

To Write with Fire: Unapologetic Poets of the Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts Movement

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“I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same ways, as the art that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red, but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human.” -W.E.B. Du Bois (50)

Overview: Igniting the Fire

This unit will focus on the works of two significant literary periods of the 20th century- the Harlem Renaissance (New Negro Movement) and the Black Arts Movement (BAM). The unit’s purpose is to introduce 7th and 8th grade students to African American writers of separate eras who shared an incredible talent of challenging the ills of their environment and expressing themselves through the art of poetry. Students will learn the historical background of both periods and understand how political elements play key roles in artistic movements. Through reading/writing poetry and song lyrics, watching documentaries, taking trips, and participating in interactive activities, students will discover a past of rich culture and creativity. It is my goal for students to learn how to transfer the raw emotions of their personal realities into poetry as they construct self-concepts. This unit was inspired during my participation in Dr. Herman Beavers’ seminar, *Thinking Black, Writing Revolution: The Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement*.

Although heavy focus will be placed on these two literary periods, it must be emphasized that there were writers, musicians, painters and intellectuals between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement who kept the fire of cultural and racial pride ignited. African American artists did not fall into an age of silence. Some of the most memorable and celebrated works of American literature by authors such as Richard Wright (*Uncle Tom’s Children, Native Son*) and Lorraine Hansberry (*A Raisin in the Sun*) were written in between these periods. The rarely-

mentioned literary period, the Chicago Black Renaissance (1930s-1950s), actually set a tone for what the “new” Black aesthetic was to be. Before Sonia Sanchez of the Black Arts Movement wrote haikus; first African American Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks, of the Chicago Black Renaissance, had written “*We Real Cool*.” According to University of Pennsylvania professor of English and Africana Studies, Dr. Herman Beavers, “Black writers are always producing; what makes the Renaissance and the BAM distinct is that they both seem like moments when black artists were having a broader and wider conversation amongst themselves about what constituted *important* art.” I think it is essential for students to understand the progression of an artistic revolution/ period in order for them to realize how the next literary period comes into fruition. Hopefully, following this unit, they will be inspired to make contributions that can spark the next literary movement.

The cultural awakening that occurred during both artistic periods was fueled by artists searching for ways to construct a self-concept without conforming to the assumptions and conventions of their time. There are a plethora of poets during both the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement who are excluded from the modest list of African American literary talents discussed in many classrooms through conventional approaches to the American literary scene. In this unit, students will discover how the contributors of the Harlem Renaissance had a desire to be accepted and recognized as artists by the mainstream. They will also learn how the artists of the BAM collectively rejected the use of Western aesthetics and created a new form of black artistic expression.

What was the common representation of African Americans before the development of the Harlem Renaissance? Understanding how the African American was represented is necessary for students to conceptualize the cultural milestone of the Harlem Renaissance. In the early 1900’s, minstrel shows and coon caricatures contributed a warped and dehumanizing perspective of African Americans. In vaudevilles, films and radio programs, African-Americans were commonly portrayed as shiftless, illiterate and simple-minded individuals. There were songs with titles like “All Coons Look Alike to Me” and plays such as “The Coon that Sat By the Door” that attempted to destroy the image of African Americans. In response, African American leaders Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois confronted the racism to be found in popular cultural forms by using skilled oratory and scholarly intellect to insist on the important contributions made by Blacks across the African Diaspora. The once backwards and primitive perception of Africa that African Americans began to change. Africa became embraced as the beloved homeland of African Americans. (The term Negro was used during this time). The redefining moment of Africa was captured in dance, music, literature and visual arts of the Harlem Renaissance. African masks and art became popular for both mainstream and African Americans. Garvey taught, “Africa was peopled with a race of cultured black men., who were masters in art, science and literature; men who were cultured and refined; men who, it was said were like the gods. Even the great poets of old sang in beautiful sonnets of the delight it afforded the gods to be in companionship with the Ethiopians.” (89) Black consciousness and pride were seen during the Harlem Renaissance decades before James Brown belted out, “ Say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud!” in the 1960’s.

