom we studied in Lesson I of this unit. We will consider the significance of the mural in the Texas Southern University student art collection (Biggers et al. 31).

On day two of the lesson, classes will visit the Texas Southern University campus to view original works of John Biggers and his students. During our visit we will discuss the significance of the mural as requisite format for students' senior projects. We will consider links to Mexican tradition, and reflect on "epochal painting that served as a catalyst to give the Mexican pride in his heritage and a self-identity" (31).

Learners will take notes and later write critical analyses of the works they view, applying prior knowledge of the vocabulary of design elements and principles, and describing the artists' creative styles and use of materials.

"Walls are hung everywhere with paintings ...but there are few if any classroom buildings on most university campuses that have hall walls covered with one mural after the other—on floor after floor, and in the stairwells between" (91). This is a description of the larger-than-life images and the sensory feast that one encounters on the campus where John Biggers and his students labored to "relate the painting to the wall and not cut a hole in the wall with the painting" (33).

As we view the paintings, we will discuss our sensory responses, the painters' messages regarding the importance of the site as it relates to Dr. Biggers' quotation above, and the responsibility of the artist to the viewer in public art.

During this phase of the lesson, we will open dialogue to discuss the role of the graffiti practitioner as public artist and the viewer, and consider the historic and cultural roots and ramifications of this form, linking it to our own environment, assessing its effect upon our school and surrounding community.

Returning to the classroom, students will form small groups to reflect on today's experience, to brainstorm and plan their own narrative works, choosing either the small scale of Jacob Lawrence or the larger scale of John Biggers. We will choose several panels from various groups and propose installation of murals on our campus in the mode of John Biggers and the "Texas Southern University Experience."

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