Artist Aaron Douglas created dignified illustrations of African Americans showing the mainstream that a “New Negro” had emerged. Jessie Fauset, novelist and literary editor of *Crisis*

magazine, along with sculptor, Augusta Savage and jazz musician, Ella Fitzgerald, were among the many women who represented the “New Negro Woman.” The “New Negro” term, coined by intellectual writer Alain Locke in 1925, had everything to do with the African American being seen as an educated, sophisticated and proud city-dweller. The “Old Negro” was seen as the illiterate, nonassertive plantation worker from the country who had no self-pride.

During the Great Migration, African Americans continually found themselves confronted with economic, political and social challenges that belied their dreams of what life in the North would mean. Segregation and poverty was still a stark reality for Harlemites. New York was already seen as the center of changes--social, spiritual, and political. When African Americans poured into New York (and other Northern cities) from the South and the West Indies, they brought along their dreams, talents, work ethics and ways of life. African Americans became increasingly involved in education, politics, business and sports. Religion, like everything else, flourished as different types of churches were founded. Some African Americans became successful doctors, dignified reverends and respected teachers. Some African Americans became notorious street hustlers, gambling number runners and streetwalkers. Then there were the African Americans who were the dishwashers, servers and cooks. The two major organizations; NAACP and the Urban League began in New York and served as a refuge for African Americans. Eventually, these two organizations created the two major publications, *Crisis* and *Opportunity*. These publications documented the life and culture of the Harlem Renaissance. Other publications such as *The Messenger* and *Negro World* gave African Americans a place to share their ideas, creativity and emotions.

There was an explosion of African American culture throughout Harlem. The world was mesmerized by the jazz Harlem played. The syncopated rhythms, instrumental solos and improvisations of jazz gave music a new complexity and sound that few had heard before. Duke Ellington’s band electrified audiences in the infamous Cotton Club. Billie Holiday’s melancholic voice crooned lyrics of love and heartache. Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey had both Whites and African Americans singing along to their melodies. Most people in Harlem enjoyed the sounds of jazz. Unfortunately, the love of jazz did not change the harsh reality that African Americans were not allowed to enter the doors of the Cotton Club- unless as performers or servers. Racism was as much a part of the Renaissance era as jazz.

The poets of the Harlem Renaissance had different styles/ approaches of breaking social and political barriers through artistic expression as they sought legitimization by the mainstream. Recurring themes such as self-image, heritage, pride, resilience and disdain for racism can be seen as early as 1919 in Claude McKay’s poem, “*If We Must Die*.” The poem, which was written amidst the bloodshed of the Red Summer of 1919’s race riots, prompts the reader to action as opposed to reflection. McKay’s last two lines,

“ Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!” (273)

Harlem Renaissance poet, Sterling A. Brown, boldly confronts racial exploitation while incorporating themes of slavery, perseverance, and inner-strength in his poem, “*Strong Men*” (1932). Brown speaks directly to his African American audience insisting that in spite of the

injustices and prohibitions placed upon them, they are still “strong men gittin’ stronger.” African American poets were finally speaking to an African American audience. Poets similar to Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka (Black Arts Movement) were proud to write to and for African American people. Another Harlem Renaissance poet, Helene Johnson, wrote “*A Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem*,” calling attention to the African Americans who attempted to imitate the very ones considered to be their wrongdoers. The poem’s speaker beams with pride and adoration of a people with flaws, yet “too splendid for this city street”.

Teachers tend to focus heavily on the works of prolific writer, Langston Hughes when poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is planned for a classroom lesson. *Weary Blues*, *A Dream Deferred*, *Mother to Son*, and *Madam and the Rent Man* are a few poems written by Langston Hughes that many students are familiar. Hughes tended to write in the voice of Harlem’s “low-down common folk”, creating a style which rejected the writing influences of white poets. In fact, he criticized fellow poet Countee Cullen for wanting to be seen as merely a poet, not a “Negro poet”. In his essay, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, Hughes explains his respect for his main subject, “These common folk are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardization.” (41) Most teachers are unaware of Hughes’ cosmopolitanism and mistakenly represent him as “often a parochial, narrowly focused, working-class oriented poet”. (Hughes, a world traveller, was in France during the beginning of Modernism.) Students are at times given the false impression that the people of Harlem were simplistic and humorous, lacking depth. Although his talents and brilliant contributions to literature are undeniable, Hughes’ poetry speaks of the soul, anguish and rhythm of the African American community. His poems are not known to have the fiery approach of poets such as Claude McKay and Sterling Brown. Including poets, who spoke aggressively against the ills of racism or encouraged positive self-identity in their poetry, helps students to fully understand the Harlem Renaissance beyond the aesthetics and the blues. Students will see that these artists were activists of their time. The tone of this poetry is uplifting, triumphant and hopeful. Not giving recognition to the poets who wrote specifically against oppression discredits this literary period. If we do not tell our students of their existence, we have not honored their contributions to the American literary scene. Are we eliminating the outspoken poets for fear that our students will realize the world is not color-blind or do we ourselves believe we are in a Post-Racial America? When is it acceptable or unacceptable to teach of revolutions?

The turbulence of the 1960’s set the stage for the next art/literary period, the Black Arts Movement. The Southern United States had a grim culture of lynching, police brutality, bombings and multiple laws giving African Americans the status of being second-class citizens. Following the assassinations of key African American leaders Malcolm X, Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King Jr., African American communities across the nation were left in turmoil. Those of us who reside in any urban city have seen a broken sidewalk with vegetation sprouting through. Politically and creatively, there were flowers growing through cracks of concrete on city streets throughout America. To some observers, flowers in concrete represent insignificant/troublesome weeds of a declining ghetto. The poets of the BAM recognized the flowers as a symbol of beauty, strength and renewal. In Oakland, a new Black nationalist organization, the Black Panther Party took a stand against police mistreatment and child hunger.

In Harlem, a poet, Amiri Baraka organized other artists to create for the African American audience. The cultural movement of actors, poets, musicians and artists flourished daring African Americans to get involved in their liberation. Unlike the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement stretched from the East Coast to the West Coast. A common spirit of struggle and unity connected these artists.

Poets Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Etheridge Knight, Nikki Giovanni, Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, Gil Scott-Heron and a host of others spoke the language and echoed the voices of African Americans' raw emotions of love, heritage and anger that they experienced in the streets of urban America. They embraced the task of instilling pride and consciousness into communities, and believed in being financially and creatively in control of their art. Besides believing in autonomy, artists of this period rejected the western aesthetic and the legitimization of mainstream. Larry Neal proclaims, "When we speak of a 'Black aesthetic' several things are meant. First, we assume that there is already in existence the basis for such an aesthetic. Essentially, it consists of an African-American cultural tradition. But this aesthetic is finally, by implication, broader than that tradition. It encompasses most of the usable elements of the Third World culture. The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world." Most of the poetry crafted a style that favored the fusion of African American speech/vernacular with jazz music and free verse. Art and the role of the artist were redefined. Culture boldly intertwined with politics. Sonia Sanchez considers, "all poets, all writers to be political." Amiri Baraka said "art is whatever makes you proud to be human". What makes our students proud to be human? The poets of this controversial movement usually do not grace the walls of school classrooms. Many students have never heard or recited poems like "*Choices*" (Nikki Giovanni), "*There It Is*" (Jayne Cortez) or "*The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*" (Gil Scott-Heron). How can we help students connect with poetry being written in the hip-hop era? Are we giving them enough opportunities to embrace their culture within the classroom? How have cultural occurrences like poetry slams and freestyle come to define this moment in time?

This unit will allow students to breathe life into words through poetry about themselves as they see it unfolding around them. They will relive both time periods through music, clothing styles, art, and especially poetry. We will recreate our classroom environment with the décor popular of the 1920's in the first half of the unit and the 1960's will be represented during the second half. Students will learn the history of post-slavery conditions of the South and Post-migration conditions of the North. They will hear blues, jazz and R&B /soul music before and during lessons. We will watch films and read old newspaper articles to understand how African Americans were portrayed during both periods. Lessons will also focus on understanding the climate of America during the 1920's and the 1960's as it pertains to African Americans. Our class will take a trip to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem after the culmination of the Harlem unit. They will begin the Black Arts Movement unit with documentaries "*Eyes on the Prize*" and the "*Black Power Mixtape*." James Brown and Nina Simone will be among the singers featured during this unit. The lyrics of their songs will be discussed and analyzed. Students will read poems giving authentic conversation that ties them to these remarkable periods in American history. They will be asked: What can a poem reveal about a culture? In which ways can you express opinions/emotions, the climate of your surroundings

and experiences through poetry? How can art uplift people and cause them to change their conditions?

Rationale: Behind the Flames...Do You See Me?

“She does not know

Her beauty

She thinks her brown body

Has no glory”- by Waring Cuney, “No Images”

Students demand relevance. They want to feel relevant and be given material relevant to them in social, cultural and generational ways. A student who does not know his or her glory will not be your most motivated student. How well do we see our students? Educators must acknowledge the culture of their student and celebrate the diversity in the classroom. Everyone has a poem, a story, and a song, which is worthy of a platform. Today, African American students continue to lag behind whites, Asians and Latinos on standardized tests. Studies prove that many African Americans struggle when it comes to vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. There are far too many factors behind the “achievement gap” to be addressed in this section, and none has to do with intelligence, or lack thereof. We, as educators, are responsible for engaging our students in the classroom and the world. Gloria Ladson-Billings, author of “The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children,” states that “culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society” (128).

I pose the question: “How often are we exposing our students to poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement?” Students connect to teachers who stay in the “know”. When teachers are able to combine the “cool” with the “school” and take in consideration students’ backgrounds, engagement will naturally take place. For instance, we know that today’s culture has a fascination with hip-hop. Let us tap into their world to make a connection. We are able to teach children how the Harlem Renaissance opened the doors for the Black Arts Movement, and that in turn made it possible for the Rap/Hip Hop culture to exist. They need to understand that before hip-hop artist/activist Kendrick Lamar, there was hip hop artist/activist KRS-One (1990s). KRS-One’s politically charged lyrics were inspired by hip-hop artist/activist Chuck D of Public Enemy(1980s). Chuck D’s activism was influenced by the politically outspoken Last Poets (1970s). Hip-hop is a product of evolution. What evolution can take place in our classrooms?

Students can learn to transfer their thoughts, emotions, and opinions into a poem and have the satisfaction of knowing that they are preserving history creatively. Imagine having students that want to change the problems that have plagued their lives by becoming proactive rather than reactive. We see increasing headlines and video footage surrounding police brutality in our country. We read about the gun violence in most of the inner cities. There is a school-to-prison pipeline that continues to haunt many disadvantaged African-American communities. We see the disproportionate number of African American youth being suspended, dropping out of high school and being arrested. There are small activist groups within communities and the Black Lives Matter movement that challenge injustices such as racism. Our students do not need to

look far to find social issues to incorporate into their writing. Poetry allows struggling readers to gain vocabulary skills and word recognition strategies with shorter texts as opposed to a novel. Since poems are filled with figurative language and sensory details, poor readers can focus less time on decoding and more time visualizing and constructing meaning. Based on the Poetry in America study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, readers of poetry are more sociable, read a variety of genres and attend cultural events at higher rates than non-poetry readers.

“You are young, gifted and Black. We must begin to tell our young. There’s a world waiting for you. Yours is the quest that’s just begun.” -James Weldon Johnson

Objectives: Passing the Torch

This unit is intended for students in Grade 8 English/ Language Arts. The objectives will include the following.

- Read, analyze and critique poetry of two historical literary periods- the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement
- Understand poetry as a literary art form
- Analyze the elements of poetry (tone, figurative language, theme, symbolism, etc.)
- Recognize the rhythmic aspect of poetry and how it has musical elements
- Develop critical thinking and writing skills
- Identify a variety of genres and forms of poetry
- Write a variety of poetry such as haikus, sonnets, free verse and dramatic monologues.

Strategies

This unit will include using the Internet and the Free Library of Philadelphia to conduct research on poets, poetry, politics and historical information of African Americans during two eras. The research activities will help them understand the meaning behind the poetry provided during this unit. They will determine the influence of politics and culture as they read and interpret poetry. Students will do the following:

- Attend a Poetry Slam/ Spoken Word Event
- View documentaries / Listen to audio recordings of poets reading their own words
- Read and analyze poetry
- Incorporate music and visual art with poetry
- Write and perform poetry for an audience (individually and in small groups)
- Visit historical areas (Harlem)
- Take a Virtual Tour
- Use Graphic Organizers
- Invite a local Spoken Word artist
- Letters to the Poet
- Create Powerpoint Presentations
- Documentary Viewing Worksheets
- Using Multimedia Sources
- Newspaper

- Online Trivia (Kahoot)
- Paraphrase poetry

Classroom Activity One: Drop Me Off in Harlem

*This lesson should be taught after an introduction to the Great Migration. Use the suggested documentary, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (see Appendix) It may take up to five days to view and discuss film. Allow students time to process information because it is a lot! It may help to ask questions and provide a viewing documentary worksheet for students to be active during their viewing. (In Appendix) Remember to hit pause and make your own “commercial/conversation breaks” to help all of your learners understand the content.

Objectives: The goal and purpose of this lesson is to have students practice reading nonfiction texts as they research a literary period. They will talk and write about the information using a graphic organizer (K-W-L). As an extension, they will write a brief report of their findings for homework.

Standards: Students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently as they research. (CC.1.2.7.L) They will identify and introduce the topic clearly, including a preview of what is to follow. (CC.1.4.7.B)

Materials:

CD player
 Projector Board
 Computers/Laptops with Internet access
 Thin markers/ pens
 Student journals
 Post-it notes
 Chart Paper
 K-W-L Handout

1) [Begin all lessons for both periods with music. It pulls on the emotions connected to poetry] Have a copy of lyrics for all songs played. Song can play as students get settled in the classroom. For this lesson, play *Drop Me Off in Harlem* with Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. When the song finishes, provide them with copies of the lyrics.

2) Provide students flash cards with Wow facts (Teacher made) of both artists. Have them trade and circulate cards. Allow students to share facts. After five to seven minutes students must return all Wow facts.

3) Begin a K-W-L chart of Harlem. What do your students already know about Harlem? What would they like to know about the Renaissance? What have they learned? Distribute a copy of the K-W-L chart they may fill out as they conduct research. (Each student should have a binder for all of their work) Instruct students to share and discuss their prior knowledge. Encourage students to share ideas! Write some of their responses on the large chart paper. After students fill

out their first two sections (K and W) have them break up into pairs and share the research process of Harlem.

4) Encourage pairs to find a minimum of 10 interesting facts surrounding life in Harlem during the Renaissance. (20 minutes) Once students fill out remaining section of their charts(L), they can share facts. This is a great time to open a discussion about their findings. Facts can be used for a trivia game like Kahoot (<https://create.kahoot.it/account/register/>)

5) Give them the Virtual Harlem Tours (Appendix)

6) Play the song again as they write a few words of reflection in their journal. If a prompt is helpful to students who do not know what to write use: How does the history of Harlem make you feel? Why?

7) Homework- Students should pretend they are living in Harlem and write a letter to relative or friend about their experience. The letter should include some information from the research.

Classroom Activity Two: News Story Sonnet (Two days)

Objectives: This lesson's goal is to teach students about the structure of a sonnet as they read sonnets of the Harlem Renaissance. Students will determine the characteristics of sonnets after reviewing and analyzing examples. They will also determine the theme of the poems provided in this lesson is self-dignity. They will use recent newspaper articles to write their own sonnets based on the content.

Standards: Students must determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.(CC.1.2.7.D) Students will write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information clearly when they do a biographical sketch of two poets.(CC.1.4.7.A Students will cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text. (CC.1.3.8.B)

Materials:

CD player
Projector Board
Computers/Laptops with Internet access
Thin markers/ pens
Student journals
Post-it notes
Handouts (sonnets)
Binders
Newspaper Articles

1) Play Duke Ellington's song *Black Beauty* (In Appendix). Pass out the sonnets written by Helene Johnson "*Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem*" and Claude McKay's *If We Must Die*. Give students time to read silently.

2) Allow students to get in small groups and analyze poem. Ask them to write down answers to questions such as: Who/what is the subject of this poem? Which form of figurative language is used? What do both poems have in common? Why are they considered sonnets? What is the theme? What is the tone? Why do you think Johnson wrote her sonnet? What do you think prompted McKay to write his sonnet? How are the two poems similar/ different? What conditions did each writer experience before writing these poems. Give them a chance to write “questions to the author.” (Although students are working collaboratively in a group, they should continue to keep their work in binders) Have a discussion about Johnson’s criticism of the African Americans who turned away from their “down-home” roots. A great reference to help explain is Langston Hughes essay mentioned earlier, After giving them enough time to respond, clarify that a sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines. Provide them with an article of Red Summer of 1919. You may use your projector to show the article as your students discuss the details.

3) Distribute copies of recent newspaper articles that pertain to injustices (social/racial) Explain to students that writers during the Harlem Renaissance used sonnets to open a conversation and elicit a reaction. Have students choose a theme and write a sonnet based on the the article. They should include tone, mood and poetic devices.

4) Students will self edit and then peer edit sonnets. Students will do informal mini presentations of their sonnets.

5) Play song again as students write a reflection of anything that they found interesting in the lesson.

5) Homework- Students must paraphrase one of the sonnets. They must also give a brief two paragraph biography of the poet chosen.

Classroom Activity Three: Nina and the Revolution

*This lesson should be given after the Harlem Renaissance period is taught. Also, use three days for active viewing of *Eyes on the Prize; Awakenings*. It is best to preview film in order to know the best stopping points for the much needed “conversation breaks”. It may also be a good idea to have printed copies of a documentary viewing worksheet to maintain focus. I recommend using an activity in between this and the next documentary, *The Black Panthers Vanguard of the Revolution*. For example if the documentary is shown on Monday through Wednesday. This lesson will need at least two days to complete (Thursday and Friday). Of course, the timing varies based on the needs of your students. Keep the interest and enthusiasm going!

Objectives: Students will interpret the meaning behind the poem and present their meaning using multimedia. They will analyze the elements of poetry (tone, figurative language, theme, symbolism, etc.). Students will also recognize the rhythmic aspect of poetry and how it has musical elements while they listen to selections of Nina Simone. This lesson will encourage students to use critical thinking and writing skills

Standards: Students are expected to organize ideas, concepts, and information using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts; provide a concluding statement or section; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension. CC.1.4.7.D Students will read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. E08.A-K.1.1.1 Students will establish and maintain a formal style. E08.C.1.2.4 E08.They will read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Materials:

CD player

Projector Board

Computers/Laptops with Internet access

Student journals

Index Cards

1) Play *Sinnerman* by Nina Simone. (10 minutes) Each group gets a copy of the lyrics. Model for students how to analyze the text after song is complete. Ask them: Who is Nina Simone? Who is the “sinnerman” and why does he need to run? Give them fact cards (teacher-made) to circulate as you give a brief introduction of Nina Simone. (They will find out more later for homework and extension activities) As a class, discuss the turbulence during the time *Sinnerman* was written and performed. Identify the mood, symbolism, poetic devices and purpose of author and fill out a class chart. Emphasize to students that during this period African Americans made their own rules of poetry and focused on free verse as they conveyed their message.

2) *Four Women*- Nina Simone. Independently students will write down responses to the following questions: What does this song represent? What historical references are made in song? How does this relate to African American women? Do the women have anything in common? What?

3) Divide class into six groups. Once in groups, explain that they will be responsible for creating an artistic interpretation using images, words, music in a five to ten minute powerpoint presentation. Each group will get a different poem to work on: *Wise, I*-Amiri Baraka, *The Revolution Will not be Televised* -Gil Scott-Heron, *Ego-tripping*- Nikki Giovanni, *Malcolm* - Sonia Sanchez, *The Idea of Ancestry*-Etheridge Knight and *We Real Cool*- Gwendolyn Brooks should be distributed. The presentation should include: poetic devices, point of view, meaning, purpose of poet, audience, color of mood (blue-calm/ red-love or anger), biographical information of poet, images that relate to the poem, and EACH person in group must either write a personal comment or question to author at the end of the powerpoint presentation.

4) Groups will complete powerpoint and give presentations during the next class.

5) Play the youtube video of *Mississippi Goddam*- Nina Simone. (Appendix) Students will write a response in their journal to the question: What is a revolution and why do they happen? Students may write a reflection of the video and what they think of Nina Simone.

6) Homework- Students will write a short biographical essay on Nina Simone including her involvement with Civil Rights. Using the information in the essay, they will write a free verse poem about her.

Extra, Extra! (More Activities to Build and Use)

“Poetry with a Twist”- students will combine three art forms (painting, music and poetry) in this activity. They will be given a blank canvas to paint as they listen to a poem. Music from the corresponding time period will be played in the background. *Extension- Share in a school exhibit and allow class to recite poem that was used.

· “You Remind Me Of...”- Students must choose two artists (one from each time period) that are similar in style, tone or . They must find poems of the chosen poets that have similarities and make a Venn diagram of the poem or poet. They must also present biographical information of the poet and a newspaper article describing the climate for African-American people of that time period. Standards:CC.1.3.8.E Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style. E08.A-C.2.1.2)

Bibliography

Reading List:

Bracey Jr., John, Sanchez, Sonia, and Smethurst, James. *SOS- Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*. Amherst and Boston. University of Massachusetts Press. (2014).

This anthology includes the work of key writers of the BAM such as Haki Madhubuti, Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Etheridge Knight, Nikki Giovanni and Ed Bullins. This book is useful to study in preparation for teaching the unit. Teachers will be properly introduced to the principles of the Black Arts Movement through the poetry, essays and short stories that are featured. This is an authentic document which gives insight on the history and thought behind the legacy of an American literary period.

Candaele, Kerry. *Bound for Glory 1910-1930: From the Great Migration to the Harlem Renaissance*. Chelsea House Publications. (1996).

This book is a great resource for teachers to browse when preparing for the unit. It gives a study of African American people during the 20th century. This book has a tremendous amount of information regarding the artistic, social and cultural accomplishments of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance after the great move from the rural South.

Gay, Geneva. “*Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching.*” *Journal of Teacher Education*. 53.2 (2002). 106-16

Geneva Gay gives insight as to why it is crucial for teachers to use the cultural experience and perspective of students to teach them effectively. This article reminds us as educators to maintain high expectations as we teach a diverse classroom.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Shimmy, Shimmy, Shimmy like My Sister Kate: Looking at the Harlem Renaissance Through Poems*. New York. Henry Holt and Company, Inc. (1996)

This book is a wonderful resource for both teachers and students to learn about the Harlem Renaissance and beyond. Along with Giovanni's commentary, readers will find a collection of poetry by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks and Ntozake Shange. Each poem is followed by an explanation of how each poet contributed to the movement.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass, (1994).

This is the second edition of Gloria Ladson-Billings' acclaimed book about the importance of culturally relevant teaching. Teachers can gain insight on ways to work with the diverse talents of the students in their classroom.

Patton, Venetria and Honey, Maureen. *Double-Take- A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*. Brunswick, New Jersey and London. Rutgers University Press. (2001).

This anthology is a collection of texts that explain a revolutionary literary period. The book explains the culture of the Harlem Renaissance, providing the works of key figures of this period such as Garvey, DuBois, Hurston, Grimke, Hughes, Cullen and Dunbar-Nelson.

Villegas, Ana-Maria, and Lucas, Tamara. "Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum". *Journal of Teacher Education* 53.1 (2002). 20-32.

This article serves as a guide for teachers who want to help learners construct knowledge as they include students' culture and ethnicity.

Filmography

The Black Panthers Vanguard of the Revolution. Writer and Director Nelson, Stanley. Firelight Films. 2015.

This is a documentary film about the revolutionary group, the Black Panthers. Interviews of Panthers and former F.B.I. agents and actual footage will be seen. This is age-appropriate for middle school students. As any film, it is best to preview film before showing it to the class. If a teacher has a 45 minute time block with class, I suggest saving ten minutes for discussion with students. The film is 115 minutes, so it will take several days for viewing film. For teachers who have longer blocks with students, I still recommend breaking film into at least three day segments. It is important to have on-going conversations in order for students to stay engaged and have a clear understanding of this time dynamic period.

The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross. Writer and Executive Producer Gates, Henry Louis. Kunhardt McGee Productions and Inkwell Films, 2013. Released on DVD January 2014. This is a documentary which aired as a six part series on PBS. I think this film is an excellent resource to use in preparation for teaching this unit. Episode Four (see Appendix) will help students understand the state of African Americans in the South leading to the Great Migration.

Eyes on the Prize; Awakenings (America's Civil Rights Movement). Produced by Blackside. Aired on PBS in 1987.

This was part of the award-winning PBS history series American Experience. It chronicles the African American experience in the United States from the mid 1950s to the mid 1980's. I included a link to part one (Awakenings) in the Appendix which gives valuable information on life in the black rural South during the 1950s. I believe this should be shown after the Harlem Renaissance section of the unit, as students are introduced to the Black Arts Movement. They need to be aware of the social injustices for African Americans present in many parts of the country in order to understand the frustration and passion behind the BAM.

On the Web

<http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides/film-study-worksheet-documentary.html>

This is a great resource to use when showing documentaries. This website provides worksheets that you have permission to download and use for your students. (See Appendix)

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/chicago-race-riot-of-1919>

This is a helpful website which offers details of some of the race riots in Chicago 1919. Keep in mind that race riots were occurring in dozens of cities during the course of 1919.

Standards

The Core Curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia is aligned to the Common Core Standards of Reading and Literature. The Common Core challenges students to use their critical and analytical thinking as they read and learn poetry and poetry terminology.

Students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently as they research. (CC.1.2.7.L)

They will identify and introduce the topic clearly, including a preview of what is to follow. (CC.1.4.7.B)

Students must determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.(CC.1.2.7.D)

Students will write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information clearly when they do a biographical sketch of two poets.(CC.1.4.7.A)

Students will cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text. (CC.1.3.8.B)

Students are expected to organize ideas, concepts, and information using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts; provide a concluding statement or section; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension. CC.1.4.7.D

Students will read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. E08.A-K.1.1.1

Students will establish and maintain a formal style. E08.C.1.2.4 E08.

They will read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CC.1.3.8.E Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style. E08.A-C.2.1.2)

Appendix

Harlem Virtual Tours:

<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/harlem-renaissance/title-page>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pL1z2Z-0Gg>

This video shows a CAVE® virtual reality environment that allows a walkthrough of Harlem, New York in the 1930s during a period known as the Harlem Renaissance.

(Use both tours for first lesson mentioned in unit)

Music Playlist

Drop Me off in Harlem- Duke Ellington/ Louis

Armstrong <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvp-MZ8enVQ>

Black Beauty- Duke Ellington <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4fP4cGo6sc>

After You've Gone- Bessie Smith https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCDOr6au_H8

Take the "A" Train - Ella Fitzgerald https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJ_4cRG8B1g

God Bless the Child- Billie Holiday <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKNtP1zOVHw>

Strange Fruit- Billie Holiday <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ZyuULy9zs>

Scandalize My Name- Paul Robeson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0X0uw9RzUo>

Four Women- Nina Simone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRmzQ39sXTQ>

Sinnerman- Nina Simone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYJYcVzXm2Q>

Mississippi Goddam- Nina Simone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ25-U3jNWM>

What's Going On?- Marvin Gaye <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-kaA3UtBj4M>

Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud- James Brown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bJA6W9CqvE>

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised - Gil Scott-Heron

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnJFhuOWgXg>

Who'll Pay Reparations on My Soul?- Gil Scott-Heron

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVoDV3icbgc>

Johannesburg- Gil Scott-Heron <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDkQY6cOH0s>

Movie/Documentary Playlist:

Harlem Renaissance Period

The African-Americans Many Rivers to Cross Episode Four (Henry Louis Gates) -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIOH8QvaL>

Brain Pop Harlem Renaissance (Brief Introduction)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjOhNUFI4Y>

History Brief: The Harlem Renaissance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90PTxdsqfsA>

Black Arts Movement Period

Eyes on the Prize; Awakenings (America's Civil Rights Movement)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HHx2im_nDM

The Black Panthers Vanguard of the Revolution-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bcubkt6BwY>

Film Study Worksheet for a Documentary Seeking to Persuade the Viewer

On a Matter of Political or Social Significance

Read the questions before you watch the film so that you will know what to look for while you watch. At breaks during the showing or at the film's end, you will have an opportunity to make short notes in the spaces provided. If you make notes while the film is playing, make sure that your note taking doesn't interfere with carefully watching the movie. You do not need to make any notes on the worksheet, but after the film is over, you will be required to fully respond to the questions.

Complete the assignment by answering each question in paragraph form. Answers need to be complete and comprehensive, demonstrating that you paid attention to the film and thought about what was shown on the screen. You may use more than one paragraph if necessary. Be sure that the topic sentence of your first paragraph uses key words from the question. All responses should be in complete sentences using proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

1. State the title of the film and the year it was released. Then briefly describe what the film is about and the position that it advocates.

Notes:

2. Describe the progression of the film: how it begins, what stages it passes through, and how it concludes.

Notes:

3. List six facts described in the film that impressed you and explain how each fact relates to the film's premise or theme.

Notes:

4. How did the filmmakers try to convince you of the position that the film supports? Look for appeals to logic, emotion, and prejudice.

Notes:

5. If the filmmakers asked how this film could be improved, what would you tell them? Describe the changes you would suggest in detail.

Notes:

6. Did the film change your mind about any aspect of the subject that it presents? What information, argument or persuasive technique caused you to change your mind?

Notes:
